

**STORIES**

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS




**YAROSLAV MINKIN**

**"Common horrible past experience helps to see the common in us. This becomes the basis for dialogue"**

Since the beginning of the military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine more than a million people have become displaced persons and refugees from these territories. For many of them, integrating into new cities and communities was a real challenge that sometimes continues to this day. Yaroslav Minkin, civil society activist shares his experience of moving from the Eastern Ukraine to the West for the "Pulse of peace".

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**"Rules of Life" is a column in which the floor is given to the people of Donbas, as well as to people who play an important role in the peacebuilding process.**

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I have moved from Luhansk and now live in Ivano-Frankivsk. Almost all of our team are people from other regions, except maybe one or two. We have created a youth human rights resource center “Stan” here, and now we are working not only with the Carpathian region, but also with people from different parts of Ukraine, especially those living in small towns and villages.

We set ourselves the task of promoting the theme of human rights and helping people to become braver, learn to achieve social change. We also help vulnerable groups – veterans, Internally Displaced Persons, not as a service organization, but rather an educating one. And our third goal is to promote cultural diversity and peaceful dialogue that would help society to become stronger.



Most of the people who left the territories of Donbas either went to the places where they had some acquaintances or to where they themselves had been before, which is why there are so many IDPs in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa. But some of the people just chose to go as far as possible. And most of those who ended up in Frankivsk just wanted to leave as far as possible geographically, so as not to return.

I decided to leave for a very simple reason – back in early March (2014 - ed. note), the policemen I knew said that it was better for me not to spend the night at home, that was the signal. I probably became the first person in Ivano-Frankivsk who moved from the Donbas due to political persecution. At that moment, all organizations helped the IDPs from Crimea, and they told me that it was not clear why I had come, because it was still normal back at home. But it changed in just a couple months.

The most difficult thing after moving was getting used to the fact that everyone starts working very late, at 10 am. When you lived in a proletarian, working-class city, where everything started with a call at 8 in the morning, it was not easy to get used to a different rhythm. And the easiest thing was to start all over again. **I think that it was easier for those who moved before the war, there was no such prejudiced attitude towards them that they were all “separatists” there.** Now there are no friends of mine in the uncontrolled territories at all, people are constantly leaving, including because of political persecution. Sometimes it seems that only those who decided to die on their own land remain there.

Now very often they say that everything is lost in Ukraine, and that there are no places where the situation is worse. I cite other post-Soviet countries as an example for these people. Until you see Tajikistan, or Belarus or even Moldova, you will not understand that Ukraine is a political phenomenon. We are the only country that can show its success in democratic change. We are the only country in which there were two revolutions and both won. And **in Ukraine, a large stratum of intelligentsia has formed – intellectuals, activists, a creative class – people who are changing the world in a new way.**

Why is it important to talk about it? Because now there is more and more disinformation about us, some saying that there are only nationalists in Ukraine. Of course, everything is not easy. Of course, there is corruption. Of course there is poverty. And you can understand, we are on the frontier, on the fault line between Russia and Europe. But, at the same time, Ukraine, despite the repressions that it experienced over the previous centuries, was again able to form a large civil society, gather intellectuals, people who can speak to the whole world and who are not ashamed to listen, and I want to support them.

Partly about this was one of our projects – a virtual museum of Luhansk culture and activism 2004-2013. You can see how many artists and art activists worked in a region that everyone associates far from art in the first place. When we first created the museum, we faced a wave of criticism. I think this was due to the fact that all the events that took place before the war had not yet been accepted. Now it is perceived differently. This project, by the way, can well help to understand what Luhansk is, that it is not only mines.

Such projects that describe reality, create its mapping, become a good tool in dialogue with those who are in other conditions. Now our organization is actively involved in international projects for teachers from different countries to develop lessons for school children about the Soviet past, repressions, political persecution, including against the rich peasants. And this common horrible past experience helps to see the common in us. This becomes the basis for dialogue.

It is very important for Ukraine now not to rest on our laurels. **We have succeeded a lot, and there is good support from outside, but it has been very difficult for the country and people in these 30 years, and now we need to remember that without mutual understanding and without constant control over the authorities this balance may collapse again.**