

Results of the CivilM+ Forum 2022 in Berlin

**OVERCOMING RUSSIA'S
WAR AGAINST UKRAINE.
STRENGTHENING LINKS
BETWEEN POLITICAL DECISION
MAKERS & CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE**

Responsibility for war crimes, social cohesion in times of war and solidarity with Ukraine



This publication was prepared as part of the activities of the international civil society platform CivilM+ and the project "Dialogue for understanding and justice". The project is implemented with financial support from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of all members of the CivilMPlus platform and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



With financial support:



Federal Foreign Office

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Annual Forum on European Ukraine – Overcoming Russia's war against Ukraine: strengthening ties between political stakeholders and civil society organizations in Europe

Since the founding of the CivilM+ platform in 2017, the platform's Secretariat has organized a main offline event annually – the International Forum on European Ukraine. It is traditionally held in autumn, but preparations for it start long before the event with the search for the most relevant and pressing topic for platform participants, as well as inviting speakers capable of providing expert opinion on the problems faced by civil society representatives working on the stabilization of Ukraine.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the work and focus of the CivilM+ platform has expanded beyond Donbas to cover the entire territory of Ukraine that has been subjected to shelling and destruction. The activities of both Ukrainian and international organizations that are members of the platform were also refocused to the needs of wartime, which naturally influenced the choice of forum topic in the first year of the full-scale war.

The central issues of the forum were the opportunities and challenges of interaction between political stakeholders and civil society organizations in Europe in general and in Ukraine in particular. Through the lens of such interaction the forum's participants were able to discuss:

- violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and their documentation
- the role of the EU in establishing peace in Ukraine
- the problems of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and residents of frontline and occupied zones
- Russia's destructive impact
- strengthening of the international presence in Ukraine
- the situation of prisoners of war and civilian hostages
- possibilities for the post-war reconstruction of the country.

The conference was opened by Oleksandra Matviychuk, head of the Ukrainian human rights organization Center for Civil Liberties, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022. Oleksandra noted the importance of the international community's continued support for civil society's efforts to build a democratic and just state in Ukraine.

Germany has faced a lot of criticism from the Ukrainian side for its hesitancy in providing Ukraine with weapons, so this was one of the key issues raised by Ukraine's Deputy Ambassador to Germany Maksym Yemelyanov during his address to the international community. Not only representatives of the Ukrainian state, but also civil society representatives have stepped up advocacy work in the international arena in order to obtain the military support Ukraine needs for self-defence: "(...) Arms for Ukraine are the best humanitarian aid we can have at the moment. (...) I'm not impressed when Ukrainian diplomats ask for weapons. But I am impressed when human rights activists ask for weapons."

At the same time, the panellists from the German side put a strong emphasis on the humanitarian issues facing Ukraine. These issues seemed most important to Alexander Slotty, State Secretary for Education from the Office of the Berlin Mayor, and to Matthias Lüttenberg, ambassador and representative for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both were concerned about the upcoming winter in Ukraine and the harsh living conditions it entails for the country's inhabitants.

All the topics of discussion panels and roundtables reflected in one way or another the problems and issues faced by the platform's participants in their work. You can read more about the thematic focuses of the platform and the forum in the individual chapters below.

1.1 Strengthening synergies between political and civil society actors in the field of human dimension: which joint efforts are needed for overcoming violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Since the beginning of the military invasion of Ukraine, the Russian authorities and armed forces have consistently violated international humanitarian law and human rights. "The war goes hand in hand with the war against the rule of law," Anastasiya Donets of the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) commented. Documenting these violations and punishing the perpetrators requires the combined efforts of various actors whose aim it is to ensure justice and responsibility.

According to Yuriy Belousov, head of the war department at the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, as of November 2022, more than 45,000 cases have been opened into Russian war crimes. The nature of these crimes – illegal detentions, torture, kidnapping of children, deliberate creation of poor living conditions for the civilian population – make it possible to declare the genocide of the Ukrainian people by the Russian state. Collecting this information was possible, among other things, thanks to the interaction between representatives of Ukrainian civil society organizations and state institutions. For example, there is an ongoing cooperation between the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) and the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, where information on documented war crimes is submitted for further investigation. In addition, according to Oleksandr Pavlichenko, executive director of the UHHRU, there is also cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights as part of an electronic system for victims of war crimes. Ukrainian human rights activists also cooperate closely with the German prosecutor's office with regard to Russian perpetrators in Germany. Wolfgang Benedek, professor of international law from Graz, noted that cooperation with non-governmental organizations has played

a significant role in the fact-finding missions conducted in Ukraine. For example, the level of public trust in state institutions is low, and citizens are instead more comfortable interacting with grassroots civil society organizations. Both state and international institutions should take this fact into account and define NGOs as indispensable partners, Prof. Benedek argued. This example once again emphasizes the need to develop mechanisms for collaboration between representatives of civil society, state structures and international institutions.

The level of interaction between Ukrainian state institutions and other states and international institutions also remains important. Anastasiya Donets noted the great need for international support for Ukrainian actors dealing with war crimes, as they are unable to process such a large volume of material on their own. At the same time, international support should not replace the role of the government, and all external actors should respect the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state. Aleksandar Sekulić, representing the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, emphasized the principle of "do not harm" as the most important in this context.

Anastasiya Donets saw the need for concrete actions to support Ukraine in achieving justice: 1) Russian soldiers who fled Russia should be held accountable for war crimes committed; 2) sanctions should be strengthened; 3) the foreign assets of Russian war criminals and oligarchs should be seized and the proceeds used to support victims. The current international security order, namely the work of the OSCE and the UN Security Council was criticized for its lack of effectiveness and resolve, with civil society representatives calling for new alternatives.

1.2 Strengthening links between political and civil society actors in making Europe a more secure and conflict-resilient space: what is the role of the EU?

In the conversation about security, the starting point could be seen as a discussion of resilience. The European Parliament member Sergey Lagodinsky defined this concept as "the ability to remain a democratic, dynamic and liberal country with strong civil rights and democratic institutions, despite all external attacks." Tetyana Pechonchyk, executive director of the NGO ZMINA, believes Ukraine has demonstrated its resilience by continuing to live and develop despite Russia's aggression that began in 2014. However, in the course of the full-scale invasion, the living conditions of Ukrainians have been deteriorating with each passing day and stopping this is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, according to Tetyana Pechonchyk, Ukraine should not stop or curtail internal reforms, there is no time to waste.

The Ukrainian government is unable to cope with all the problems that the war has brought to Ukraine, so civil society plays a key supporting role. Monitoring, countering disinformation and propaganda and helping accountability mechanisms remain key functions that civil society performs. And they need EU assistance to be able to continue their activities on the ground. According to Tetyana Pechonchyk, the main areas of assistance can be summarized as:

1) civil society organizations should receive financial support directly, without the involvement of the state as an intermediary recipient.

2) organizational restructuring is needed in the EU to make funding more accessible to civil society organizations.

3) financial support should be more flexible and should not be tied to specific targets as circumstances change very quickly.

4) medical support should be provided where necessary.

5) new structures need to be supported to ensure resilience.

A separate important issue in both peacetime and wartime is the inclusion of women in socially relevant decision-making processes on different levels. Their participation and involvement are also areas of work that require support, including from the European Union, as underlined by Anna Carin Krokst ade, deputy head of the Ukraine Division at the European Union External Action Service. Wilfried Yilge, an expert on Ukraine and Eastern Europe added that the absence of women in the Minsk process also affected its outcome. Special attention should be paid to women in war and under occupation as they are a vulnerable social group exposed to sexualized violence. Serhiy Lagodinsky noted the need for medical and psychological support from the EU. But the biggest protection for woman and children in Ukraine is the supply of weapons so that Ukrainians can liberate occupied territories.

1.3 Strengthening the international civil society coalition to end the war in Ukraine: how to achieve stronger joint action and greater influence on policymaking?

Many representatives from Ukrainian civil society and politicians noted the well-established dialogue and communication platforms with each other, but does this mean that civil society can actually influence specific political decisions? Based on the experience of civil society representatives in Ukraine, sometimes this does happen. Oleksandra Romantsova, executive director of the Center for Civil Liberties, explained that they have been greatly helped by their status as Nobel Peace Prize laureates. It has given the organization more chances to speak and be heard at a high political level, where the solutions proposed by the CCL from a civil society perspective have attracted the interest of politicians.

Valery Novikov from the Luhansk Regional Human Rights Centre "Alternativa" also described his experience with Ukrainian leaders positively, noting that state actors and civil society are currently acting on equal terms. However, there is still a need to adapt formats of cooperation and ask for more support from the government in implementing the ideas of civil society actors.

The downside of close cooperation between civil society representatives and the state is the loss of distance between these public institutions and the critical view of civil society on the actions of the

authorities. This should be remembered especially in the wartime crisis.

The role of European civil society in overcoming the war in Ukraine was outlined by Stefan Melle, director of the German organization Austausch e.V., namely to "inform and persuade" politicians making decisions to stand up for Ukraine's interests. A separate challenge noted by experts was to maintain the long-term interest and commitment of politicians to achieve peace in Ukraine. For many people, Ukraine is still something very distant, with many talking about the so-called "Ukrainian mainstream," and this needs to be overcome by raising the more global topic of decolonization in the Ukrainian context. European colleagues identified the supply of arms to Ukraine as one of the top advocacy issues in their work. As a peacebuilding representative, Cinta Depondt from the organization PAX for Peace stated: "We need weapons to stop the weapons. After that we can talk."

In addition to the state and international institutions, civil society actors need to support dialogue and cooperation first and foremost with each other, within their international community. The key to the success of such coalitions is trust, Cinta Depondt believes.



1.4 Strengthening the international presence in Ukraine: how can international actors contribute to restoring peace and stabilizing the country?

The UN, the OSCE, NATO, the Council of Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross were supposed to be effective pillars of the post-World War II multipolar peace order – to promote universal human rights, to guarantee the principle of territorial sovereignty, and strengthen regional and international security. Russia's war against Ukraine demonstrated the serious vulnerability and occasionally inability of existing international mechanisms and actors – intergovernmental and international organizations, as well as governments of individual states – to prevent and stop the open aggression of one state against another in 21st century Europe.

These international actors not only failed to prevent aggression, but in many cases were unable to respond to the crisis by remaining on the ground in Ukraine. The guarantees of the Budapest Memorandum to ensure Ukraine's territorial integrity turned out to be purely declarative: no country expressed its readiness to defend Ukraine militarily after a full-scale invasion. The Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE – the institution that had been monitoring, reporting and facilitating dialogue between the conflict parties related to conflict management in eastern Ukraine since 2014 – was forced to completely withdraw its forces from Ukraine due to the blocking of its mandate by the Russian Federation as one of the organization's participating states. The UN Security Council's ability to stop the aggression was blocked for the same reason – the veto power of the aggressor state on numerous military resolutions. The International Committee of the Red Cross failed to negotiate access to conflict zones and was unable to deliver aid and evacuate civilians fleeing the war. Lastly, the launch of an international police mission has also not yet taken place due to a lack

of consensus on the mandate and specifics of the work of such peacekeepers. André Härtel, an expert from SWP, is convinced that the limiting factor of many international organizations is their strict mandate. And few of them actually work to prevent military conflicts, rather setting themselves other objectives, for example, supporting democratic reforms and developing the resilience of societies.

There is a clear crisis in the existing international security system and the inability of existing international organizations and governments to stop the ongoing violence, destruction of infrastructure and aggression against the people of Ukraine. It is also clear that ending the war and stabilizing Ukraine is unlikely to be possible without adequate support from the international community. Anthony Foreman, programme manager for Europe and the South Caucasus at Peaceful Change, noted the lack of sensitivity of international actors to the war in Ukraine, which can only frustrate Ukrainian society. All actors should have a clear understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and act accordingly. At the same time, control over any actor's actions should always remain in the hands of local organizations, so as not to act counter to the interests of Ukraine.

The question of the political function of international organizations remains open. Such actors can become intermediaries and mediators in the political settlement of armed conflicts, in one way or another clearly manifesting their political position. This aspect becomes even more important in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, when it comes to the issues of organizing a special military tribunal, the need for which has been repeatedly emphasized by Ukrainian and international human rights activists.

1.5 International coalition of supporters of Ukraine: the Baltic states and the Visegrad Group in European relations

The Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia and Czechia have been providing financial and military aid to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's open invasion, condemning Russia's actions and supporting various kinds of sanctions against the aggressor. The civil society of these countries is equally active in raising funds for Ukraine and providing various kinds of assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Europe. Political actors and the civil society in these countries are characterized by a relatively high awareness of the war and, according to the experts of the roundtable at the Forum of European Ukraine, additional information campaigns in this region are not required.

Nevertheless, one cannot speak of the Visegrad Group's full support for Ukraine since Hungary, one of the association's members, does not provide assistance to Ukraine and even cooperates with Russia. The assessment of Hungary's actions and its support for the aggressor country should be the subject of separate consideration in the future.

International support to Ukraine, including from the Baltic states and the Visegrad Group can be considered on 4 levels: military, humanitarian, financial and lobbying. In working on these areas of support for Ukraine, central European actors face the following challenges:

1) Complex reporting to donors. The formal procedures associated with grant work are not designed for emergency work and are difficult for organizations with limited administrative capacity. Large international donors require Central European organizations working in the field to follow extensive reporting procedures. Responding to this challenge, the Czech organization People in Need has begun providing grants itself and is trying to reduce formal requirements for other organizations so that aid can be redistributed more quickly and accurately. Formal requirements are also a burden for organizations delivering emergency aid across the Polish-Ukrainian border.

2) Lack of qualified personnel. The first nine months have been an exceptional time for civil society actors in terms of expanding their activities. NGOs in the region found themselves in a situation where they had to operate with budgets larger than ever before. Their growth has been very rapid and has not been accompanied by professional

development. The situation is exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding long-term funding for humanitarian projects.

3) Lack of communication between grassroots initiatives and other civil society actors. The Baltic states and the Visegrad Group need to integrate grassroots activities and initiatives set up by Ukrainians who have previously migrated into the overall support for Ukraine. Ethnic Ukrainians, long settled in Central Europe, were the first to help refugees from Ukraine without any support from the state or civil society. In the first days of the full-scale invasion, many grassroots initiatives emerged, especially in direct support of territorial defence, the army and humanitarian aid in Ukraine. Many of the first steps were taken outside of any formal institutions, let alone coordination with larger NGOs. As the war drags on and individual support dwindles, there is a need for ways to identify and coordinate this support over the long term.

Apart from the obvious humanitarian, military and financial support Ukraine, Central European countries have been performing an important function in lobbying for Ukraine's interests in Europe. This has helped combat the inertia of Germany and other Western European countries, and such work should continue.

Another important task to support Ukraine could be to help it continue reforms and establish high standards of governance. Central European actors can be key in setting high standards of transparency and supporting reforms even in times of war. The war did not transform Ukraine into a prosperous and transparent democracy overnight. At the same time, Central European states currently hold a very significant position in Ukraine, and this influence should be used to promote democratic values. Experts drew attention to the possible risks associated with the emergence of political ambitions among representatives of Ukrainian civil society, and European NGOs should be aware of these ambitions when providing support. In such a situation, Ukrainian actors may use the assistance provided to them for their own selfish purposes, just as the Ukrainian state may use civil society representatives to achieve its own political goals unrelated to ending the war.

Ukraine needs to participation of Central European civil society in the areas of education, environment, good governance and sustainability. Plans for 2023

should include support in these areas as well, because it gives Ukrainians the opportunity and motivation to stay in Ukraine and work for its future.



1.6 The role of civil society in Ukraine's post-war environmental restoration

In the acute phase of the war, when Ukraine is facing serious human losses and destruction of vital infrastructure, environmental issues take a back seat in the public attention. This is an understandable but dangerous reaction that can lead to irreversible consequences.

At the moment, experts cited the lack of a monitoring system, the difficulties of farming, climate change, threats to biodiversity and the difficulty of documenting and investigating environmental crimes among the major environmental problems.

The first step to solving environmental problems must be awareness of their existence and the ability to track and record changes. This requires an extensive monitoring system, which in Ukraine, unfortunately, has been destroyed. To restore it, it is necessary to train people living along the front lines in monitoring tools and communication with local authorities.

The agricultural sector is in a vulnerable position: it is both a target and a weapon of war. However, agricultural reconstruction must not be limited to restoring the sector to its pre-war state, but must become more efficient and sustainable. A new approach to agriculture must involve:

- the prioritization of local food systems
- the development of rural areas
- the development of sustainable solutions for agricultural production
- production and processing based on circular economy principles
- a transparent market for agricultural land.

In the first seven months of the full-scale war, greenhouse gas emissions were at least 100 million tons of CO₂, and these figures likely underestimate the true level of emissions. Russia's war in Ukraine not only hinders modernization and the green transition, but also increases emissions due to the armed combat itself and fires, but most of all the need for future urban recovery and reconstruction. The longer the Russian war continues, the higher the final numbers will be. All plans to rebuild Ukraine's energy system have shown that environmental transformation and compatibility with the European Green Deal program are not at the forefront. The Ukrainian government's reconstruction plans presented at the Lugano conference have also been criticized. There is a complex contradiction

between the need for rapid emergency relief and sustainable recovery. Sustainable recovery should include synergies between energy security, national security, economic growth and social security, but also green transformation along with environmental protection. More active participation of Ukrainian civil society in discussions on the state's plans for the country's reconstruction is very important. Moreover, a common space for dialogue between EU and Ukrainian politicians, industry and civil society is also needed in order to find the most appropriate solutions for Ukraine.

Environmental crimes that are being committed during the war also require close attention now. According to the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, by November 2022, state law enforcement agencies had opened 74 criminal cases on environmental violations related to the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. This is less than 1% of the total number of opened criminal cases concerning war crimes. This small number of environmental crimes can be explained by the lack of documentation methods, prosecutors' lack of experience and positive examples of working such cases in Ukrainian and international courts. Addressing these problems requires the introduction of a common methodology and protocol for documenting war crimes against the environment, strengthening cooperation at all levels for damage assessment, mitigation and restoration of destruction, as well as recognizing the importance of treating environmental crimes on an equal footing with other war crimes.

By November 2022, about 20% of all protected areas in Ukraine were under threat, with military operations covering almost 3 million hectares of forest in Ukraine.

There is a threat to the strategic objectives of conserving biodiversity and the potential for greenhouse gas absorption is decreasing. The processes of desertification and degradation are increasing, especially on agricultural lands. Endemic plant and animal species are critically endangered; their extinction would have catastrophic consequences for biodiversity on a planetary scale.

Military operations should not affect protected areas or failing that all destroyed systems must be restored in accordance with the principles of green

reconstruction and sustainable development, drawing on the views of experts and civil society representatives. Restoration must start now; Ukraine cannot wait until the war is over to start the recovery.

1.7 Russia's disruptive influence on European societies: Wartime challenges and response tactics

In February 2022, the Russian Federation launched an open military invasion of Ukraine, but long before the full-scale war, since at least 2014, Russia has been waging a covert hybrid war, using the tools of disinformation and propaganda, exporting corruption, abusing economic ties including energy blackmail, supporting anti-democratic political movements in Europe, and arming Russian-speaking communities.

Dr. Susanne Spahn, a leading German expert on Russian propaganda, highlighted the role of disinformation narratives disseminated by Russia through state media (especially Russia Today) and social media. Russia Today-Deutschland is also still accessible via VPNs and mirror sites, the German authorities are reluctantly and not very consistently implementing the EU's ban on the broadcasting activities of RT's holding company. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, these narratives promote the idea that the real aggressor is the West and, in particular, NATO. Propagandists whitewash the war, calling it a "special operation" conducted to protect the residents of the "republics" of Donbas, and promote the narrative that "nationalists" in Ukraine threaten the Russian-speaking population, while continuing to claim that Russians and Ukrainians are one people. In a separate area of Russian information warfare, it is possible to identify the fears of European societies being exploited – propagandists fuel fears of economic and social decline in Germany if it continues to support Ukraine: sanctions, not the Russian attack on Ukraine, are seen as the cause of the crisis, as a result of which Germans are allegedly freezing, starving and losing their jobs. Russian propaganda finds fertile ground in Germany in a network of sympathizers that includes the anti-vaccination movement *Querdenker*, far-right groups, alternative media and pro-Russian activists such as Alina Lipp.

An increasing number of journalistic and academic publications focus on Russia's ties with far-right groups in Europe. Dr. Anton Shekhovtsov, a Ukrainian political scientist and researcher at the Research Center for the History of Transformations in Vienna, noted that contrary to popular belief, the relationship between Russia and far-right groups is interpersonal rather than institutional; it is based on connections between different stakeholders. The so-called "Ibiza affair" of 2019, which led to the downfall of Austria's far-right

Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, is a prime example. After the pro-Russian Strache left the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), the party changed its stance on Russia. Italy's Lega Nord party made a similar change of course. The European far-right's sympathies for Russia are supported by a common ideology (traditional values, anti-globalization, anti-Americanism, anti-liberalism), but they remain essentially a Plan B for Russia, with Russia preferring to establish ties with (possibly corrupt) mainstream politicians such as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine destroyed many such ties, with most political players in Europe condemning the aggression (whether sincerely or not is unknown). Although an anti-Russian stance has become the political mainstream, some parties remain friendly to Russia. The most prominent example is the Germany AfD party (Alternative for Germany). As Shekhovtsov concludes, far-right parties appreciate Russia's support but are not dependent on it; they are still domestic in origin.

In contrast to Germany, in Balkan countries Russia mainly uses domestic media, Dr. Rumena Filipova explained, founder and chairperson of the Sofia-based Institute for Global Analysis. Russia relies mainly on informal ties and is a major player in the advertising market. In recent months, Russian embassies have become even more aggressive in spreading propaganda. Russia has doubled its activity on social media, especially Facebook and Telegram. The Kremlin continues to target traditional views, cultural and linguistic similarities with Russians, and plays on the deep-seated fear of a new war in the region. It presents itself as a credible alternative to the EU and NATO while asserting its ability to influence divisions in the region. In other words, the national interests of the Balkan states are construed as the need to maintain good relations with Moscow. In addition, Serbian media, which is easily accessible in the region due to the mutual comprehensibility of languages is an important disseminator of Russian narratives.

Security threats coming from Russia are also being directed toward Georgia, Eteri Buziashvili explained, a Tbilisi-based security analyst at the Atlantic Council. To avoid Western sanctions, Russia has utilized numerous smuggling routes, one of which leads through Georgia. About 2000 Russian-owned companies are registered there, and there is currently no formal mechanism to make

sure they are not contributing to circumventing economic sanctions. The growing number of Russian citizens arriving in Georgia is also fuelling tensions between locals and newcomers. These tensions are exacerbated by Russia's long-term involvement in the country, its support for far-right groups and the most conservative parts of Georgia's Orthodox Church. Since 2008, several NGOs have been established in the country to promote the Kremlin's goals. They have sponsored the publication of textbooks containing "facts" about World War II and promoted the spread of Russian language and culture in Georgia. Many of the founders and representatives of these pro-Russian NGOs have moved into the public sector. Russia also pays attention to ultranationalist proxy groups in Georgia and uses them to mobilize violent mobs against liberals.

Dr. Céline Marangé of the Institute for Strategic Research at the École Militaire in Paris emphasized that Europe's ability to resist Russian pressure in the long term depends not only on the EU and the United States, but also on the ability of each EU country to be resilient in the information sphere. Russia has developed country-specific coercive

tools; therefore, each country must define them in its national context and develop a customized approach at the national level. According to Marangé, the Kremlin pursues a two-pronged strategy. With respect to the West, it exerts maximum pressure, while with respect to Ukraine it seeks total destruction. Russia is reinforcing the belief that autocracies are stronger than democracies and that economic hardship will divide European societies. Significant progress has been made in countering these mechanisms, even though European policy towards Russia has always been very contradictory. The EU has agreed to supply arms to Ukraine and has adopted eight sanctions packages. Much has been done in recent months to secure EU energy supplies. Europe is clearly better prepared than previously expected. The main task now is to prevent Russia from destroying Ukraine's infrastructure in the winter. Ukraine needs to get missile defence systems very quickly, it also desperately needs generators to help civilians survive the Russian-sponsored blackout, and its soldiers need winter gear and equipment to continue fighting through the winter months. Much has been accomplished, but time and missile superiority are still on Russia's side.

1.8 Life under the Russian occupation: challenges and consequences

In the territories occupied by Russian troops, the humanitarian situation is continually deteriorating. Destroyed infrastructure and housing are not being restored. Residents of certain areas of Mariupol, whose apartments have been destroyed, are forced to live in basements and stairwells without light and water and to cook food over a fire. Many households in Mariupol are spending this winter without heating.

In the occupied areas of the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts, filtration measures continue to be used against the local population, with citizens who have not been filtered are detained and taken to an unknown destination.

The Russian authorities continue to illegally remove and adopt Ukrainian children from the occupied territories. These are children who were living in care homes, foster families and whose parents were killed by Russian shelling. The forced Russification of the population of the occupied regions continues.

To compensate for the significant daily losses of personnel, the Russian military leadership has been conducting "mobilization campaigns" of the population in the captured territories of Ukraine, including Crimea. Additional Rosgvardiya units arrived in the cities of Berdyansk and Melitopol to carry out mobilization and suppress resistance of the local population. In certain districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (hereinafter referred to as the ORDLO), forced "mobilization" of the local population has been taking place since mid-February. Men are taken directly from the streets or their places of work and sent to military enlistment offices, from where they are sent straight to the front line without medical examination, military training, appropriate equipment and sufficient supplies.

In order to effectively respond to the problems caused by the Russian occupation, civil society should be systematically and effectively involved in the development and implementation of state

transition policies. This can be facilitated by the establishment of coordination councils of specialized civil society institutions that deal with the problems of residents of the temporarily occupied territories and internally displaced persons. At the national level, such a coordination platform could be established under the Ministry for the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, and at the regional level - under regional, district and local military administrations (for the duration of martial law).

To create social cohesion, strengthen national unity and build sustainable peace, it is necessary to promote the development of platforms for dialogue and spread mediation and facilitation practices among different segments of the population affected by the war, including internally displaced persons.

For sustainable peace and mutual understanding, it is also important to develop a state information policy regarding the residents of the temporarily occupied territories and IDPs. Such a policy would contribute to understanding the different circumstances that influenced people's motives and choices in difficult life situations; breaking down stereotypical generalizations and stigmatization; explaining how exactly the state plans to overcome the negative consequences of the war and promote social and economic reintegration of internally displaced persons, citizens living or forced to return to the temporarily occupied territories.

In order to counter the unfair accusation of collaboration, it is necessary to develop and adopt a separate law on the prohibition of collaboration, which should be coordinated with the current legislation in Ukraine. Such a law should provide clear definitions of the concepts of "collaborationism", "collaborator" and "collaboration activity"; provide a clear classification and an exhaustive list of cases and circumstances that have features of collaborationism; and establish a proportional degree of responsibility.

1.9 Tendencies in Ukrainian society in wartime: IDPs, a new "grey zone" on the frontline and civic activism

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the local authorities were not prepared for the challenges they faced in terms of emergency evacuation of the population, provision of foodstuffs to the local population in the cities on the front line and in the zones of active hostilities. This task was largely carried out by civil society. Yaroslav Boyko, chairperson of the NGO "Association Humanitarian Center Vse Bude Dobre" from Kramatorsk, commented: "On February 24, we created a working group, and on the 26th our volunteers already went out to carry out evacuations at the train stations. We immediately began to respond to the call, the cost of everything that was needed had to be covered by small organizations." The "Association Humanitarian Center Vse Bude Dobre" was engaged in evacuating the population of the Donetsk Oblast from the first days of the invasion and became the largest association of civil society organizations and volunteers in the region.

In the cold season, it is very important to evacuate as many people as possible from the area of active armed combat, the frontline and de-occupied territories. Unfortunately, the pace of evacuation in the Donetsk Oblast, in particular, has slowed to a very low rate, up to a maximum of 200 people per week. Evgenia Kuleba, founder and chairperson of the NGO "City Garden", noted in her contribution that people do not want to go abroad and to other regions of Ukraine because they worry that they do not know the local language and that in general no-one needs them there. There are even fears that people abroad will have all their documents taken away, a fear not based in fact. Both Yaroslav Boyko and Kateryna Skrypova, operations manager of the charity Vostok-SOS, were sure that it is impossible to make people feel safe in the frontline and de-occupied territories. People must be persuaded to leave. This is a challenge for the authorities and volunteers, who have to find a synergy in this process and strengthen each other. The biggest challenge now is also the rapid reorientation of public activists to work with humanitarian aid and evacuation. It is necessary to train activists to work in this sphere, as well as to provide them with timely and qualified psychological support.

For those who do stay in danger zones, there is a problem with the distribution of humanitarian aid: it is mostly deposited in big cities and effectively does not reach small settlements. Evgenia Bardyak, chairperson of the public organization "Young

Enlightenment" and member of the Ivano-Frankivsk regional council, commented that the centralized distribution of humanitarian aid will help: "The authorities should have a clear understanding that they rely on public organizations. It is important to delegate tasks from the authorities to the public sector". Another problem noted by the expert is the slow response to challenges and provision of humanitarian aid from international organizations. Maria Khudeneva from Slovyansk, a community outreach specialist at New WAY Foundation, experienced this firsthand. In September 2022, the Armed Forces of Ukraine liberated Sviatohirsk in the Donetsk Oblast, which had been under occupation for 5 months. The town urgently needed humanitarian aid, however, due to bureaucratic processes there was no help for a month and a half and volunteers had to raise funds on their own through social media. "If European countries could help us a little faster, because the help is urgently needed, we don't have time to wait," Maria Khudeneva explained. For Ukrainian NGOs, it is not only the support of local authorities that is important now, but also the faster response of the international community and donors to the challenges of the war.

In the public sector there should be further synergy in working with the authorities and developing a unified plan of assistance and response to challenges, according to which civilians will also understand what awaits them and how they should behave in crisis situations.

The biggest challenge for all activists and volunteers is winter, so it is important to unite and strengthen each other in the field, supporting people who do not want to evacuate, as well as facilitating the evacuation itself and providing humanitarian aid to small communities.

Activists working directly on the ground made the following recommendations for working more effectively with the consequences of war and occupation:

1. to create a coordination centre, both in every community and at the state level, whose task would be to collect, systematize information about ongoing projects in the regions and at the state level to provide humanitarian aid, evacuation and resettlement of the population and training. Coordination of actions could take place in an

online / offline format. Additionally, this centre could also function as an information resource, where all information and contacts would be stored. The resource should be constantly updated and have relevant contacts and recommendations, as well as meaningful content.

2. develop and implement a training program for administrators and civil servants, which would contain elements of crisis management and analytical methodology of humanitarian aid provision "do not harm".

3. develop not only the humanitarian, but also to focus on projects that will be able to provide economic support in the form of grants for business start-up and development. Training in the basics of accounting, planning and business process management.

4. it is worth creating a system of psychological assistance for survivors of loss, traumatic events and amputation as a separate area, with the possible creation of mobile teams.

5. optimize the system of distribution of humanitarian aid so that it is concentrated not only in regional centres or large settlements, but also covers small villages and towns. There should be proportional distribution and a well-planned system of logistics or partnership with local public organizations or local government representatives.

6. support projects focused on educational work regarding the history, culture and language of Ukraine.

7. establish a system in which civil society does not take over the responsibilities of the authorities, but rather they work in partnership and utilize an integrated approach.

8. simplify the mechanisms for providing humanitarian aid to de-occupied settlements and to have a mandatory stock of kits necessary to quickly provide the liberated territories with everything they need.

9. strengthen work on increasing the media literacy of the population, especially in terms of dealing with propaganda narratives and fraudulent schemes, which are particularly active now.

10. develop a plan at the national and local levels to provide housing for IDPs. Also take into account the need to build bomb shelters near residential areas.

11. pay attention to conflict sensitivity and restorative practices. This would help to prevent discriminatory narratives, stereotypes, and help in the process of establishing peace within the country.

1.10 Deprivation of freedom: prisoners of war, civilian hostages and deportations

In the course of its full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory, Russia is systematically and purposefully violating the Geneva Conventions with regard to prisoners of war and civilians. Article 13 of the Convention specifies the humane treatments of prisoners of war, prohibiting the detaining power from any unlawful act or omission causing death or seriously endangering the health of the prisoner of war. Reprisals or the use of violence or intimidation are also prohibited. According to the testimonies of prisoners of war who have been released, in Russian detention they were subjected to physical and psychological pressure, electrocuted, beaten with batons and the butt of an automatic rifle. They were also beaten with batons during interrogation, had bodily harm inflicted with knives, and kept in tiny solitary cells with no daylight. The prisoners of war who returned from detention had broken noses and teeth knocked out, bruises on their faces and torn skin from duct tape. The violations of the aforementioned article are also mentioned in the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the human rights situation in Ukraine, covering the period from February 1 to July 31, 2022. In addition to evidence of torture, violence and threats against Ukrainian prisoners of war, the report also refers to the deaths of two Ukrainian service personnel as a result of torture. The first victim reportedly died after Russian servicemen beat her and electrocuted her on May 9 at an airfield in Melitopol. Two witnesses told OHCHR that the victim was brought to the classroom of the pilot school with signs of torture and died soon after. The second victim reportedly received fatal blows when guards beat prisoners of war upon arrival at the Volnovakha penal colony near Olenivka, Donetsk Oblast, on April 17. The colony in question is the one where the Russian side staged a terrorist attack in a room where Ukrainian prisoners of war were held on July 29, 2022. As a result, more than a hundred people were killed and maimed. This tragedy highlighted the catastrophic situation of all Ukrainian prisoners of war given that by being under Russian control, they are all in mortal danger, without any rights or protection under international humanitarian law.

Article 15 of the Geneva Convention speaks of the obligation to provide prisoners of war with free medical care as required by their health. Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russian detention have very limited access to medical care. According to those who have been returned from Russian detention,

medical care is provided only in emergency cases of severe injuries and illness, when inaction by the regular medical staff of a hospital or prison could lead to the prisoner of war's death. Ukrainian prisoners of war who, as a result of participation in armed combat, have gunshot wounds, fractures, amputations of various degrees, shrapnel injuries, and contusions remain without adequate medical care during their entire time in detention. For example, after the terrorist attack in Olenivka, only those prisoners of war who received severe wounds or amputations received medical assistance in medical institutions. After treatment, most of them were returned back to the place of detention.

Chapter II of the Convention asserts the right to adequate conditions of detention, sufficient food and clothing for every prisoner of war. The conditions of detention of Ukrainian prisoners of war can be judged only by the testimonies of those who have managed to be released from detention, because the Russian side does not grant official access to the location of Ukrainian prisoners of war to authorized representatives of Ukraine and international humanitarian missions. The conditions of detention of Ukrainian prisoners of war on the territory of Russia and in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, which are deliberately created by the aggressor state, are cruel and inhumane: lack of food and drinking water, lack of medicines and lack of proper medical care, lack of sleeping places, overcrowded detention cells, unsanitary conditions, lack of basic personal hygiene products and warm clothing. During the winter period, the conditions of detention of Ukrainian prisoners of war cause concern. After all, in a state of chronic malnutrition, with critically reduced immunity, wounds, without medicines, without guarantees of qualified medical assistance, without warm clothes and shoes, warm blankets, in barracks, which are not adapted to hold a large number of people, lacking insulation and basic repairs, each of the prisoners faces a risk of dying due to hypothermia and accompanying seasonal infections. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian government's attempts to deliver humanitarian supplies to places where Ukrainian prisoners of war are being held are met with categorical refusal from the Russian side. Unfortunately, there are also no humanitarian supplies from the United Nations, the ICRC or other international organizations.

According to Article 26 of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, the

basic daily ration should be sufficient in quantity, quality and variety to maintain the prisoners of war in good health and to prevent weight loss or the development of malnutrition. According to the results of previous exchanges, Ukrainian prisoners of war released from detention almost all have an extreme degree of anorexia. There are cases when relatives cannot recognize their relatives, as the latter have lost 30–40 kilograms of weight in detention. Some liberated soldiers said that they were not given water for several days. The daily ration of an adult could include a piece of bread once a day and 80 grams of porridge. In some places prisoners of war were fed three times, but even with this frequency of meals, the food and water were not enough to maintain normal health and prevent weight loss.

Families of prisoners of war have the right to information about their loved ones in detention, the right to correspondence and packages – this is stated in articles 70–72 of the Convention. However, the families of Ukrainian defenders do not receive any information at all from their relatives who are detained in the Russian Federation. For an average of 6–7 months, families have no contact with their relatives.

Ukrainian medics and musicians of a military orchestra, who under the Convention are considered non-combatants, have been held captive in Russia for almost 8 months. Non-combatants cannot be the direct object of an armed attack by the enemy because, unlike combatants, they are not subjects of the use of violence in a military conflict (according to definition IV of the Hague Convention). Accordingly, if they are detained by the enemy in the course of hostilities, they should not be considered prisoners of war. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation continues to hold them.

Viktoriya Andrusha, a civilian freed from captivity, described the treatment of prisoners in Russian Federation detention centers: "We were blindfolded, blindfolded, we were taken first in one car, then in another. And when we were taken in the second car, we were beaten there," Viktoriya said. "They beat us. My hands were tied. You just hear when someone approaches you, and then you feel the blow." Viktoriya spent several weeks in a prison camp in Glushkovo, then was taken to a pre-trial detention centre in Kursk. She was, she said, accused of espionage. The staff in the pre-trial detention centre treated them with particular cruelty, said Viktoria: "They hated us, they were ready to kill us on the spot." Yulia Polekhina, human rights activist and lawyer at the NGO "Sich", war crimes documenter at the "T4P Coalition"

initiative, drew attention to the way Viktoriya was treated in detention: "This is a direct violation of international agreements signed, including by the Russian Federation. The Geneva Conventions require parties to a conflict to distinguish between civilians and participants in armed combat, but in practice Russia often fails to do so. The conditions of detention do not meet the requirements of the Conventions, basically the Geneva Conventions regarding prisoners of war and civilians are not being complied with."

Victoria Karpenko, the wife of a seriously wounded AFU serviceman who was captured with multiple wounds, also spoke about the failure to provide medical care to her husband, which led to serious consequences for his health: "My husband was illegally detained in the occupied territories. He was not provided with necessary medical care and the possibility to correspond with his relatives. No representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross were allowed into the place where he was held. He had fractures of the humerus and clavicle, which fused without being set. Wounds from debris that spent months rotting in unsanitary conditions. A life that miraculously defeated death, not because of, but in spite of his treatment. My husband lost 20 pounds. He was hard to recognize in the video of the exchange. Unfortunately, today, in the 21st century, the horror that mankind has already seen is being repeated. The horror of the death camps.

Captivity is a continuous hell, from beginning to end. Severely wounded soldiers are brought to hospital or prison. They are given no painkillers or antibiotics, no debris is taken out, no wounds are treated. Cold, hunger, thirst, and staying in a small room without being able to go outside, or call their relatives, is what awaits them if their body has dealt with the wound on its own. This goes on for months. It is accompanied by psychological pressure, they are told that nobody needs them, that nobody is looking for them. People simply lose hope of returning home.

Russia is holding hundreds of wounded prisoners of war. Among them are people paralysed, with amputations, with serious damage to internal organs. In the hospital next to my husband there was a woman with a festering eye wound, which is not being treated. She has already lost one eye. All of them are kept in inhumane conditions, receive no medical care, and suffer from lack of food and basic necessities. Their lives are in great danger, and this danger will increase with the onset of cold weather.

Under the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, under Article 109, Section I, the parties to the conflict are obliged to send home seriously ill and seriously wounded prisoners of war, regardless of their rank and number, after their condition is such as to permit transportation. During hostilities, the parties to the conflict should endeavour, with the assistance of the neutral states concerned, to arrange for the hospitalization in neutral countries of sick and wounded prisoners of war.

Russia is brazenly violating the Geneva Convention. It is confident in its impunity, confident that the world community cannot stand up to it, and therefore commits terrible crimes against humanity. Help ensure that wounded prisoners of war receive the most basic human rights – the right to life, liberty, health and medical care. Save them today, because tomorrow there will be no one left to save!"

Human rights activist Roman Kiselyov is sure that the failure to provide assistance and inhumane conditions of detention is a systemic approach of Russia: "Russia is doing a lot to create a system in which it is virtually impossible to provide assistance. It hides people, invents some strange statuses that are not provided for by the current legislation. It creates additional threats through additional repressive legislation for various forms of speech."

Ukrainian human rights activists regularly point to the need to hold the aggressor country accountable for the crimes committed, for this purpose a global initiative "Breaking the Vicious Circle of Russia's Impunity for Its War Crimes" (short name "Tribunal for Putin") was created. The initiative seeks to utilize existing mechanisms of the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the EU and the International Criminal Court to prevent these gross crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice.

1.11 Documenting international crimes in Ukraine: civil society efforts, key findings and international accountability mechanisms

As of November 2022, 46,888 war crimes had been registered in the official register of war crimes of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine: violations of the rules of warfare, crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity. Ukrainian and international experts have stated the need for an effective mechanism for bringing perpetrators to justice, which will not only be professionally organized from the legal side, but will also have political support. At the same time, the interests of the victims should remain a priority.

Oleksandr Pavlichenko, executive director of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), noted that accountability for the crimes committed by Russia cannot be realized on the basis of the International Criminal Court (ICC), so another effective mechanism of accountability is needed, which will have both a political and legal mandate.

Anton Korynevych, ambassador-at-large of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, believes that the investigation into the crime of aggression can lead to the Russian leadership itself. The crime of aggression – in other words, the decision to unleash war – is easy to prove due to the existing official speeches, statements and positions of Russian officials. In addition, many countries and organizations have already adopted resolutions recognizing the crime of aggression. At the same time, linking the war crimes committed in Bucha, Irpin and other areas of Ukraine to the Kremlin's decisions is a much more difficult task and will take years. However, it is impossible to leave the crime of aggression without deserved punishment, otherwise it will become a signal that such crimes can be committed further. The last time a crime of aggression was prosecuted internationally was at the Nuremberg Tribunal.

The ambassador-at-large of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that the jurisdiction of the ICC over the crime of aggression differs from that over crimes against humanity and genocide and is quite limited. In particular, in order for the ICC to consider a case, at least one of the following conditions must be met:

- countries affected by the crime of aggression must ratify the Rome Statute and the Kampala Declaration
- the act of aggression must be recognized by a

resolution of the UN Security Council, which must apply to the ICC.

Anton Korynevych is sure that neither of these conditions will be fulfilled and the ICC will not be able to consider the case. At the same time, the national courts of Ukraine or any other countries cannot consider cases against the top leadership of the Russian Federation, because of their immunity from prosecution in other countries. Thus, the expert concludes, a special tribunal is needed. It could be established on the basis of an agreement with the UN, and the relevant UN General Assembly resolution, or an agreement between Ukraine and some other countries, or the EU/Council of Europe. Korynevych urged civil society and politicians to support the idea of setting up such a tribunal.

The head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Desk at the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Ilya Nuzov, said that there was no consensus in his organization on the issue of setting up a special tribunal for Ukraine. He noted that there are already many initiatives and organizations that document crimes and send materials to the ICC for consideration: "I think there should be a kind of hybrid court on Ukraine, but I don't think it should deal only with the crime of aggression. The court should have a broader jurisdiction, including the crime of aggression, but also other international crimes," Nuzov said. According to him, such a court can be included in the system of national justice, as, for example, the Special Chamber for Kosovo, or separately, on the basis of an agreement between Ukraine and the UN, or the EU and the UN. There are already precedents of such courts working together with national courts, for example, in the Central African Republic.

The expert believes that such a hybrid court with broad jurisdiction may have greater legitimacy in the eyes of the victims. The crime of aggression is a crime against the state, not people, so the victims will not play a significant role there. Sentencing would be done by such a court in absentia because it is unlikely that justice would get its hands on Putin, Lukashenko and other criminals. From a symbolic point of view, it is still a very strong act, but it is far from justice for the thousands, and possibly millions, of victims who have suffered as a result of Russian actions.

At the same time, as the head of FIDH's department

points out, a hybrid court will be able to provide justice to more people. It can also apply certain legal innovations, such as extending its mandate to legal entities such as Gazprom.

A prerequisite for further investigating crimes and finding the perpetrators is the documentation

of crimes, but experts recognize that not all the information collected will reach the court. Documentation alone does not bring justice, although it can provide some relief to victims who have been able to tell their story.

1.12 People and war: space for conversation. Results of the playback theatre

As part of the Fourth International Forum on European Ukraine, the Women's Dialogue Platform (WIPD) initiated an alternative way to talk about the lived experience of war – the playback theatre format, which is often used as one of the practical tools for peacebuilding in divided communities.

At this stage of the hot phase of the war, peacebuilding work in the Ukrainian community is on pause, and within a number of cross-contact dialogue projects there is an ongoing process of rethinking previous activities. This is due to the need to identify, on the one hand, successful practices used before the full-scale invasion that can be continued at the current stage. On the other hand, there is a need to analyze the approaches that did not fit the realities of hybrid warfare that has been going on since 2014, as well as those approaches that cannot be used in a full-scale war and the accompanying political situation.

Despite the risks and difficulties of dialogue work, it remains important for people affected by a traumatic event to be able to share their personal experience of living through the war and to reflect on the experience of others, presented in the format of a theatrical performance, thus demonstrating the work of playback theatre as a practical tool for peacebuilding and the rehumanization of a person living in a different context or sharing a different vision.

The playback theatre performers came from Ukraine, including its occupied territories, Russia and Germany. At the beginning of the event, each of the playback theatre performers shared with the guests their stories and experiences of living through the war, and then they presented these stories on stage in the form of a performance, thus setting a framework for further work with the group. Each of the guests present was able to share their story, which was then presented on stage. In addition to analytical methods of dealing with the situation of war, which are widely accepted in the expert and academic communities, creative and artistic methods can also be used to work with people's emotions. Such methods can be both theatrical methods (e.g., playback theatre, doc theatre, forum theatre) and other forms of art (e.g., creation of literary works, works of art, films).

The use of artistic methods makes it possible to involve people in the discourse who, on the one hand, by the nature of their activity are far from the topic under discussion, and, on the other hand, those who are more inclined to build social interaction on the level of emotions. In addition, the use of artistic methods provides an opportunity to rehumanize a person/friend who is in a different context and shares a different vision of the war situation. Playback theatre allows making such interventions promptly and targeting a specific group.

It should be kept in mind that the stories shared by playback theatre guests can have a very intense emotional impact on others present. This, on the one hand, may lead to a certain reinterpretation of the situation in the spirit of Aristotelian catharsis, and on the other hand, it may be difficult for a number of those present to cope with their emotional experiences. Therefore, at the beginning of the event, it is necessary for the conductor to talk and agree with the group about the rules of its work and the need for psychological safety in order to avoid retraumatizing those present. In this regard, a good rule of thumb is the "free to go" rule, which allows a participant to leave the room where the process is taking place at any time if they feel that they are not emotionally ready to participate or to be present during the discussion of a story that has an excessive emotional impact on them. At the same time, the conductor should try to work with such negative emotions as much as possible and be able to provide psychological support to the person in case of the above-mentioned situations.

In general, the playback theatre method can be successfully applied in dialogue and peacebuilding processes in divided communities living in the hot phase of war. It can be used as a stand-alone method at certain stages when a rapid intervention is required for rehumanization and to overcome acute hostility. Playback theatre can also be used as an auxiliary method at various stages of the dialogue process in a stable group or community to work on an emotional level. At the same time, the cooperation of representatives of different cross-contact communities within one playback theatre group is also a dialogical process in itself and an example of diapraxis (dialogue through joint activity).



Strengthening synergies between political and civil society actors in the field of human dimension: which joint efforts are needed for overcoming violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity?

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OVERCOMING
RUSSIA'S WAR
AGAINST
UKRAINE

International
Civil Society
Platform
Civil

Conclusion: stabilization of the Ukrainian state and society in the context of war

In the theory of international assistance to areas of armed conflict, stabilization is seen as a transitional stage from war to peace – it begins when conditional military security is restored and leads to reconstruction and sustainable peacebuilding. On the basis of this concept, strategies of international institutions for the development of individual conflict regions emerge.

Experts from the CivilM+ international platform, in turn, are also engaged in the development of stabilization strategies for certain spheres of public and state life in Ukraine.

Despite the fact that full-fledged stabilization is possible only in the post-war period, it is necessary to start the processes of strengthening state institutions and their sustainability for the survival of the Ukrainian population even in war conditions. Strengthening institutions in the Ukrainian context, for example, means promoting anti-oligarchization and anti-corruption reforms, as well as Ukraine's decentralization reforms and strengthening self-governance. Local NGOs that have regional expertise play an important role here.

Issues of supporting the proper condition and repair of infrastructure can also be attributed to stabilization processes that are also carried out during the hot phase of the war. Hubs and platforms are needed to coordinate and consolidate the efforts of the state, civil society and international actors. One such format was created in Warsaw, its advantage is the horizontal distribution of aid to the population through Ukrainian organizations.

Ensuring the rule of law and the rule of law is also an important aspect of stabilization work in wartime Ukraine. Oleksandr Pavlichenko, head of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, speaks of the need for judicial reform, as without an established judicial process even in the restored territories there will be no proper protection of human rights. In the conditions of war, the topic of war crimes plays a special role: their documentation, systematization, search and punishment of the perpetrators. According to Roman Avramenko, an employee of the Ukrainian NGO Truth Hounds, the problem of digitizing the war crimes documentation system is currently very pressing in Ukraine. As long as all processes take place in paper format, it is not safe and is labour-intensive and time-consuming. The lack of a

common electronic database makes it difficult for different actors involved in documentation to work together.

The issue of justice is significant not only to punish the perpetrators, but also to provide a way for survivors to live through trauma. "The demand for justice, the demand for the indictment of the Russian political regime, the indictment of specific officers and military personnel – this is a monumental demand in Ukrainian society, and it is only growing. Without this process, there will be no possibility for reflection," explained Oleksandra Romantsova, executive director of the Center for Civil Liberties. More support is needed in the search process for missing people: internment in third countries, DNA analysis, and leveraging other technical capabilities. "People can only move on with their lives when they can find out the exact status of their relatives, give them a proper burial and say goodbye," Oleksandra Romantsova said.

A group of victims who can still be saved includes people in detention in the occupied territories and in Russia. International humanitarian law provides security and freedom for all non-combatants, and for prisoners of war – the possibility of exchange. However, the Russian side is currently not releasing people, covering up the war crimes it has committed. The international community's contribution to restoring justice would be to establish an international tribunal on the crime of aggression and to assist Ukraine in war crimes investigations. For Ukraine, this means changes in national legislation and the development of appropriate mechanisms; without these actions, Ukraine risks failing to deal independently with the large number of cases of war crimes committed.

"The process of reconstruction is also a process of rebuilding institutions and relationships between people," Valery Novikov explained, chairperson of the Luhansk Regional Human Rights Center "Alternative." For instance, the liberated districts and frontline zones show signs of authoritarian governance by the military administrations. They quickly solve specific issues of restoring infrastructure, organizing evacuation and other emergency wartime problems, but do not have the ability and competence to develop a long-term plan for the areas' recovery. The development of such a plan requires the joint work of both state institutions and civil society representatives. Given

the current legal uncertainty, civil society sees its task as searching for democratic forms possible under martial law.

Another important area of stabilization work is to directly support the population. Svitlana Krot, head of the NGO "Country of Free People", said that overall, the mental health of Ukrainians has deteriorated by 15%, and the country lacks specialists who can work with serious traumas that require the specialization of psychologists and psychotherapists. Support is also needed for employment, such as developing entrepreneurial skills in the face of a shortage of opportunities on the labour market. For many Russian-speaking

Ukrainians, the language issue is acute. They need an environment in which they can systematically learn Ukrainian and receive public support without being judged or disregarded for not always speaking correct Ukrainian.

The experts highlighted the importance not only of the stabilization process itself, but also of its media component. The need for works and reforms that will lead to the strengthening of stability should be clearly articulated to society. This requires expert independent media, which would be carriers of these messages and explain the importance of change.



