The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

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О ситуации с правами человека на Украине

<u>Unofficial translation</u>

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN UKRAINE

**Report
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation**

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This report is a further effort by the Ministry to draw attention of the international community to a grim human rights situation in Ukraine with no signs of its improvement at this point. On the contrary, there continue systemic violations of basic human rights and freedoms. There is no respect for the right to freedom and personal integrity. There have been multiple instances of unlawful detention, as well as tortures, intimidation, and ill-treatment, including with a view to extorting confessions from detainees.

Under the pretext of combating "Russian aggression" and separatism, there continue repressions against political opponents, independent journalists and media companies, as well as members of civil society organizations unsuitable to authorities. To that end, the Ukrainian government actively engages radical nationalist groups.

Undue restrictions apply to the rights of internally displaced persons, Russian speaking citizens and national minorities. Repressive measures continue to be taken against congregants and clergy of the canonic Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The situation described seems to indicate a persistent reluctance and inability of the new Ukrainian leadership which took office more than year ago to address serious violations of human rights in the country.

Manifestations of neo-Nazism, glorification of former Nazis and collaborationists, as well as the spread of racism and xenophobia

Upon the election of Vladimir Zelensky as President of Ukraine, most Ukrainian citizens expected the situation in various areas of public life to improve. However, it has been more than a year since Zelensky won the presidential elections, and it must be noted that the policy of the new Ukrainian authorities on the majority of key issues, including humanitarian ones, has seen little to no change from the policy of Pyotr Poroshenko.

For instance, Ukraine is still committed, just like it was under its previous President, to rewriting history, erasing the historical memory of the Ukrainian people about the events of the Great Patriotic War, and doing its utmost to conceal the role of the USSR and the Red Army in the victory over Nazi Germany. The historical events are misrepresented with a view

to cultivating the nationalist mood among the general population. Hence, the rewriting of history is accompanied by the efforts at all levels of government to whitewash and glorify Nazism, Nazi accomplices of World War II and various groups of Ukrainian collaborationists who worked with Nazi invaders during World War II.

Nazi collaborationists and members of Ukrainian nationalist groups are glorified under the guise of honoring the members of the so-called national liberation movement in the 1940–1950s and anti-communism fighters for the freedom of Motherland. Particular emphasis is given to a wide range of measures to support them by the State.

To whitewash Nazi accomplices, the government of Ukraine has developed and adopted several laws and regulations as part of the so-called decommunization. It started in spring 2015 with the adoption of the so-called decommunization package of laws that prohibited the communist ideology and Soviet symbols, condemned the communist regime and gave members of various Ukrainian nationalist organizations and paramilitary groups, including the ones that collaborated with Nazi Germany before and during World War II, the status of "fighters for Ukraine's independence". The fighters of the Ukrainian nationalist groups of World War II (the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA),[1] and their leaders: Stepan Bandera, OUN leader, and Roman Shukhevych, commander of the Nachtigall Battalion and the UIA) were recognized as fighters for independence. Members of such groups became entitled to social guarantees and benefits from the State. In 2018, the list of persons entitled to benefits under this status was expanded with the adoption of amendments to the Law on the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of their Social Protection. In accordance with those amendments, "war veterans" meant all persons who had been involved in "all forms of armed struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the 20th century", including members of the UIA, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army "Polissian Sich" headed by Taras Borovets, the Ukrainian People's Revolutionary Army and other armed groups of Ukrainian nationalists. Besides, the amendment removed the reservation, according to which the status of war veterans (and relevant benefits) was given to the members of nationalist armed groups that had participated in the fight against German-fascist invaders in occupied Ukraine in 1941-1944, had committed no crimes against humanity and had been rehabilitated.

As part of the so-called decommunization package, local authorities in certain areas of Ukraine adopted decisions allowing the use the symbols of Ukrainian nationalists along with the State symbols.

The package of laws on decommunization marked the start of numerous demolitions of memorials to Soviet figures. Despite the fact that the law excludes the monuments to the heroes of World War II, in practice, that provision is ignored by both State institutions and right-wing radicals. Besides, as part of the so-called decommunization, a campaign was launched to rename settlements and streets, as well as to dismantle memorial signs and images related to the Soviet past. According to official figures, 52,000 place names have been changed, 987 settlements have been renamed, and more than 2,500 monuments of the Soviet era have been dismantled over the past five years.

In May 2017, the Code of Administrative Offences of Ukraine was amended to prohibit the public use, wearing and demonstration of the Georgian (Guards) ribbon and its images.[2]

As a result of the package of measures on decommunization, citizens are prohibited from publicly using Soviet symbols, including the symbols of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, which led in practice to numerous conflict situations during the annual celebration of the Victory Day on 9 May.

Furthermore, following the adoption of that law, the number of acts of vandalism committed by right-wing radical groups against the monuments erected in honor of Soviet commanders, heroes of the Great Patriotic War and Nazi terror victims has significantly increased.

Legislative initiatives on the so-called decommunization and glorification of Nazi accomplices have received quite a mixed reaction from the Ukrainian society. Those laws have been repeatedly criticized by opposition political parties, mass media, as well as Ukrainian and international human rights organizations.

Nevertheless, Ukrainian officials express public support for Nazi figures and collaborationists. The case of June 2020, when Vladimir Nikolaenko, Mayor of Kherson, congratulated the citizens with the anniversary of the adoption of the Act of the Proclamation of the Ukrainian State by Hitler's collaborators in Lvov in 1941, that contained a commitment to "collaborate closely with National Socialist Greater–Germany, which under the direction of its leader Adolf Hitler is creating a new order in Europe and the world, and is helping the Ukrainian people to free itself from Moscow's occupation" attracted a strong response. To commemorate that occasion, several billboards were posted in the city with a photo of the editorial of the OUN Samostiynaya Ukraine newspaper of 10 July 1941, where the text of the act was printed.[3] Aleksei Zhuravko, former MP, recalled on his page on the social network that the Act of the Proclamation

of the Ukrainian State was a documentary confirmation of the cooperation of the OUN with Nazi Germany.[4]

Pursuant to resolutions of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, birthdays of Ukrainian Nazi accomplices are regularly entered into the calendar of memorable dates.

On 3 December 2019, by the Verkhovna Rada resolution No. 2364, the anniversaries of such Nazi collaborationists as Vladimir Kubiyovich (an active supporter of the cooperation with Germans, the initiator of the formation of the SS Galicia Division), Ivan Poltavets-Ostryanitsa (the head of the UNAKOR – the Ukrainian National Cossack Rukh, which included auxiliary police units participating in the mass killings of Jews in Volyn, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, and Belaya Tserkva), Vasyliy Levkovich (a member of the Ukrainian auxiliary police in Dubno, then – the commander of the UIA' Bug Military District convicted by the Military Tribunal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kiev Oblast in 1947), Ulas Samchuk (OUN activist, the editor-in-chief of the Volyn pro-Nazi newspaper in Rovno who published anti-Semitic articles calling for the extermination of Jews), Vasyliy Sidor (OUN and UIA member, the commander of a sotnia of the Nachtigall battalion, which participated in punitive operations; after the war until the liquidation in 1949, he actively participated in underground activities and held the position of the UIA chief commander), Andrey Melnik (the head of the OUN board, the head of the Ukrainian National Rada in Kiev during the war, the organizer of the Ukrainian auxiliary police units, and the organizer of mass killings of Jews), Kiril Osmak (a member of the OUN (Stepan Bandera wing), one of the leaders of the Ukrainian National Rada in Kiev under the leadership of Andrey Melnik), Aleksandr Vishnevsky (one of the organizers of the SS Galicia Division), Yaroslav Starukh (a member of the OUN board, the organizer of the Jewish pogroms), Vasyliy Galasa (one of the leaders of the OUN, who led the OUN underground network in Western Ukraine, the organizer of the Jewish pogroms in the Ternopol Oblast and the massacres of Poles), as well as nationalists, in particular Maksym Zheleznyak (the leader of the Koliivschina, who was involved in the massacre of Jews in Uman in the 18th century) were included in the calendar of memorable dates and anniversaries of 2020. At the same time, in a number of cases, these persons are simply referred to as public figures (such as, for example, the "historian and geographer" Vladimir Kubiyovich, the "political and military leader" Yaroslav Starukh, and the "writer, publicist, and journalist" Ulas Samchuk) without reference to their connection with nationalists. Public funding is allocated for holding commemorative events in honor of these "figures." The Ministry of

Education has to hold lessons and educational sessions. Commemorative coins and stamps in honor of these persons are also to be issued.

In connection with this Verkhovna Rada resolution, Joel Lion, Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine, protested on 6 December 2019, noting that "honoring those who voluntarily decided to cooperate with the Nazi regime – for whatever reason – is an insult to the memory of six million Jews exterminated by Nazis."[5]

Reinforcing that resolution of the Verkhovna Rada, regional authorities of Ukraine adopted their own regulations.

On 24 December 2019, the Lvov Regional Council adopted a resolution to allocate public funds in 2020 to hold commemorative events in honor of one of the OUN leaders, Andrey Melnik, as well as a proponent of the ideas of Ukrainian nationalism, Ivan Lypa, and his son, Yury Lypa, a nationalist ideologist.

On 27 February 2020, the Kiev City Council took a resolution – at the behest of Yury Sirotuk, deputy of the Svoboda party – to celebrate commemorative events and anniversaries in honor of the same collaborators in Kiev, namely Vladimir Kubiyovych, Ivan Poltavets-Ostrianytsya, Vasyliy Levkovych, Ulas Samchuk, Vasyliy Sydor, Yury Lypa, Vasyliy Galas, and Andrey Melnik.[6] This decision of the Kiev City Council to commemorate the dates related to the figures associated with Nazism in Ukraine was suspended by the administrative court on a claim of Andrey Portnov, layer and public figure.[7] The Jewish Confederation of Ukraine supported this decision by publishing the statement: "The Jewish Confederation of Ukraine strongly supports this decision of the District Court of the Ukrainian capital and urges the Kiev's authorities to additionally examine the background of the personalities, whose anniversaries are proposed to be celebrated on the Kiev's territory by the Kiev City Council in its decision of 27 February 2020.[8]

The actions of the Ukrainian authorities provoked the resentment of the ambassadors of Poland and Israel to Ukraine who issued a joint statement on 2 January 2020 calling the celebration of supporters of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine insulting. They found it concerning that the authorities (namely the Kiev City State Administration and Lvov Regional Council) took part in that celebration. Furthermore, the ambassadors were outraged at the fact that on 1 January, the Kiev authorities raised a banner Stepan Bandera's picture. "It is with our great concern and sorrow, that Ukraine's authorities of different levels: Lvov Oblast Council and the Kiev City State Administration continue to cherish people and historical events, which has to be once and forever condemned", says the statement.[9]

In addition to the legislative measures, Ukrainian officials make statements in support of collaborationists. For instance, in the video commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Victory in World War II, President of Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, put a Soviet pilot, Ivan Kozhedub, on par with an OUN member, Olena Teliha.

Official Kiev's support for neo-Nazism is not limited to public statements of civil servants. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR) is actively pursuing efforts in this field. Even under its previous director, Vladimir Viatrovych, who was known for his Russophobic and nationalistic views the Institute worked in several areas, including the promotion of legislative initiatives to glorify Nazi accomplices and immortalize the memory of the participants of the Ukrainian "liberation movement", the publication of relevant "patriotic" literature, and methodological recommendations for secondary and higher education institutions, as well as for the holding of various relevant activities and festivals with the participation of veterans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA), participants in the so-called Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in south-eastern Ukraine and local "pro-Bandera" historians, including the Banderstadt festival dedicated to Nazi accomplices. Such apologists of Ukrainian nationalism as Symon Petliura, Yevgeny Konovalets, Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych, Yaroslav Stetsko, Andrey Melnik, etc. have been and are still persistently imposed on the society as moral guidelines.

When the leadership of the UINR changed following the appointment of Anton Drobovych in December 2019, the policy of the historical revisionism did not undergo significant changes. In 2020, on the eve of 9 May, the new director recorded a video on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation celebrated on 8 May[10] and the 75th anniversary of Victory over Nazism. Apart from the usual attempts of current Ukrainian authorities to present Ukrainian collaborators as fighters against Nazism, Anton Drobovych essentially equaled the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation to the Day of Victory over Nazism in World War II and proclaimed that they "do not symbolize the triumph of the victors over the vanquished." He also noted that at that time, Ukrainians fought for "other people's interests" and that the real heroes were the members of the national liberation movement who "fought for independence" from both totalitarian regimes.[11]

It was under the new UINR leadership of Anton Drobovych that another step towards the glorification of Nazi accomplices was made, when on 23 September 2020, the Sixth Administrative Court of Appeal of Kiev ruled in favor of the UINR and overturned the decision of the District

Administrative Court that had de-facto recognized the symbols of the SS Galicia Division as Nazi.[12] Three years prior to that, a resident of Kiev, Natalya Myasnikova, challenged in the court the notion spread by former UINR director, Vladimir Viatrovych, that the SS Galicia Division and its symbols could not be considered Nazi since that Division was not part of the Allgemeine-SS, but of the SS-Verfügungstruppe and was used primarily as a battle unit. The plaintiff requested that the court recognize as illegal the provision by the UINR and its head to one of the Ukrainian online news agencies of their interpretation of subparagraph 5 of paragraph 1 of Article 1 of the Law of Ukraine on the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of their Symbols (listing the symbols recognized as symbols of the national socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regime) with regard to the SS Galicia Division and ban the propaganda of the symbols of the 14th Grenadier Division of the SS Galicia taking into account subsequent name changes. In addition, the plaintiff requested that the UINR be ordered to refute the information about the symbols of the SS Galicia Division.[13]

On 27 May 2020, the Kiev District Administrative Court concluded that the UINR had no right to circulate its President's statements and ordered the Institute "to refrain from committing acts to disseminate" those symbols. However, the Court granted the plaintiff's claim only partially and dismissed its other parts. Ukrainian national radicals from the Right Sector, National Corps, Sokol (the youth wing of Svoboda) and the Traditions and Order made a "fire-show" in front of the Court during the proceedings and, on the day before the judgment to be delivered, the judge and Nataliya Myasnikova's lawyer received threatening texts from unknown persons.[14]

Ukrainian textbooks are also modified to reflect the official interpretation of history. History is being rid of facts evidencing Ukrainian nationalists' collaboration with the Nazis. For example, the Ministry of Education and Science requested to recall history textbooks for grades 10 and 11 that contained information on the cooperation of UIA commander Roman Shukhevych, as well as the Roland and Nachtigall battalions, with the Nazi Army during World War II.

At the same time, nationalist and xenophobic ideas are implanted in youth patriotic education programs, in particular aggressive Russophobia, as well as ideologies of glorification of Nazi accomplices. The Strategy of National Patriotic Education for 2020-2025, which was signed by Pyotr Poroshenko in May 2019, two days before the end of his presidential tenure, was adopted to serve as a pillar for this work. The document provides for development of values among the younger generations based

on examples inherited from, in particular, the Sich Riflemen, units of the Carpathian Sich and the UIA. Persons taking part in the ATO and in the operation of the United Forces in Donbas are also to become role models.

History curricula for grades 5-9 and 10-11 of secondary schools and higher educational institutions approved by the Ministry of Health and Science are designed to build an understanding among students of the Soviet period as a time of "occupation" of the Ukrainian lands. Students are required, inter alia, to give a well-reasoned assessment of the role of Stepan Bandera, Andrey Melnik, Roman Shukhevych and other nationalists in the "Ukrainian liberation movement".

In Ukraine's schools there is also a compulsory subject for grades 10 and 11 "Defense of Ukraine" (until February 2020 it was called "Defense of the Fatherland", the name was changed at the initiative of Education and Science Minister Anna Novosad as it bears the "legacy of the Soviet paradigm"). In the years of the "Maidan" leadership this subject acquired a strong nationalist bias. For example, according to the curricula adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science, teachers are instructed to wear a military uniform in class. The Ministry-approved textbooks include information on Russia as a "military adversary", and OUN/UIA chiefs Bandera and Shukhevych were called "distinguished leaders of the national independence movement."

The Ukrainian authorities connive at radicals' mass actions to glorify the collaborators, which resemble the Nazi mass events. For example, annually, on 1 January (the birthday of OUN ringleader Stepan Bandera) and on 14 October (the date of the UIA establishment), radical nationalist groups the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda, C14, Right Sector, the OUN, etc. hold torchlight processions in several cities of the country. It is noteworthy that the current Ukrainian authorities believe that these actions fully comply with the objectives of the State policy for the education of younger generations. For instance, in the context of regular torchlight processions held in honor of Stepan Bandera on January 1, 2020 in Kiev, Lvov, Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk, the Press-Secretary of Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky said that the events were in line with a policy priority to "restore and preserve the national memory."

The Ukrainian authorities engage right-wing radical and ultra-nationalist groups and organizations (including Svododa and C14) in "patriotic education work" with young people, with certain groups receiving state support.

There are children's summer camps, festivals and field war games dedicated to Ukrainian Nazi accomplices and war criminals (e.g., a festival

in honour of Dmitry Dontsov, the ideologist of the Ukrainian nationalism, and the Banderstadt, Taras Borovets Trails and Under the Cover of Tryzub festivals; the Khorunzhiy youth military and patriotic camp, the Zagrada and Unizh Smithy children summer camps, and the Jura and Gurby-Antonovtsy war games, etc.). As a rule, they get financial support from the Ukrainian State through the Ministry of Youth and Sports and local administrations. Most commonly, former members of the UIA and the ATO participants are invited to such events with the re-enactment of battles between "insurgents" and Soviet troops. In summer 2019, the Banderstadt festival in Lutsk (Volyn Oblast) was attended by around 11,000 people, including 2,000 of participants in the hostilities in South-Eastern Ukraine and 600 children under 12 years of age.

In December 2019, Ukraine adopted the Law on the Recognition of the Plast Movement and the Particularities of State Support for the Plast Scout Movement providing for the support of the Plast, which openly declares that it inherited its structure from Bandera's organization. Essentially, this document laid the foundation for the State to take under its wing an association similar to the infamous Hitler Youth, where young people undergo deliberate ideological indoctrination; almost all UIA commanders were at some point members of the Plast.[15]

Furthermore, in December 2019, the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports of Ukraine once again allocated 20 mln hryvnias for funding several "military and patriotic youth educational" projects in 2020, including 2 mln hryvnias – to the abovementioned Plast scouting organization (of them 770,000 hryvnias for financial support of its military and patriotic camps, 450,000 hryvnias for the organization of an all-Ukrainian game, 500,000 hryvnias for a cultural identity celebration – the Plastun (Plast Scout) Day); 440,000 hryvnias for the Banderstadt festival of the Ukrainian spirit (held since 2007), allegedly of an "ideological and patriotic" nature and aimed to "perpetuate the image of Stepan Bandera as a national symbol"; 350,000 hryvnias to the Youth Nationalist Congress for propaganda of ideas of Ukrainian nationalism as part of Camping Season 2020 that is to culminate in the Gurby-Antonovtsy military game dedicated to the battle between the UIA and the NKVD in Ternopol Oblast; 485,000 hryvnias for the organization of the Jura military and patriotic game (held nationally since 2015); 250,000 hryvnias to the Ukrainian Youth Association (supports rehabilitation of Symon Petliura, Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych) for the organization of the Global Ukrainian Community conference, history-related events (180,000 hryvnias), and the Zagrada children's camps (95,000 hryvnias) whose participants visit UIA memorial

places; 300,000 hryvnias to hold a military history festival Under the Cover of Tryzub in Boyarka (Kiev Oblast); 560,000 hryvnias to the Ukrainian Reserve Army for the Unizh Smithy patriotic sport camp and the Insurgent Heart for children of combatants fighting in the southeast of the country; and 250,000 hryvnias to the All Ukrainian Union of Military History Organizations to hold competitions at the premises of a military unit.

Moreover, in January 2020, the same Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports of Ukraine announced the winners of a competition of children and youth projects that would also receive State funding in 2020.[16] Nationalists are to receive 8 mln hryvnias. It is almost half of all the funding allocated by the Ministry to children and youth organizations.[17] Thus, the Plast organization is to receive 2.7 mln hryvnias to organize summer camps and hold thematic fora. The Youth Nationalist Congress will receive 400,000 hryvnias for cycles of training programs The Free People Course and The Young Bandera Supporter Course. The National Alliance is to receive 200,000 hryvnias for the all-Ukrainian field game Pobeda (held since 2006). The Education Assembly affiliated with radical group C14 will receive 120,000 hryvnias for the project We are Proud of Ukrainians. Sokol Svobody, a youth wing of the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda, will get 200,000 hryvnias to conduct Patriot Games in Ternopol Oblast. The State will also fund an all-Ukrainian campaign The True History of Ukraine and a social advertising festival (organized by the Ukrainian People's Youth). At the same time, many of these organizations or their affiliated structures already receive public funding for national patriotic education, as well as direct financing from State and local budgets for their activities.[18]

It should be noted that Kiev's financial support to radical nationalists at the expense of the State has not been left unnoticed. In particular, the Bellingscat group highlighted the fact that the Ukrainian Government was secretly funding ultra-right extremist groups under the guise of financing educational programs. According to the investigation findings, Ukrainian grants under the program for "national patriotic education" of young people were used to increase the influence of nationalists and attract new supporters.[19]

Furthermore, the Ukrainian authorities continue to install monuments and memorial plaques in honor of OUN-UIA fighters, as well as to dignify former Nazis that survived to nowadays. For example, in 2019, Oblast authorities erected monuments to OUN member Roman Ryznyak[20] in Truskavets (Lvov Oblast) and to head of OUN security service Nikolay

Arsenich[21] in the village of Nizhny Berezov (Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast), and murals in honor of Symon Petliura in Kiev and Kamianets-Podolskyi.

On 23 May 2019, another monument to Roman Shukhevich was unveiled near the city secondary school No. 2 in Ivano-Frankovsk. Mayor of the city Ruslan Martsinkiv wrote on his Facebook page: "This monument is a warning to our enemies and a sign for the entire Ukraine that the nation remembers its heroes."[22] The monument's installation provoked the resentment of the Polish and Israeli Ambassadors, who expressed their condemnation of the memorialization of criminals to the Mayor of the city.[23] In their letter to him, the Ambassadors recalled that "the people who survived after those massacres with Roman Shukhevich playing the decisive role still live in Ukraine, Poland and Israel", – is written in a Facebook message of the Polish Embassy in Kiev. It was also noted that Roman Shukhevich bears a personal responsibility for taking tens of thousands of people's lives for praying in Polish or Hebrew.[24]

On 28 July 2019, a State-supported solemn reburial with military honors of the remains of the SS Division 'Galicia' members dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Division's defeat in the battle for Brody took place in the Zolochevsky district of the Lvov Oblast. Besides, memorial events were held near the village of Yaseniv of the Brody district at the monument to SS Division "Galicia" fighters on the mountain of Zhbir.[25] Besides, in the official messages about this event published by the press service of the Lvov Oblast administration and various public Ukrainian media, e.g. the Vekhovna Rada's newspaper Holos Ukrayiny, the mentioned armed formation was called 'the First Ukrainian division 'Galicia' of the Ukrainian National Army'. There was no mention of it being part of the German SS troops.

On 21 August 2019, a monument to the OUN-UIA was unveiled in the presence of the Ambassador of Canada in Ukraine on the site of the demolished Holocaust victims' memorial at the Jewish cemetery in Sambir (Lvov Oblast).

On 6 November 2019, a memorial plaque to SS member and a creator of SS Division 'Galicia' Dmitriy Paliiv was opened in Kalush (Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast). Persons in Nazi uniforms attended the event.[26]

On January 29, 2020, a solemn funeral of Mikhail Mulik, former punitive squad and the SS Galicia Division member, was organized at the Walk of Fame in Ivano-Frankovsk, attended by regional officials and clergy. Many of those who attended this event were wearing Nazi uniform. Aleksandr Sych, the head of the regional council of the Ivano-Frankovsk region, stated that the country needed "such patriotic and Ukrainian-

minded soldiers carrying the spirit of history and identity." Ruslan Martsinkiv, mayor of Ivano-Frankovsk, promised to name one of the city's streets in Mulik's honor.[27] According to Ukrainian media, Mulik received support from local authorities: he chaired of the regional association of former SS Galicia Division members and a honorary citizen of Ivano-Frankovsk.[28]

In April 2020, a solemn ceremony of presenting an award, established by the Brotherhood of Soldiers of the SS Galicia Division, to its veteran Vasiliy Nakonechny took place in the city of Kalush (Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast). Such awards have been given to all former SS members who are alive. While receiving the award, the 95-year-old member of the SS Division reflexively raised his arm in a Nazi salute. Earlier, in May 2018, he earned honorary citizenship of Kalush following the decision of the Kalush City Council.[29]

In April 2020, a stamp and postcards exhibition dedicated to the SS Galicia Division was organized at the Lvov Central Post Office.[30] As has become customary in Ukraine, the exhibition did not display the division's real name, resorting instead to simply calling it "Ukrainian Division". This was reported by Eduard Dolinsky, head of Ukrainian Jewish Committee.[31]

On April 28, 2020, the Lvov region State Administration website posted congratulatory remarks on the occasion of the 77th anniversary of the creation of the "first Ukrainian division "Galicia". The document, published on behalf of the department of domestic and information policy and the press service of the administration, speaks positively of the division and omits may mention of its affiliation with the SS. It also stated that 84,000 Ukrainian volunteers enlisted into the division.[32]

Around May 23, 2020, on the occasion of the "Day of Heroes"[33], UIA veterans and their widows residing in the Lvov region were granted a one-time monetary reimbursement from the regional budget. A total of 989 persons received this grant.[34]

On June 21, 2020, Lvov City Council press service announced on its website that Andrei Sadovoy, mayor of Lvov congratulated Olga Ilkiv, former attendant of the UIA leader Roman Shukhevich, on her centenary. The announcement noted that Ilkiv was gifted an apartment in Lvov, provided jointly by the city and regional authorities on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the creation of the UIA.[35]

On June 30, 2020, authority representatives and members of the public in Kalush (Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast) paid homage to Roman Shukhevich. The corresponding announcement appeared on the Kalush

City Council's official site. Igor Matviychuk, mayor of Kalush, as well as some members of the public lay flowers to Shukhevich's memorial, Ukrainian anthem was played during the demonstration.[36]

On July 18, 2020, a commemorative cross dedicated to Ivan Treyko, "General-Khorunzhiy" of the UIA, was erected in the forest between the Gorodnica village of Zhytomyr region and Storozhev village of Rovno region, supported by the UINR. Local authority representatives, politicians, public activists, and a UINR representative attended this event.[37]

In August 2020 a "Petliura voluntary clean-up day" was held in Kiev as part of "honoring" the fighters of the 1st Ukrainian Battalion of Bogdan Khmelnitsky, buried at Zamkovaya Hill.

In September 2020 a memorial plaque dedicated to Volodimir Logvinovich, a Ukrainian Polizei, was installed in Rovno.

New technologies are being used with a view to spread nationalistic sentiments among the youth. In May 2020 a Kiev video game studio "Starni Games" presented a video game called "Strategic Mind: Blitzkrieg". The gameplay revolves around commanding Nazi troops, with one of the objectives being to capture Moscow. If successful, Nazis hold a military parade in the Red Square.[38] Earlier, in 2017, the UINR developed a boardgame called "UIA: a Response of the Unconquered People", glorifying Bandera and his supporters.[39] This game is still available for download at the UINR website.

The UINR has also started to ramp up its actions against memorials to prominent Soviet figures and commanders. In May 2019 after Gennadiy Kernes, mayor of Kharkov, announced a restoration to Pyotr Grigorenko avenue of its former name, Marshal Georgy Zhukov avenue (the street had been renamed after the adoption of the "decommunisation law"), which prompted the UINR to threaten the mayor with a lawsuit to qualify this step as illegal and hold those responsible accountable.[40] In July 2019 the UINR submitted a complaint to the Prosecutor-General Office of Ukraine and the National Police after the restoration of a bust of Marshal Georgy Zhukov that had been demolished by nationalists on June 2, 2019; the UINR demanded a criminal investigation.[41]

The policy of glorification of Nazi collaborationists in Ukraine leads to a situation when monuments dedicated to soldiers of the Soviet Army and victims of tragic events of the Second World War, including those linked to the Holocaust are being attacked by radical right wing and nationalist groups. Ukrainian law enforcement notes those transgressions and enters them into the registry of pre-trial investigations, however, the perpetrators

are not held accountable. In practice, this means that Ukrainian officials absolve the vandals of any guilt.

Human rights defenders note yet another factor contributing to the impunity of these vandals: Ukrainian radicals use a tactic of informing the public of their transgressions or any illegal actions they partake in (various acts of violence towards their political opponents, acts of vandalism, etc.) while attributing their actions to some "unidentified patriots". Such a cynical tactic allows them to both "advertise" right wing extremist activity and evade accountability for criminal transgressions.[42]

On June 2, National Corps activists demolished a bust of Marshal Georgy Zhukov in Kharkov. Footage from the media showed nationalists and law enforcement agents near the monument, and the police did not interfere with the demolition.[43]

On July 16, 2019, nationalists belonging to the Svitanok right wing radical organisation from Kharkov demolished a monument to Georgy Zhukov in Yagotin (Kiev Oblast). Extremists published photos of the event on their social media accounts, stating that they had a permission from the authorities and threatening to destroy the Kharkov monument to Georgy Zhukov next.[44]

On July 21, 2019, vandals desecrated a monument to General Nikolai Vatutin in Poltava. The police considered the incident a minor transgression.[45]

On August 28, 2019, vandals desecrated a monument near Vradyivka village (Nykolaiv Oblast) commemorating 7,000 Holocaust victims killed by the Nazis in autumn of 1941. The criminals covered the monument with a swastika and various insults.[46]

On September 5, 2019, vandals desecrated an Order of the Great Patriotic War monument in the Mars Field in Lvov.[47]

On September 15, 2019, vandals desecrated a memorial erected in the place where 54,000 Jews were killed in Bogdanovka village (Nykolaiv Oblast). Unidentified persons covered the Holocaust victims memorial with swastikas and left a note containing threats.[48]

On September 17, 2019, there was an act of vandalism against the memorial complex dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust in Kirovohrad region. Unidentified persons painted swastikas over the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust near the road from Golovanivks to Klinove.[49]

On October 31, 2019, radicals in Odessa demolished a bronze bas-relief to Georgy Zhukov on the military commissariat building of the Primorsky district. Concerned citizens tried to interfere, which prompted the nationalists to insult them and tell them to leave to Russia. Citizens then

complained to the police, who called an investigative team at the scene to evaluate the situation. The radicals presented the police officers a document signed by a Ministry of Defense official, which stated that pursuant to the decommunization law the ministry did not object to the demolition. Eventually, the right wing radicals took the Georgy Zhukov bas-relief off the building. Later, one of the vandals published a photo on his social media account where he stood over the prostrated bas-relief.[50]

In November 2019, vandals in Kharkov poured red paint over the Georgy Zhukov monument.[51]

On the same month vandals in Odessa poured paint and drew an insult on a memorial plaque to Georgy Zhukov attached to the façade of a building on Novoselskogo street.[52]

On December 27, media in Odessa reported that unidentified vandals broke a memorial plaque on the monument to Mikhail Plokhoi, a combat pilot and Hero of Odessa, situated in a park on Yarmarochnaya square.[53]

On 19 January 2020, vandals desecrated memorial stone The tragedy of Krivoy Rog, which is dedicated to the 15 thousand Jews who died at the hands of the Nazi regime, set up in the territory of a synagogue in the city of Krivoy Rog.[54]

In February 2020, in Odessa, nationalists took down a memorial plaque with a bas-relief of Marshal Georgy Zhukov from a wall of the student residence of the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University, where the headquarters of the Odessa Military District – headed by Georgy Zhukov in 1946–1948 – was located in the post-war years. This was the last bas-relief of the Soviet commander in the city.[55]

In the same month, vandals desecrated the memorial in the April 10 Square in Odessa commemorating the liberation of the city[56], and two young people desecrated the monument to Nikolay Vatutin in the Mariinsky Park in Kiev by pouring brilliant green on it.[57] The monument to Nikolay Vatutin is erected on the general's grave. At first, there were reports in the media that the police opened a criminal case under Article 297, part 3, of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (vandalizing a grave or any other burial place or a corpse).[58] However, later, when the police arrested only one of the vandals, he was charged with an offence under Article 296, part 2, of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (hooliganism perpetrated by a group of persons).[59]

On 22 February 2020, vandals desecrated the Wings of Victory memorial erected in the similarly named square in Odessa on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of its liberation from the German-fascist occupation by the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front on 10 April 1944: the granite

pedestal with names of heroes of the Soviet Union was covered with drawings.[60]

In late March 2020, it became known that vandals demolished the monument to the warriors of the Great Patriotic War in the Nyrkov settlement (Ternopol Oblast). The monument was last seen intact on 25 March 2020.[61]

On 2 May 2020, it became known that the monument to fallen soldiers of the Red Army was desecrated in Uzhgorod (Zakarpatskaya Oblast). Vandals damaged the memorial plaques with the soldiers' names and the star of the Eternal Flame. The incident was reported by a woman living in the city on her Facebook page.[62]

On 5 May 2020, radicals from the Decommunization. Ukraine organization torn down the monument to Grigory Kotovsky, hero of the Civil War, in the Krutoyarka settlement (Odessa Oblast). Nationalists said their actions had been approved by the local council.

On the eve of celebrations on the occasion of Victory Day in May 2020, vandals attacked monuments to Soviet soldiers in the city of Sloviansk. Thus, in the Shelkovichny Park, local nationalists painted the figure of a Soviet soldier with the Victory Banner in the OUN colors. They also damaged the monument set up on a mass grave of soldiers who died in the liberation of the Ukrainian territory from the Nazi occupiers.[63]

On 19–20 May 2020, the monument to Georgy Zhukov in Kharkov was yet again attacked: two nights in a row, unidentified persons doused it with red paint.[64]

With the connivance of the Ukrainian authorities, nationalists and far-right radicals do their best every year to disrupt the celebration of anniversaries of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War and other memorable dates, as well as anti-fascist events, by organizing acts of provocation on those days. As a rule, no measures in connection with threats made against activists are taken. Law enforcement bodies do not seek to suppress unlawful acts of the offenders or bring them to justice, letting them get away and "isolating" the victims. The conduct of nationalists is qualified as hooliganism regardless of its motives and character.

In 2018 and 2019, nationalists, wearing clothes with Nazi symbols, attacked the organizer of commemorative events and the director of the Institute of Legal Policy and Social Protection, Elena Berezhnaya, on Victory Day in Kiev. Law enforcement bodies failed to react against the radicals' actions and, instead, detained the victim.[65]

On 19 January 2020, nationalists, using pyrotechnic devices, tried to disrupt a demonstration of Ukrainian anti-fascist human-rights activists held

in Kiev under the slogans "Stop feeding the radicals," "Disband the Azov Battalion," "Investigate the crimes of far-right radicals," "It's time to stand up to murderers." The police let the radicals break through the police lines to the demonstration participants and did not detain any of the offenders, merely giving them a warning. Shortly before the anti-fascist demonstration, a nationalist social media channel published a series of messages calling for liquidation of its participants.[66]

On 9 May 2020 – the day of the 75th anniversary of the Victory over fascist Germany – despite the restrictions introduced by the authorities due to the spread of the coronavirus infection, Ukrainian nationalists conducted a number of blasphemous actions. In Odessa, they disrupted the motor rally, put up fights, and interfered with the celebrations of the 75th Anniversary of the Victory. Radicals also marched carrying portraits of Nazi accomplices from the OUN – UIA, other similar organizations, and symbols of the SS Galicia Division.[67] In Lvov, young neo-Nazis held a demonstration on the Hill of Glory, showing Nazi symbols and playing a record designed to resemble messages of German occupiers while residents of the city were laying flowers at the graves of the fallen soldiers. The Ukrainian authorities did not respond to such actions in any way.[68] In Kharkov, activists from such nationalist organizations as Freikorps, the Union of ATO Veterans, Right Sector and the Veterans' Association to Support Ukraine's Defense, hung provocative banners saying "Thank you, grandfather, for smashing the Moscow louse" (in Ukrainian: "Дякую діду за те, що давив московську гниду") on three bridges in the city.[69]

On 30 June 2020, radicals threw eggs at demonstration participants in Kharkov – in the presence of the police.

Quite often, nationalists are actually aided by law enforcers. Thus, on the night of 8 to 9 May 2020, the police raided the premises of the Victory Regiment NGO, which regularly organizes motor rallies on the occasion of Victory Day on 9 May, and searched the homes of the event organizers. They attempted to frustrate the demonstration itself: participants in the motor rally and journalists reported that the organization's headquarters was cordoned off, and the police seized masks with stars, red flags, copies of the Victory Regiment 1945–2020 newspaper and other items meant for the demonstration.[70] A criminal case was opened against Andrei Ivanov, organization's head. As Pavel Volkov, journalist from Zaporozhye, wrote on his Facebook page, as the motor convoy was moving, the police pulled over one car after another and, eventually, stopped the whole convoy without any comments. The police detained the demonstration participants but afterwards let them go, making them take down the flags – despite the

fact that the motor rally had been authorized by the city administration. As was later reported by the police, a criminal case was initiated under the article concerning the "dissemination of communist and Nazi symbols and propaganda of communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes."[71] Members of the Oberig organization were also involved. Nationalists tore down the red flags from the vehicles participating in the rally. There occurred a verbal fight between the opponents.[72] Another motor rally was stopped in the Chernomorskoye settlement (also in the Odessa Oblast) by far-right radicals from the Diya, Automaidan, National Corps and Odessa Self-Defense organizations. The police did not make any effort to prevent the radicals' actions.

When planning their actions, radicals in Ukraine enjoy the patronage of the authorities. Many such gatherings are attended by Ukrainian government officials. Thus, Yuri Sirotyuk, member of the Kiev city council and also deputy chairman of the Svoboda radical nationalist party, took part in the torchlight procession organized by nationalists on 1 January 2020 in honor of Stepan Bandera.[73] A similar demonstration in Lvov was attended by Andrei Moskalenko, deputy city mayor, and vice chairmen of the Lvov regional state administration.[74]

On 8 February 2020, the seventh Bandera Readings took place in the Column Hall of the Kiev City Council, organized by the Svoboda All-Ukrainian Union. Later, the media reported that City Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko authorized the organization of the readings in the premises of the Kiev City Council free of charge. This was stated in the response by the Kiev Council to a request from the Ukrainian News information agency.[75]

On 7 March 2020, a large-scale torchlight procession Remember the Heroes was held in Lvov in honor of Roman Shukhevych. During the procession, its participants chanted various nationalist slogans, such as "OUN, UIA – worldwide recognition", "Bandera, Shukhevych – the heroes of Ukraine!", "Glory to Roman Shukhevych."[76]

On 23 May 2020, Ukrainian radicals, with participation of the authorities, yet again organized events dedicated to Day of Heroes in Lvov, Ternopol, Zhytomyr and Khmelnytskyi.

On 2 August 2020, in the Kiev suburbs, Ukrainian nationalists presented a new organization called Centuria, whose main goal is said to be the preparation for a "liberation war." During the presentation, nationalists fired into the air.[77]

On 14 October 2020, on the anniversary of the UIA creation, radicals from Svoboda, Right Sector, the National Corps and the Congress of

Ukrainian Nationalists held another march carrying Nazi symbols and chanting anti-Russian and anti-Semitic slogans.

Having support from authorities, nationalist groups, such as Right Sector, National Corps and Svoboda, operate freely in Ukraine. These associations were represented in the country's parliament by their leaders, Dmytriy Yarosh, Andrey Biletsky and Andrey Ilyenko. Moreover, there are examples of nationalists becoming members of executive bodies. A striking example was the appointment of the former neo-Nazi activist and Azov fighter Vadim Troyan as deputy minister of internal affairs of Ukraine on 8 February 2017.[78] It is also known that Evgeniy Karas, leader of the extremist organization C14, joined the Public Monitoring Council at the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine.[79]

After 2018, the Kiev City Council signed an agreement with the C14 group to create the Municipal Guard (Municipalna Varta) to patrol the streets (it is composed mainly of C14 members and Svoboda's youth wing). This organization is funded from the city budget.[80] At least three such patrols are registered in Kiev and another 20 in other parts of the country.

Reassured by support form official authorities and encouraged by impunity, Ukrainian right-wing radicals actively employ violence and intimidation against their political opponents, civil society leaders, human rights activists and journalists, pressuring the government authorities into making decisions to their benefit. They organize campaigns against legislative initiatives they deem undesirable and against court decisions concerning their supporters. For instance, during a trial against one of the two young men who had doused in brilliant green the monument to General Vatutin in Mariyinsky Park in the night of 10 February 2020 in Kiev, the head of the radical organization C14, Evgeniy Karas, and members of Bratstvo, the party of Dmytriy Korchynsky, were present in the courtroom of the Pechersk Court. The prosecutor demanded that the suspect be taken into custody during the investigation. However, investigating judge Olesya Batrin decided to commit him to the supervision of deputy M. Bondar of the Verkhovna Rada.[81] Human rights activists believe that the nationalists' presence in the courtroom was intended to influence the court. There were also many cases where radicals behaved aggressively in courts, demanding that their supporters be released.

The most noteworthy incident occurred on 23 September 2020, when the Sixth Administrative Court of Appeal in Kiev, following an appeal submitted by the UINM, overturned the decision of the District Administrative Court of 27 May 2020, which de facto recognized the symbols of the SS Galicia Division as Nazi. Ukrainian radical nationalists

from the Right Sector, National Corps, Sokol (youth wing of Svoboda), and Traditions and Order held a fire show during the hearing in front of the court; the judges and the lawyer of N. Myasnikova had received threatening messages from unknown numbers on the day before the decision.[82] They received threatening messages saying that this was "a reminder to all enemies and traitors to Ukraine" and that all judges of the District Administrative Court of Appeal "would be declared accomplices to the separatists supported by Putin's Kremlin and their lackeys in power" if they denied the appeal from the UINM.[83] That night, the radicals placed leaflets bearing portraits of N. Myasnikova and her lawyer, L. Braslavskaya, on their apartment doors and in the entrance halls, along with SS runes and the slogan "Glory to the nation, death to the enemies!" Two of the three judges who made the decision in this case reported death threats to the law enforcement agencies.[84] The media, however, point out that it is unlikely that these allegations will be investigated and anyone will be held accountable.

There were other "campaigns" by Ukrainian nationalists. On 23 January 2020, an office of the Party of Shariy in Kherson was set on fire; it was located on the first floor of an apartment building. The intruders broke a window and threw a glass bottle containing a flammable substance inside.[85]

In late March 2020, radicals attacked the public reception office of the party Opposition Platform – For Life in Kharkov. It was reported to be the eleventh attack on the Kharkov office.[86]

On 7 March 2020, local radicals in Lvov issued threats against a local school that had announced the registration of first grade students for Russian-language classes (in particular, they demanded that the school be disbanded and burned down). Nationalists accused teachers of "propagandizing the Russian world" and "Russifying Ukrainian children"; they were indignant at the fact that the Lvov City Council continued funding the school's activities.[87]

In early April 2020, nationalists launched a campaign against Pavel Victor, Honored Teacher of Ukraine, for filming physics lessons in the Russian language. [88]

On 5 April 2020, nationalists attacked activists from TV channel 112.Ukraina who were handing out medical face masks in the street. Representatives of the channel were called separatists handing out "Putin's face masks."

On 4 May 2020, radicals from the National Corps, National Druzhina and Demokratychna Sokyra organized a rally against the appointment of

Deputy Head of the Kharkov Regional Administration Evgeniy Gritskov as Head of the Coordination Council for National and Patriotic Education. The reason was a photo made in 2015, capturing Evgeny Gritskov and the former governor of Kharkov region, Mikhail Dobkin, holding a red banner. On 6 May, Evgeniy Gritskov resigned as head of the coordination council.

On 23 May 2020, radicals from the National Corps stormed the Kiev office of the party Opposition Platform – For Life, which speaks out against glorification of Nazis and xenophobia. Nationalists tried to burn down the office, threw flares and smoke bombs into the windows and poured paint over the building. With the connivance of the police, who blocked the office security, radicals attacked the organization's employees.[89]

In mid-June 2020, radicals attacked journalists from the newspapers Strana.UA, Shariy.Net and the TV channels Zik and NewsOne, who were covering the course of the trial near a courthouse in Kiev, where the case of the premeditated murder of a man in May 2018 in Odessa by a member of a nationalist group, S.Sternenko, was under consideration. Nationalists also stormed the court building, got into fights with the police and lit flares and firecrackers in an attempt to pressure the court. The police kept journalists out of the court building without any explanation, which led to new attacks. After attempting to interview the defendant, journalist B. Aminov received threats and was told that "ATO troops would come and tell him how to love Ukraine." At the same time, none of the attackers were detained. Moreover, according to Strana.UA, the police subsequently apologized for the beating of "activists," promising to punish those responsible.[90]

On 23 June 2020, activists of the National Corps attacked S. Litvinenko, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada from the party Servant of the People, who came to meet with local residents in Berezne (Rovno region).[91]

In the night of 25 June 2020, National Corps activists (closely linked to the so-called Azov Civilian Corps) assaulted a local supporter of Anatoly Shariy in Kharkov. The media reported that prior to the attack, the activist had sought protection from police in connection with threats from nationalists. Anatoly Shariy himself believes that it was a murder attempt planned by radicals with the support from authorities.[92] Earlier, the head of the Party of Shariy branch in Zhytomyr was brutally beaten up.[93] Moreover, the leader of the National Corps, Andriy Biletsky, said on his Telegram channel that he was going to take care of the Party of Shariy activists and "get this trash off the streets."[94]

On 3 July 2020, a woman from the office of the party Opposition Platform – For Life in Poltava was injured in an explosion during another violent attack by radicals.[95]

On 15, 16 and 17 July 2020, nationalists organized mass protests in Kiev, as well as in Dnepropetrovsk, Lvov, Kharkov and Chernovtsy, against the consideration in the Verkhovna Rada of a bill on amendments to laws on the use of minority languages in education. The document provided for a delay in the introduction of restrictions and extension of the transition period for the use of Russian as the language of instruction. During these protests, the radicals behaved aggressively, desecrating national symbols of Russia and clashing with the police. Local deputies also supported the nationalists in different regions. In particular, addressing President Vladimir Zelenskiy, the Lvov Regional Council pointed out that anyone who voted for the document prepared by Maksym Buzhansky, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada from the party Servant of the People, would be regarded as "collaborators" and "traitors to Ukraine."[96]

On 30 July 2020, nationalists attacked journalists of KRT TV channel who gathered near the building of the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting in Kiev to protest against the Council's intention to cancel the license of the channel.[97]

On 27 August 2020, in Liubotyn (Kharkov Oblast), the radicals carried out an armed attack on a minibus transporting supporters of the party Opposition Platform – For Life from the public organization Patriots for Life. The nationalists blocked the road, opened fire with traumatic weapons on the people sitting inside and then violently beat them with baseball bats. As a result of the attack, several people were injured and hospitalized.[98] Even the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM)[99] drew attention to this incident but did not mention that the attackers belonged to radical groups.

Restrictions on media activities (censorship, pressure, harassment of journalists)

Ukraine witnesses a whole range of problems related to the restriction of freedom of the media. There are serious restrictions on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, limitations on the independent work of journalists, and attempts to tighten censorship. The level of aggression towards the media workers remains high. There have been multiple documented cases of right-wing radical "activists" blocking TV

channels unfavorable to Kiev. The authorities' pressure on journalists has reached its climax. It is noted that intelligence services interfere with the work of the media and activities of those public organizations that hold views different from the official ones.[100] Despite the appeal of many human rights entities and mechanisms, there is still no tangible progress in the investigation of high-profile cases involving the deaths of journalists Oles Buzina and Pavel Sheremet.

A common means of putting pressure on dissenting journalists is criminal prosecution. Since 2015, for example, numerous accusations had been made against Igor Guzhva, editor-in-chief of the largest independent online media source in Ukraine Strana.UA, and as a result he was forced to leave the country and seek political asylum in Austria. Prosecution was also brought against Alexander Medinsky,[101] owner of the Open Ukraine news agency and former serviceman, and independent journalists, Yury Lukashin and Vladimir Skachko. Dmitry Vasilets[102] (placed under house arrest in 2018), Vasily Muravitsky[103] (has been under 24-hour house arrest since 2018) and Pavel Volkov[104] (fully acquitted in March 2019) were held in detention centers as a rule without the right to bail.

Multiple searches were carried out in editorial offices of such media outlets as Vesti Ukraina and RIA Novosti Ukraine (in addition, Kirill Vyshynsky, editor-in-chief of the later, was accused of State treason).

The National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine took restrictive measures in January 2020 against a number of dissenting media outlets that were suspected of breaking the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting and the Law on Information. OUR TV channel, for example, was fined, and inspection was carried out of such TV channels as ZIK and 112-Ukraina controlled by Viktor Medvedchuk, chairman of the political council of the Opposition Platform – For Life party. They are charged with broadcasting programs featuring participants who have allegedly used language with signs of national and racial hatred, called for undermining Ukrainian statehood, for violating its territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as made comments popularizing the authorities of the "aggressor country" and justifying the "occupation of Ukrainian territories". In addition, the Ukrainian regulator in the media sector filed a lawsuit to cancel the licenses of NewsOne TV channel. This was caused by its attempt to hold a teleconference with a Russian channel, Russia-1, in July 2019. The SBU launched an investigation against the owner of the TV channel and member of Opposition Platform – For Life, Taras Kozak, and its general producer, Vasiliy Golovanov, on suspicion of

State treason in the form of conniving with a foreign State to conduct subversive activities.

Human rights activists also note cases where SBU officers would give instructions to media outlets on how to treat certain headline-making news. Ukrainian executive authorities also reportedly prepare guidance on such issues. The Ukrainian presidential administration, for example, issues monthly rules for journalists and bloggers that set guidelines on what is the "correct" way to present the current situation and how to give it the necessary public coverage.[105]

In addition, with the actual connivance of the authorities, nationalists attack the offices of media outlets that maintain an independent position on the most sensitive issues. The building and premises of such TV channels as Inter, OUR, 112 and NewsOne were repeatedly subjected to threats or aggression by radicals. As a general rule, such incidents took place in connection with media events that involved participants from Russia or demonstration of material critical of the Kiev authorities (including the well-known film by American director Oliver Stone, Revealing Ukraine).

Moreover, human rights activists point out that journalists are often harassed by Ukrainian nationalists precisely for covering their violent actions.[106] On 18 May 2020, for instance, nationalists in Kiev carried out an act of provocation at the office of well-known journalist and blogger Dmitriy Gordon. The building was painted with offensive remarks and pelted with chicken eggs. This was provoked by interviews conducted by Dmitry Gordon with Igor Girkin (Strelkov), former head of the militia in Donbas[107], and Natalia Poklonskaya, member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. The journalist said that had been done as part of his cooperation with the SBU, but the Security Service of Ukraine disavowed those claims.[108]

Yekaterina Sergatskova and Roman Stepanovich, founders of news website Zaborona Media and authors of publications testifying to the contacts of local nationalists with the Kiyv office of social network Facebook, are currently forced to hide because of threats they receive. Law enforcement agencies refrain from starting criminal proceedings for intimidation of the journalists and obstruction of them in the execution of their professional activities.[109]

In view of this, the incident that took place on 16 September 2020 in the Cherkasy region is also noteworthy: an apartment house where the parents of pro-opposition journalist Dmitry Vasilets lived was set on fire by unidentified persons. According to the official version, the fire was caused by a short circuit, but a media worker doubts it since the building had new

wiring and neighbors saw a car with European plates hurrying away from the village.[110]

The work of investigative journalists is hampered. On the night of 17 August 2020, for example, Brovary saw unidentified people set fire to a car belonging to the film crew of the Shemy program.[111] Its editor-in-chief Natalia Sedletskaya believes that the incident was caused by publication of Mikhail Tkach's investigations into law violations by Ukrainian high-ranking officials. The journalist earlier reported to the police that he had found signs of a listening device installed in his flat. He said he had also received multiple warnings that officials found his professional activities irritating.[112]

In September 2020, the head of Anti-Corruption Human Rights Rada news agency, Aleksandr Snisar, was attacked and taken to hospital of Dnepropetrovsk in serious condition. The victim's colleagues assume that the attack may be related to the professional activities of the journalist since he investigates corruption schemes involving officials.[113]

In July 2020, judges of the Kiev District Administrative Court, Pavel Vovk and Yevgeny Ablov, made an attempt to place a media representative under illegal surveillance. They tried to gain access to the mobile phone of Yevgenia Motorevskaya, journalist of Slidstva.Info, bypassing due process, following the publication of her investigation into Yevgeny Ablov's activities.[114]

In October 2020, the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Freedom of Speech revoked the press pass of a number of independent media, including Suspilne Donbas, NikVesti and Slidstva.Info. The news was posted by Oksana Romanyuk, executive director of the Mass Media Institute (IMI), on her page on social network Facebook. The Parliament, for example, explained its decision regarding Slidstva.Info, media source which had repeatedly published investigations related to people's deputies of Ukraine, by alleging that it did not cover the parliamentary work in a comprehensive manner.[115]

In early November 2019, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine held hearings on safety of media workers. During these hearings it was noted, for example, that between 1993 and 2019 some 60 journalists were killed in Ukraine. There were over 200 unlawful actions recorded in 2019 against representatives of this profession (including threats, insults, unlawful interference with their professional activities, use of force, damage to equipment and means of communication). 92 per cent of such crimes remain unsolved or unpunished. Only 1 out of 12 cases are brought to court, and offenders are mainly punished with symbolic fines. It was also

noted that journalists are afraid to publish "sensitive" information that may displease the individuals featured in its content provoking aggression and harassment from them.

Amid the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to bring the law-abiding media sphere under their control, notorious website Myrotvorets, a resource that openly violates the right to privacy, operates freely in the country. It publishes illegally collected personal data of Ukrainian and foreign nationals labelled as "separatists" or "enemies of Ukraine", including reporters, politicians, cultural figures and even Russian diplomats. Currently, this online resource is actively used by Ukrainian intelligence services, as well as radical nationalist organizations to put psychological pressure on those whom they accuse of "separatism and treason against the homeland". The most egregious case was the publication in 2015 of personal data of writer and journalist Oles Buzina, including the address of residence, since he was killed shortly after this information had been posted on the website. In addition, a number of media representatives announced the freezing of their bank accounts due to the fact that they were included in the list of "enemies of Ukraine".

Besides, information from the Myrotvorets website is used by the courts at all stages of court proceedings as the body of evidence. International human rights organizations, human rights defenders and journalists strongly criticize the Myrotvorets. For instance, the Ukrainian human rights NGO Uspishna Varta noted that it found 101 court decisions in criminal proceedings, where the rationale listed the materials of the Myrotvorets website as the reasoning.[116]

In 2019, the IMI recorded 243 cases of violations of freedom of expression (235 in 2018 and 281 in 2017). Of these, 172 concerned physical aggression against journalists, with one person dead. The Institute noted that the situation in the field of freedom of expression deteriorated in 2019. From January to September 2020, the IMI recorded 152 cases of violations of journalists' rights, of which 84 were obstructions to work, 17 were threats and 15 were beatings. Fifteen violations occurred in September.[117]

At the same time, other public organizations indicate that the IMI underestimates the data. The Strana.UA outlet quotes the opinion of the head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) Sergey Tomylenko. Since the IMI biasedly reflects the picture of pressure on the mass media, the NUJU has even introduced its own alternative "index of physical safety" – monitoring of attacks on journalists, conducted jointly with a number of partner public organizations: Information Security NGO,

Platform for Human Rights NGO, Academy of the Ukrainian Press and Regional Press Development Institute. For instance, while in 2017 the NUJU recorded 90 cases of use of force, the IMI, according to the NUJU data, recorded 29 similar cases in the same period.[118] In addition, the NUJU recorded 75 cases of attacks on members of the press in 2019.[119] In August 2020, the NUJU reported that since the beginning of the year, 45 attacks on journalists, only those recorded by the police, occurred in Ukraine.[120]

According to the latest data of the "index of physical safety of journalists of Ukraine," for the nine months of 2020, 56 cases of physical aggression against media workers took place.[121] It is not only radical "activists", but also ordinary citizens who have recently resorted to attacks. One example is the attack on the journalist of the Lubny TV channel Alexander Nazaretz during the filming of a fire at a wholesale base in the Poltava region on the night of 29 July 2020. The victim was diagnosed with contusions to his face and head. At the same time, he had a journalist badge hanging around his neck. Earlier, on 2 July 2020, in the village of Zheleznyi Port of the Kherson oblast there was an attack on the film crew of the Ukraina TV channel. Staff members of one of the cafes called the journalists provocateurs and made them leave the property.

In Sergey Tomilenko's opinion, the frequent use of violence against media workers by the public is linked to people's belief that such incidents will go unpunished.[122]

Since October 2018, the statute "On amendments to certain statutes of Ukraine as to the language of audiovisual (electronic) media" (adopted in October 2017) has been in full force, according to which the share of broadcasts and films in Ukrainian on national channels shall be at least 75 per cent, and on regional and local TV channels at least 50 per cent.

Human rights defenders point out that this measure may prove to be ineffective: instead of the expected Ukrainianization of the media sphere, the application of the said law may lead to a change in the structure of consumption of information products in favor of Internet resources and reduce the market of traditional media (press and television), which will have to bear large financial costs for the production of content in the Ukrainian language and will incur losses due to this. That will strengthen the trend of reduction of Ukrainian-language newspapers observed in recent years and, more broadly, the trend of reduction of officially registered publications. For instance, from 2014 to 2018 the number of Ukrainian-language newspapers decreased by 13.5 per cent and their circulation – by 23.8 per cent. Overall, over the same period, the total number of publications decreased by 20 per cent (from 2,169 to 1,736) and

the number of print-runs by 33 per cent (from 2.7 to 1.8 billion). Taking into account the fact that media consumption is determined not by language but by the quality of the product, this will lead to a decrease in the production of content that is interesting to the viewer and, consequently, to a narrower audience. At the same time, according to the study of the Uspishna Varta human rights platform, Russian-language products significantly increased the watching ratings of TV channels that had such a component in their broadcasting. For example, on 9 May 2019, the Inter TV channel, which broadcasted a concert for Victory Day, became the leader of the Ukrainian TV broadcasting (in the category of the mass all-Ukrainian audience older than 18 years). The channel's share was 14.5 per cent. A total of 12.2 million viewers watched the program in the country.[123]

In addition, in 2017 the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine was appointed as the body responsible for issuing special permits for books imported into the country from Russia (it was decided to transfer this activity to the category of licensed). According to the Strana.UA, since November 2019 and as of 8 July 2020, not a single Russian publication was imported into Ukraine. Moreover, not a single license was issued during this period. Not only fiction but also specialized literature was subject to restrictions, which resulted in its deficit. The lack of relevant scientific works, particularly on virology, became particularly noticeable during the pandemic.[124]

Even publications for children are prohibited. The State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine, in particular, sees the "propaganda of the aggressor State" in the book Transport of the series We are Developing a Baby, as it depicts a Russian tank and communist symbols. The reason for the refusal to import the book Treasury of Priceless Knowledge: Inventions, Facts, Discoveries was the presence of a chapter on the first satellites of the Earth and space exploration in Soviet times, illustrated with the Russian state flag. The forbidden edition Why is the Sky Blue? also contains a description of the Russian national flag.[125]

In May 2020, the President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelenskiy signed a decree extending for three years the ban on access to 468 Russian websites and social network platforms on the Ukrainian territory, including Yandex, Mail.ru and Vkontakte, introduced in 2017. At the same time, in September 2020, the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine Aleksey Danilov stated that the Ukrainian special services intend to monitor and register users of the above social network.[126]

Moreover, on 13 November 2020, the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy proposed the adoption of a bill on the

punishment of the media outlets that "deny the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine". According to Novini-24 TV channel, violation of this rule may lead to the outlet being deprived of its license. As the channel notes, according to the bill, if the fact of Russian aggression is denied by a guest on live air, the media will not be responsible for this only if journalists "will do everything to stop this violation".[127]

The spread of the new coronavirus infection contributed to a further deterioration of the situation in that field. Many cases of violations of journalists' rights were related to their coverage of self-isolation and quarantine, as well as other anti-epidemiological measures. Moreover, there were incidents when the fight against COVID-19 was used by local government bodies to hold separate sessions in closed format without the participation of the press or television.

For instance, in Kharkov, a journalist of the Informburo outlet was beaten by unknown persons; he was filming a report on the violation of quarantine restrictions imposed by the authorities of the country, namely, on the meetings of young people in the parking lot near the Nauchnaya metro station. After filming the story, he called the police to the scene for them to respond to the violations. After the law enforcement officers left, the journalist was beaten up, and his phone and backpack with his personal belongings were taken.

On 7 May in Zaporozhye, a man tried to interfere with the work of a journalist and operator of the NTN TV channel during the filming of a story about the "Bakhchisarai" market during the quarantine. He swore and tried to tear off respirators from the media workers.

In Lvov, there were attempts to push out of a hairdressing salon the correspondent and cameraman of the Pershyi Zahydnyi ("First Western") TV channel. They were also preparing a story about the violation of the imposed restrictions.

At the same time, on 26 May in Kiev, a journalist of the Pryamyi ("Direct") TV channel was injured during the assault on the Ivan Honchar Museum by the State Investigation Bureau. After the door into the building was broken down, a scuffle broke out, during which representatives of the law enforcement agency hit the young woman several times in the chest and stomach, even though she was holding a microphone with the channel's logo and a badge was hanging on her neck.[128]

Cases of obstacles to journalistic activities were also encountered shortly before local elections in Ukraine on 25 October 2020. The NUJU believes that the majority of attacks on media workers in September can be attributed to political activation in the regions caused by the election

campaign.[129] For instance, on 5 September 2020, at a regular meeting of the Chernomorsk City Territorial Election Commission, on the initiative of its chairman D.Sokolov, a representative of the Servant of the People party, a journalist of the Evening Chernomorsk newspaper Andrei Smirnov was banned from online broadcasting, after which the media representative was forced to leave the premises.[130]

On 22 September 2020, representatives of the Kremenchug city TV channel (Poltava oblast) were not allowed to the party meetings of the branch of the European Solidarity party to discuss candidates for deputies of local councils and candidates for the post of head of the united territorial community. Despite the fact that the journalists had IDs, the film crew was forced to leave the premises, and the meeting was called a private event.[131]

On 24 September 2020 in the city of Nikolaev, the press secretary of the candidate for mayor of the city from the Opposition platform – For life party Yuri Bagryantsev pushed a journalist of the NikVesti online edition Alisa Melik-Adamyan out of the premises of the city election commission.[132]

On 17 October 2020, the editor-in-chief of the local independent media outlet Alternative.org Roman Varshanidze was attacked in the Odessa oblast. Three unknown people beat him during the filming. Later, on 21 October 2020, the outlet's editorial office was set on fire.[133] In September 2020, Roman Varshanidze reported on threats to him and other journalists by representatives of the former chairman of the local council Timur Khasaev.[134]

In Lutsk and Lvov, journalists were unable to attend the Servant of the People and Opposition platform – For life party conferences on nomination of candidates for local councils. Despite their accreditation, they were denied access to the premises; the denial was substantiated, among other things, with quarantine restrictions.[135]

On the day of the elections in the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, a deputy of the Ternovsk City Council demonstrated aggression towards a journalist who noticed suspicious people with "freelance correspondent" badges of the Begemot newspaper (Pavlograd) at the polling station. According to the victim, her hands were grabbed, she was pushed and there were attempts to knock the mobile phone with which she was filming out of her hands.[136] Meanwhile, the presence of unofficial observers under the guise of journalists was also recorded at other polling stations. The NUJU condemned the provision of professional IDs to outsiders and called on their colleagues to take photographs of media workers registration journals at polling stations and report on the presence of "freelancers".[137]

Human rights organizations point out that the lack of accountability for past attacks worsens the situation. Examples include the brutal beating in Cherkasy of an investigative journalist Vadim Komarov, who was in a coma for a month and a half and died on 20 June 2019.[138] The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) also noted that the trial for the murder of Oles Buzyna, which lasted for more than three years, was constantly pressured by right-nationalist radical groups. As a result, the case, which had been tried by different courts, was effectively stopped and the trial actually had to restart from scratch after the judge in charge of the case recused himself in May 2019.[139] At the same time, on 12 December 2019, law enforcement agencies detained three suspects in the murder of a well-known journalist Pavel Sheremet, committed in 2016. According to the investigation, the organizer of the crime was a sergeant of the Ukrainian armed forces Andrei Antonenko, and the perpetrator was a children's doctor Yulia Kuzmenko. The case also involves a nurse, Yana Dugar.[140]

Cases of attacks on journalists also came to the attention of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM). For instance, on 19 January 2020, the Mission indicated that on Mikhailovskaya Square in Kiev, a group of 25 people who held a commemorative event on the anniversary of the killing of journalists was attacked by radical young people who threw eggs at the event participants in the presence of a large number of law enforcement officers.[141] In its reports, the SMM also referred to the crowded pickets near the Presidential Administration of Ukraine conducted by the national radicals from Svoboda, Demsokira, and the National Corps demanding to tighten the authorities' policy in Donbas on 20 February and 17 March 2020.[142]

On 8 January 2020, two hearings were held on the case of the killing of Pavel Sheremet in the Kiev Court of Appeal. Journalists had to turn to law enforcement officers in order to safely exit the court's premises.[143]

Earlier, on 24 December 2019, near the building of the Kiev Court of Appeal, where a hearing on the killing of Pavel Sheremet was held, the nationalists beat the correspondent of Sharij.net, threatened the journalist of Strana.UA Yulia Korzun, and hit the employee of the ZIK TV channel Alla Zhiznevskaya when she was shooting on the phone camera what was happening.[144] This episode came to the attention of the HRMMU. The SMM noted in their report that the law enforcement officers present at the scene were unable to take adequate measures to protect the journalist.[145]

On June 11, 2020, supporters of the radical Serguei Sternenko accused of committing a murder in May 2018 in Odessa, drove the journalists working together with Anatoly Shariy away from the SBU

building, where the investigative actions were in progress. The video posted on Twitter shows the nationalists turn on the siren in response to a journalist's question about the reasons for the inappropriate treatment of her colleagues and, being close to the journalist, speak obscenely through the loudspeaker.[146]

The situation with the media in Ukraine regularly comes to the attention of international monitoring mechanisms. In March 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the report "Civil space and fundamental freedoms ahead of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections in Ukraine in 2019-2020." The document notes "a trend of violent attacks and acts of intimidation" in the country against journalists, civil society activists and political leaders, as well as lawyers.

The HRMMU also noted with concern the government's initiative to develop legislation to combat the spread of "disinformation" (the draft law "On Countering Disinformation"). If implemented, this would put at risk the freedom of speech. Tightened responsibility for the dissemination of inaccurate information (toughening of administrative liability and introduction of criminal responsibility) and stripping Internet users of the anonymity are, in particular, among the proposed changes. The OHCHR urges the government to shift its focus to targeted cyberattack prevention and countering malicious automated accounts ("bot farms"), invest in media literacy and open access to information.[147]

The OSCE ODIHR, as part of its assessment of the observation needs for local elections in Ukraine (October 25, 2020), was unable to ignore numerous problems in this area. In particular, it points out to the tendency of insufficient editorial independence of the media due to the political bias of their owners. Difficulties with journalists' access to public information due to the administrative barriers created by the authorities are also noted. In addition, it is specified that the actions by the national regulator – the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting – in relation to the media may also be biased due to its affiliation with a number of politically engaged media resources.

Special attention is paid to the pending law "On the Media" to replace the 5 existing laws: "On Television and Radio Broadcasting", "On the Press", "On News Agencies", "On the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine" and "On the procedure for covering the activities of public authorities and local authorities in Ukraine by the media." Above the activities of just the media, the project is intended to regulate these of any information providers. Some provisions of this act significantly

hinder the work of journalists, while strengthening the control of government bodies over media activities. By the way, even grant organizations traditionally loyal to the government noted this.[148]

Media community members have severely criticized the draft law. Thus, in June 2020, a collective appeal addressed to President Vladimir Zelensky, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada D. Razumkov, head of the Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy N. Poturaev, head of the Committee on Freedom of Expression N. Shufrych, head of the Committee on Ukraine's integration with the European Union I. Klimpush-Tsintsadze, people's deputies, head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine M. Maasikas and acting Chairman of the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine E. Litvinenko appeared on the website of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine. It was signed by the employees of publications as Observer, Gordon, Glavkom, Left Bank and others, NUJU chairman S. Tomilenko, representatives of regional media. The authors of the appeal called on the Verkhovna Rada to reject the proposed draft law due to the fact that some of its provisions conflict with the constitutional obligation of the State to ensure the right to freedom of speech. According to journalists, once the law is adopted and, as a result, the powers of the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine expanded, the latter will remain a political body the selection of candidates to which will become even more arbitrary. In turn, vaguely worded requirements for the media and reasons for canceling their registration would lead to vesting government authorities with the right to "establish the truth," that is, in fact, their use as a censorship tool.

In their appeal, the media community members also outlined their vision of the necessary legislative reforms to include streamlined registration procedures, increased opportunities for self-regulation, as well as opportunities for journalists to do their job efficiently without external interference.[149]

The then OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Desir paid attention to the situation with Ukrainian draft laws in the field of media regulation. In a press release dated January 23, 2020, he stressed that the initiative to counter the dissemination of false information violates media freedom, since it foresees excessive intrusion of governmental regulation in its activities.[150] In this regard, during his visit to Ukraine on February 4-7, 2020, Mr. Desir expressed concern about the ambiguity of criteria on the basis of which it would be possible to criminally prosecute those journalists who would be classified as misinforming.[151] On March 2, 2020, Harlem Desir's office published a legal analysis of the Ukrainian

draft law "On the Media" for its compliance with Kiev's obligations in the field of ensuring media freedom (including Art.10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document and the 2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists) prepared by the Spanish media freedom expert Dr. Joan Borata Mir; the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CMCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) were also analyzed. The expert gave a negative opinion on most aspects. It is recommended that Ukraine bring the draft law in line with "international standards, OSCE commitments and best practices on freedom of expression and freedom of information, in order to avoid any negative impact on media freedom in the country".[152]

In July 2020, a demand to bring provisions of the draft law "On the Media" in line with European standards was also posted on the Facebook page of the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. Noted was the necessity to liberalize regulation, as well as to provide additional guarantees against possible abuse in the application of sanctions, in particular in case of blocking online media.[153]

At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities are not abandoning the practice of deporting foreign reporters and banning them from entering the country. Basically, these restrictive measures are aimed at Russian journalists. In 2018, a number of Russian journalists were banned from entering Ukraine, including Paula Slier, RT correspondent, and Evgeniy Primakov, TV presenter, member of the Union of Journalists of Russia, who were sent to Kiev to participate in the OSCE conference "Strengthening media freedom and pluralism in Ukraine during times of conflict in and around the country".

In 2019, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) banned the Austrian journalist Christian Wehrshutz, who had worked for over 4 years as chief of the ORF TV channel in Kiev, from entering the country for a year. He was also included in the database of "Kremlin agents".[154] Christian Wehrshutz covered the conflict in Donbass and made a series of reports from Crimea. After a rather harsh reaction of the Austrian Foreign Ministry to this ban, which was called "an unacceptable act of censorship in Europe", as well as a lawsuit by the journalist in courts supported by the well-known lawyer Andriy Portnov, the ban was lifted.[155]

On January 9, 2020, the State Border Service of Ukraine handed a notice of entry refusal to Russian blogger Alexandra Mitroshina. The reason was her visit to the Crimea.[156]

On February 25, 2020, at the Kiev Zhuliany airport, Ukrainian border guards banned the entry into and stay in the country for Alexey Pivovarov, editor-in-chief of the RTVI TV channel, alleging the lack of a clearly formulated purpose of the visit and confirmation of the planned place of stay.[157]

In October 2020, entry to Ukraine was also banned for Boris Korchevnikov, Russian journalist, TV presenter of the Russia 1 channel.[158]

Cases are also recorded when local journalists are denied access to events with the participation of the head of state during his visits to the regions. Similar incidents occurred in Volyn, Zaporozhye, as well as in Kherson and other cities.[159]

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Persecution of national minorities

Most persons belonging to ethnic or national minorities in Ukraine are at risk of discrimination and stigmatization. Radical right-wing organizations operating in the country, such as the Right Sector, the Azov Civil Corps and the Social National Assembly, encourage incitement to racial hatred and the spread of racist ideology.[160] Numerous cases are recorded of online intolerance propaganda. Specific nationalist-oriented information resources post racist and anti-Semitic content.[161] Human rights organizations of Ukraine note the steadily growing cases of xenophobia and aggression against foreigners in law enforcement structures. The practice of detention, arrest, and identity checks on the basis of race and ethnicity remains widespread.

Stereotypes and prejudices against Roma persist in Ukraine. Representatives of this community often become victims of aggression up to its most extreme manifestations – physical attacks and murders. Representatives of international human rights structures and mechanisms record the sluggish reaction of the Ukrainian Themis to the attacks of local nationalists on Roma settlements.[162]

In April 2020, in its concluding observations on the 7th periodic report of Ukraine, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) noted with concern that the relative level of poverty, which remains relatively stable in the country, has a negative impact on the

marginalized groups of population, including Roma, Crimean Tatars, and migrant families.[163]

In addition to attacks by radicals on the Roma settlements, which peaked in 2016-2018, especially in the west of the country, as well as in Kiev, Ukrainian officials also become involved in the persecution of this national minority.

For example, on March 9, 2020, Vladyslav Krykliy, who was the Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine at that time, together with members of the C14 and Gorodskaya Strazha organizations and Roman Grishchak, a Sluga Naroda deputy to the Verkhovna Rada, launched a joint raid on a Kiev railway station under the pretext of fighting "gypsy gangs". After the "inspection," the nationalists pasted up "You can be robbed by the gypsies" posters at the station, translated into English, with the English version sounding quite harmless: "Beware of pickpockets".[164]

Along with this, cases are becoming common when racist or discriminatory hate speeches and statements directed mainly against minorities are heard in the course of public discussions, including in addresses by public and political figures, in the media, in particular on the Internet, and during rallies.[165]

On April 21, 2020, Ruslan Martsinkiv, mayor of Ivano-Frankovsk and member of the Svoboda party, instructed law enforcement officers to forcibly take out Roma people to Transcarpathia at a meeting, the video of which was released into the Internet.[166]

Soon after that, the public organization "Community of Roma in Transcarpathia" was established in the village of Kholmok, Uzhgorod district (Zakarpatskaya Oblast). Its representatives went to the Ivano-Frankovsk City Court, demanding compensation for moral damage caused by the use of racist and ethnic hate language against a national minority. The amount of the claim against the official was UAH 250,000.

Criminal proceedings have been initiated against Ruslan Martsinkiv on the fact of a call for the forced displacement of people.[167]

In May 2020, two more incidents became known. In the town of Izmail, Odessa oblast, a group of thirty people attacked the house of a Roma family. The attack was preceded by a conflict between the Roma and two participants in the pogrom. According to media reports, minority members attacked a woman earlier, and local residents helped her.[168]

In the Goloseevsky district of Kiev, unidentified persons burned down a gypsy tent, and beat up its dwellers.[169]

A significant increase in anti-Semitism manifestations is noted against the background of a mass campaign to glorify Ukrainian radical

nationalists, participants and organizers of the extermination of the Jewish population of Ukraine during the Second World War.[170]

So, on January 1, 2020, radical nationalist organizations held Nazi-style torchlight processions accompanied by xenophobic slogans in various cities of Ukraine. In a number of municipalities, including Kiev, such events were supported by local authorities.[171]

On January 10, 2020, a group of 30 people attacked a group of pilgrims near the grave of Rabbi Nakhman in the city of Uman, Cherkassy Oblast.[172]

On January 18, 2020, vandals desecrated a memorial sign in memory of the 15 thousand local Jews killed during the Holocaust in Krivoy Rog.[173]

On February 11, 2020, Yakov Zalitsker, head of the Kolomyia Jewish community, received a letter on behalf of the National Police Department for Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast with a demand to provide the department with a complete list of all residents of this nationality, including students, their addresses and contacts. This requirement was justified by the reasons of countering organized crime.[174]

On the night of April 20, 2020, an unidentified person threw a bottle with a flammable mixture under the doors of the Kherson Jewish community building. By a lucky chance, no explosion occurred: the contents of the bottle would not ignite.[175]

On June 26, 2020, unidentified persons desecrated a synagogue in Ivano-Frankovsk. I. Perelman, head of the Jewish community of the city, said that offensive graffiti was applied on two sides of the worship building. The United Jewish Community of Ukraine filed a complaint with the police to open a criminal case under article on vandalism and willful destruction of and damage to property.[176]

On July 28, 2020, an unidentified man attacked a synagogue in Mariupol. After the morning prayer, he broke into the synagogue building with an ax and attacked the guard, stabbing him several times.[177]

On August 24, 2020, the Strana.UA publication reported that B. Yatsikovsky, deputy head of the Ukraine State Commission on Mineral Resources and deputy of the Ternopol Regional Council, publicly performed an author's song with anti-Semitic lyrics. In this regard, people's deputy R. Kuzmin sent an appeal to the National Police to bring him to criminal responsibility.[178]

According to an Anti-Defamation League study, Ukraine ranks second in Europe in terms of anti-Semitic sentiments. In 2016 the level of intolerance towards Jews was 32%, as compared to 46% in 2019.[179]

Countering the "Russian world" propaganda is a separate area of the radical "activist" efforts. An incident that took place in Dnepropetrovsk on January 30, 2020 could be quoted as an example, when radicals staged a picket in front of the Trade Unions House, where the annual International Film Assembly on the Dniepr 2020, a festival organized by the Lestvitsa cultural center, was to be inaugurated. The nationalists were outraged by the presence of film directors from Russia among the guests of the Festival.[180]

The detention of T. Kuzmich, teacher of the Russian language and literature and head of the Russian National Community "Rusich", by SBU officers in August 2020 on suspicion of treason, caused a wide public outcry. According to the Ukrainian special services, during her stay in Crimea, she allegedly "was involved by the Russian FSB in espionage activities passing materials out for subversive work in the Kherson region and throughout Ukraine." It should be noted that T. Kuzmich had been regularly coming to the peninsula since 2008 to participate in the Great Russian Word festival as part of her professional duties. The teacher faces a 12 to 15 years' prison term with confiscation of property for allegedly "creating an agent network in Ukraine".

At the request of the prosecution, the case of T. Kuzmich was heard behind closed doors. The Kherson Regional Court chose detention as a measure of restraint for her, but in early October 2020 the accused was released on bail. At the exit from the isolation ward, I. Usacheva, "activist" of the Kherson Self-Defense branch, attacked the woman. She doused the teacher with red paint, humiliating and insulting her.

According to A. Zhuravko, former Verkhovna Rada deputy, the criminal prosecution of T. Kuzmich is another attempt by the SBU to oppress the Russian-speaking people in Ukraine.[181]

On August 27, 2020, I. Bakanov, the SBU chief, urged to ban the inclusion of persons who cooperate with the Russian Federation, as well as persons who have citizenship of other states, on electoral lists.[182]

The administrative reforms being carried out in the country also pose a threat to the interests of ethnic minorities. Thus, a Verkhovna Rada decision of July 17, 2020, expanded the Beregovo district where the Hungarians had accounted for 76% of the population. According to I. Borto, deputy head of the Zakarpatska Regional Council and Party of Hungarians of Ukraine deputy, after the expansion of its territory due to the annexation of Vinogradovo district, the percentage of the Hungarian minority decreased to 43%. A similar situation is observed in all districts of Transcarpathia, where representatives of this ethnicity used to live

compactly. Thus, in the enlarged Uzhgorod district, they make up only 13% of the total population today instead of the former-day 33%, and 4% instead of 12% previously in Mukachevo district.[183]

Romanian community members also claim their rights have been violated due to the linguistic and administrative reforms carried out by the Ukrainian authorities. The redrawn boundaries of the districts where representatives of this minority had used to live compactly, led to new administrative-territorial units with just about 10% of Romanian population. For them, this means the loss and a reduction of representation in the country's parliament and local councils respectively, as well as forced assimilation in violation of Ukraine's international obligations.[184]

Human rights activists have recorded dozens of cases of intolerance and/or aggression against persons belonging to minorities or adhering to alternative political views in Ukraine. They are particularly concerned about the illegal actions by the members of radical nationalist organizations (C14, Right Sector, Traditions and Order, National Corps, National Druzhinas, OUN, etc.). Their violent acts remain almost without the attention of law enforcement agencies. The right-wing radicals themselves do not hide the fact that they closely coordinate their activities with the SBU and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

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Discrimination of national minorities in the area of education and the use of their language

An integral part of the official Kiev's policy towards national minorities – forced ukrainization – is discrimination against a significant part of the population on the basis of language, including major violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking community.

Since 2017, the country's legislation has consistently banned the use of any language other than Ukrainian in the public sector, education, and the media.

In September 2017, the Law on Education was adopted, according to which education in Ukrainian educational institutions will be provided only in the state language starting from 2020. Education in minority languages is permitted in pre-school institutions and primary schools. This legislation infringes on the language rights of millions of Ukrainian citizens – Russians, Belarussians, Jews, Armenians, and speakers of other languages. The legislation makes certain exceptions only for "indigenous peoples"

(permitted to form separate classes) and speakers of the European Union languages allowed to study "one or several subjects" in their language.

In April 2019, the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language was adopted, stipulating the use of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of public life, except for private communication and religious practice. According to the law, any attempt to introduce official multilingualism in Ukraine is recognized as an action aimed at forcibly changing or overthrowing the constitutional order. At the same time, the document provides for preferential treatment of indigenous languages, as well as the European Union languages. Thus, the Russian language which is used by the majority of the population in everyday life is subject to double discrimination.

On 21 April 2019, 51 Peoples' Deputies made a collective submission to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine challenging constitutionality of the mentioned legal act, which unduly restricts the rights of citizens to use and protect their native languages and develop linguistic idiosyncrasy of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities of Ukraine.[185] As one of the initiators of the appeal to the court Vadim Novinskiy noted, instead of regulating public practices related to language policy in the multiethnic state, the legislation confronts and opposes Ukrainian and Russian-speaking citizens.[186] On 7 July 2020, the Grand Chamber of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine began the consideration of the case at a plenary session in the form of oral proceedings.[187]

However, fair trial is hardly to be expected from a panel of judges, whose members are known for their Russophobic views. Indeed, Reporting Judge Sergey Golovaty, an ex-deputy of Verkhovna Rada, is one of the authors of the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language. His colleague Judge Igor Slidenko during the trial compromised himself with openly xenophobic rhetoric. Responding to Peoples' Deputy Alexander Dolzhenkov, a signatory to the submission, who spoke about the need to protect Russian-speakers in Donbass, Judge Slidenko argued that the term "Russian-speaking citizens" was part of "Putin's military doctrine".[188]

The opinions of expert institutions announced at the public hearing revealed a strong political bias at play. The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Verkhovna Rada and a number of Ukrainian higher education institutions concluded, that none of the provisions of the legal act are either discriminatory or unconstitutional. It was argued, quite unconvincingly, that the legislation regulates the status

of the Ukrainian language only, while all other languages remain outside the scope of its application.[189]

President of the Constitutional Court Judge Fyodor Venislavsky adopted a similar approach describing the Peoples' Deputies' appeal as "artificial".[190] At another point, spokesperson of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine Alexander Sych argued that the legal act contained no provisions discriminating against the rights of ethnic minorities in the areas of education and science.[191]

On 9 July 2020, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine resumed the proceedings behind closed doors.[192]

Another step towards the establishment of a mono-ethnic language regime in a multinational state was the signing of the Law on Complete General Secondary Education by Vladimir Zelensky on March 13, 2020.[193] The document provides for three education models depending on the linguistic background of the schoolchildren.

Under the legislation, the indigenous peoples of Ukraine, who do not possess their own state and live in a foreign language environment (comprising Crimean Tatars, Krymchaks and Karaites, per Ukrainian legislation), are entitled to education in their natural languages at any school stage.

Representatives of national minorities speaking the EU languages have the opportunity to study in their native language for the first four years, followed by a gradual increase from 20 to 60 percent in the amount of study time in the Ukrainian language by the ninth grade.

For all other students, the amount of study time in the state language should be 80-100 percent already in the fifth grade. Thus, children of Russian-speaking nationalities – Russians, Belarussians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, and Ukrainians – face significant infringement of the right to education in their native language guaranteed to them by article 53 of the Constitution of Ukraine.

Such standards are deeply cynical and fall short of the declared principles of universality and accessibility of formal education, and the affirmed right of students to "fair, impartial, objective, independent, non-discriminatory and honest assessment of learning outcomes".

Under the law, the Russian language in the Ukrainian State is placed in a discriminatory position as compared to both Ukrainian and the languages of EU countries and indigenous peoples.

At the same time, 33 per cent of the respondents to a survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in February 2020 said that the Ukrainian government should secure the right of Russian-

speakers to education in their language in all parts of Ukraine. 40 per cent said that Russian-speakers should be granted such a right only in those parts of the country, where the majority of population so wishes, but not nation-wide. 24 per cent of respondents, however, disagreed that the government should make such provisions whatsoever.

At the same time, 37 per cent of the people in survey said that the government should secure the right of Russian-speaking citizens to communicate with civil servants in Russian throughout Ukraine; 31 per cent said that such a right should be granted only where the majority so wishes, while 28 per cent did not expect that the government should grant such a right.[194]

What is more, according to another survey by the Institute carried out in April 2020, 48 per cent of the respondents view the Russian language as part of Ukraine's historical heritage that is worth developing.[195]

Ahead of the universal transition to the Ukrainian language as the only medium of instruction, in the second half of June 2020, a centralized stock-taking of school library collections was carried out to ensure that all educational institutions have textbooks. However, the Ukrainian education system turned out to be unready to translate legislation into practice. Pupils' parents report that schools are not ready to provide their children with textbooks and recommend purchasing them at their own expense.[196]

Alongside the switchover to Ukrainian, regulations regarding the language of out-of-class communication among teachers, students and even their parents have taken effect. Their fluency in Ukrainian notwithstanding, the teachers are required to communicate exclusively in this language. Breaking the rule may lead to negative personnel decisions by school authorities.

To validate the policy of forceful eradication of the Russian language from daily communication in Ukraine its advocates draw on a certain kind of scholarly opinion. For example, fellow of the Institute of the Ukrainian language of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine Oksana Danilevskaya urged to obligate schoolteachers and lectors in higher education institutions to use Ukrainian at all times. She argued that the educational environment in Ukraine is marked with diglossia: while the classes are taught in Ukrainian, informal communication happens in Russian. Allegedly, this hinders the cultivation of a "Ukrainian language stability"; therefore, action is needed to reverse the negative trend.[197]

Nationalist radicals actively support the policy of ukrainization. To that effect, they launch all sorts of aggressive campaigns against those

teachers, who continue speaking Russian. In March 2020, the Ukrainian media reported on the persecution of teachers of a Lvov lyceum by nationalists. The teachers were accused of "Russian world propaganda" and "Russification of Ukrainian children".[198] Similar accusations were made against Honoured Teacher of Ukraine Pavel Viktor. In April 2020, "Vesti" media outlet reported on a nationalist campaign against Mr Viktor in connection to his educational videos on Physics.[199]. Another scandalous case worth mentioning is the dismissal of Professor of Philosophy Valery Gromov from Dnepropetrovsk Polytechnic University for giving lectures in Russian.[200]

The start of the academic year 2020/2021 has shown that the regulations are being enforced most aggressively, and taken to the extreme in some regions. The ukrainization of Russian lyceum No 45, a highly prestigious educational institution in Lvov with over 1,000 students of different ethnicities, is a case in point, despite it being touted as a "big success". The headteacher, a promoter of the Russian-language, was compelled to resign and hand over his office to an advocate of abandoning Russian as a medium of instruction with no previous connection to the lyceum.

Schoolbooks in Ukrainian are in short supply in the lyceum and elsewhere. High school students, who have learned in Russian since the first grade, are now required to write, read and give answers only in Ukrainian, even if their schoolbook is in Russian. The new school authorities imposed an informal rule requiring students to talk to each other only in Ukrainian during recess. When rule-breaking is detected it may entail sanctions, to the point of dismissal, for the homeroom teacher.

The school authorities have rejected a parents' request to form "Russian-speaking classes" for the first-grade students, although, according to the information available, the applications were enough to form three full-size classes.

In junior school (for example, in Lvov lyceum No 6, previously Russian-taught) the situation is as follows. Year one pupils began learning exclusively in Ukrainian. The school authorities rejected the suggestion from a group of parents to introduce Russian as an elective. Citing the undesirability of such a "step" amid the ongoing campaign ahead of local elections, the headteacher suggested that families seek solutions during out-of-school hours and outside the school premises.

In the grades two to four the situation is somewhat different. Those students, who learned in Russian in the previous year(s), can continue learning in their language. Only two school subjects have been transitioned

to Ukrainian – Physical Training and Music. As a separate school subject Ukrainian (designated as Mother Tongue) is taught in a mode corresponding to a similar year of study in Ukrainian-language schools.

As for the weekly schedule of the second grade, two academic hours are devoted to the English language, three to Ukrainian, four to Russian (two hours each for language and reading). Mathematics, computer science, natural history and handicraft are still taught in Russian. As for the weekly schedule of the fourth grade, one hour is devoted to Polish, two hours to English, four hours to Ukrainian (two hours each for language and reading), five hours to Russian (three hours to language, two hours to reading). Mathematics, computer science, natural history and handicraft are still taught in Russian.

In addition to forced ukrainization of education, the Ukrainian law plans the same in respect of science. The relevant provisions of the law On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language entered into force on July 16, 2020. According to the new requirements it is allowed to make scientific publications in the EU official languages, providing that they contain an abstract in Ukrainian. From now on, theses, studies and abstracts should be made in Ukrainian or English. The theses are defended and public scientific events are carried out in Ukrainian and English as well.

Since October 2018, the law On Amending Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Language of Audiovisual (Electronic) Media (adopted in October 2017), according to which the share of programs and films in Ukrainian on the nationwide television channels is at least 75 per cent and on the air of regional and local television companies – at least 50 per cent, has come into full effect. Moreover, since 16 July, 2024, it is planned to increase the quotas up to 90 and 80 per cent for national and local mass media respectively[201].

Human rights activists point out in this regard that this measure may turn out to be ineffective: instead of the expected ukrainization of the media sphere, the application of the said law may lead to a change in information products consumption patterns in favor of Internet resources and to contraction of the traditional media market (press and television). It may cause the decrease in the number of officially registered publications, particularly Ukrainian-language newspapers.[202]

Moreover, from 16 January, 2022, the Ukrainian language will become mandatory for national print media. It will be possible to publish them in a non-state language (except for the Crimean Tatar language, the languages of other indigenous people and the EU official languages),

provided that they are printed in Ukrainian and have at least the same circulation. In another six months, the Internet-media registered in the country, including their social network pages and mobile applications, will be Ukrainized as well. The regional media are expected to function in the state language in 2024.

At the same time, in accordance with article 32 of the Ukrainian law On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language entered into force on 16 January, 2020, it is required to use the state language in the commercials in Ukraine, except for official EU languages (as in other areas): in printed media published in any of these languages, it is possible to place ads in a corresponding language. The Law on Advertising was amended accordingly. Referring to the violation of these two legal acts, the Ukrainian public organization Opora submitted to the main department of the State Service for Consumer Protection and to the Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language the appeal because of the billboards in Slavyansk picturing ex-mayor Nelya Shtepa. There was also a text in the Russian language.[203]

It is planned to conduct the transition of all cultural public events, including theater, to the Ukrainian language in July 2021. Ukrainian will also become the only language of film production, as well as printing and publishing.

Some other ukrainization-related efforts have been done in respect of Russian which was deprived of its status as a regional language in various parts of Ukraine. The nationalist activist Svyatoslav Litinsky was particularly zealous in this regard. The deprivation of the second most commonly spoken language in the country of the status of a regional language in Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions is one of his "achievements". In August 2020 Odessa was included in this list: following the proceedings unleashed by Mr. Litinsky, the Odessa district administrative court adopted the corresponding decision.[204]

The rusophobic policy led by the Ukrainian authorities has obviously aggravated the situation with discrimination of the Russian-speaking population in daily life. Thus, in summer 2020, public catering services joined the overall ukrainization campaign. McDonald's was the first company to refuse to serve clients in Russian, from now on, its electronic menu is available in Ukrainian and English only. This initiative was welcomed by the Ukrainian diplomats. The Foreign Ministry staff thanked the restaurant chain on the page of Ukrainian Embassy in the United States on the social network Twitter "for the firm language position" in respect of the Ukrainian language in the restaurants' menu.[205]

Following the US brand, the Russian language was deleted from self-service terminals of the Lvov Croissants chain, so the guests had no option but to choose among Ukrainian, English and Polish[206].

However, the refusal to use Russian in customer service will soon cease to be the initiative of individual activist companies and become compulsory as soon as the next provisions of the law On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language enters into force. From 16 January, 2021, the Ukrainian service companies, regardless of their form of ownership, should now function in Ukrainian. This requirement applies to online shopping, online catalogues, as well as to any web-sites providing services. It is possible to present information in other languages at the request of the owners of such portals.

At the same time, starting from 16 July, 2022, individuals and legal entities will be subject to fines for violation of legal requirements on the use of the Ukrainian language in any sphere of activity. The violation of the state language policy in the humanitarian area is punished by a fine of 200-300 tax-free minimums, the publication of a newspaper without circulation in the state language, by a fine of 6800 – 8500 hryvnias, the use of any language other than Ukrainian by officials during meetings in state institutions or local government agencies, by a fine up to 6,800 hryvnias.

Any attempts to protect the rights of the Russian-speaking population are strictly suppressed by Ukrainian nationalist groups acting with acquiescence of the authorities. In particular, on 27 January, 2020, in Kiev, nationalists from the Right Sector, National Squads and Fraikor organizations disrupted a peaceful rally in defense of the Russian language and Russian-speaking schools. The radicals chanted rusophobic slogans, sprayed tear gas, staged a scuffle with the use of force against elderly women. All this was happening in front of the police standing idly by.[207]

However, it should be noted that some government officials are aware of the need to reconsider the new language policy led by Kiev. For example, on 10 December, 2019, Verkhovna Rada deputy from the Servant of the People party Maksim Buzhanskiy introduced draft law no. 2577 on Priority Measures Regarding the Language Issue in Ukraine[208], aimed to remedy the situation in the field. However, calls to recognize the fairness of the criticism against aggressive ukrainization remain unheeded. Already on 4 February, 2020, the draft law was withdrawn from consideration.[209]

Earlier, on 31 October, 2019, the Ukrainian Parliament registered a draft law No. 2362 On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts Concerning Teaching in the State Language in Educational Institutions. The author of

this draft law was also Maksim Buzhanskiy. According to this document the laws On Education and On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language should have been amended. The postponed switch to the Ukrainian language of the Russian-speaking classes until 2023 would have been one of the main changes. This would have solved the problem of double discrimination against Russian, placing it in the same position as the official EU languages.

The legislative initiative by Maksim Buzhansky caused an upsurge of rusophobic hysteria in the country. The former president of the country Pyotr Poroshenko and the members of his party European Solidarity organized a rally under the walls of the Ukrainian Parliament.[210] The Commissioner for the protection of the state language Taras Kremin, one of the co-authors of the laws On Education and On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, was also seen there. In his statement, he called Mr.Buzhansky's initiative "an attempt to forbid children speak Ukrainian" and "a cynical and inhumane act".[211] At the same time, Taras Kremen published on his Facebook page a public appeal to the parliamentarians to remove from consideration the draft law neutralizing language discrimination.[212] The Verkhovna Rada former deputy Leonid Yemets expressed consternation with regard to this draft law on the same social network. In his opinion, Russian is "the language of animals able to shoot a doctor on a battlefield" and "the language of an aggressor who invaded the country to kill Ukrainian people".[213] A group of Verkhovna Rada deputies from the Servant of the People party said that this draft law "causes discord in the society, creates tension, complicates the resolution of national social development issues in the future".[214] In its turn, the party Democratic Axe arranged a performance in front of the Ukrainian parliament building aimed at intimidating supporters of Buzhansky's draft law. Its supporters were clashing with sticks metal buckets, burning smoke grenades and threatening to make a fire in case the deputies voted for this act.[215]

On 15 – 17 July, 2020, nationalist activists held protests in other large cities, such as Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkov and Chernivtsi. A rally under the slogan "Let's protect the Ukrainian language" was held in Lvov. The mayor of this city Andrey Sadovy and the head of the Lvov Regional State Administration Maksym Kozytsky spoke out against this draft law. In Ivano-Frankovsk, national radicals burned a scarecrow of M. Buzhansky. In Khmelnytskyi, the national flag of Russia was desecrated at the extraordinary meeting of the city council. The deputies of the Lvov Regional Council submitted an appeal to President Zelensky, in which they pointed

out that anyone who votes for the document drafted by M. Buzhansky, will be classified as "collaborators" and "traitors of Ukraine". In Lutsk, the participants of the rally "in defense of the state language" brought to the local office of the Opposition Platform – For Life party a cow's tongue that they promised to send to the party's main office in Kiev. In Khmelnytskyi, during the session of the city council, the national flag of Russia was put on the floor and desecrated with tied pork tongues.[216]

The attempt of the deputy to settle the language discrimination issue in the country has also become a pretext for placing his personal data, including home address and contacts, on the infamous website Myrotvorets. The administration of this web-portal called on the law-enforcement authorities to "consider this publication as a statement that this citizen knowingly committed acts against Ukraine's national security, peace, security of mankind and international order..."

Before the session was closed, the deputies of the Verkhovna Rada allegedly "did not have time to consider" the bill, although it was included in the agenda.[217] To date, the document has been withdrawn, despite the positive assessment given to it by the Central Scientific Experts Office of the Verkhovna Rada. The experts emphasized in their conclusions the full compliance of the draft with the provisions of the country's basic law and the recommendations of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe).

On January 23, 2020, people's deputies from the Opposition Platform – For Life party N. Korolevskaya and M. Papiev registered in the parliament a draft resolution to repeal the law "On complete general secondary education", referring to its anti-constitutional nature. However, it was also rejected by parliament.

Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada D. Razumkov directly stated the need to amend the law "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language": "If we are talking about the language, then the law on the language should satisfy everyone and comply with the Constitution, Razumkov said. I speak Ukrainian well, and I also speak Russian, sometimes English. But if we are talking about certain processes, then we recall the position of our foreign partners. What did the Venice Commission say about it? There are many questions. But humanitarian issues should unite society."[218]

Another notable initiative in the field of protecting the linguistic rights of the Russian-speaking population was the bill No. 3084 "On Amendments to the Regulations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (regarding the language of work)"[219], proposed by M. Buzhansky together with the

deputy from the Opposition Platform – For Life faction O. Voloshin. The authors propose to amend the regulations of the legislative body, which would provide for the possibility of using Russian and other languages of national minorities in the work of deputies in accordance with Art. 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine. In accordance with this provision of the basic law, the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine is guaranteed in Ukraine. "Constitutional guarantees and norms on the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine are not implemented in the regulations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine," says the explanatory note to the document.[220] In late April 2020, the Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy of the Verkhovna Rada recommended lawmakers to reject the named bill.[221]

A number of international human rights structures have commented on the discriminatory legislative steps of the Ukrainian authorities. Thus, critical assessments in this regard were given in the PACE resolution "Protection and Development of Regional and Minority Languages in Europe" of January 23, 2018. In December 2018, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities L. Zanier stressed that Ukraine "should remain a space for all nationalities with different languages that they should be allowed to use." He voiced his critical remarks about the odious language laws several times during 2019: during the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on May 23,[222] the meeting of the UN Security Council members in Ukraine on July 16, convened on the Russian initiative,[223] as well as in an interview with the Izvestia newspaper[224] during his visit to Russia (July 22-26, 2019).

The fact that OHCHR is closely following the law-making process in the state and recommends that the government of Ukraine, without any undue delay, develop a law on the implementation of the rights of national minorities in order to ensure a fair relationship between the protection of their rights and the preservation of the state language, stated the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs R. DiCarlo in relation to the law "On the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language" during the UN Security Council meeting on July 16, 2020.

The OHCHR report on the human rights situation in Ukraine from 16 February to 31 July 2020 once again highlighted the lack of progress in developing such a normative legal act.[225] At the same time, part 3 paragraph 8 of the final and transitional provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language" requires the Cabinet of Ministers to prepare and submit to

parliament a draft law on the procedure for implementing the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities within 6 months from the date of entry into force of the specified document.

The Venice Commission also criticized Ukrainian legislation in the language sphere. In December 2017, its expert opinion on the law "On Education" was published, which confirmed the existence of discriminatory provisions in the document. It was noted that this law does not contain norms that would regulate the position of languages that are not the official languages of the EU, in particular, Russian – the second most widespread language in the state. It is also indicated that the most acceptable solution would be to amend Art. 7 of the document with the replacement of the wording on the possibility of teaching one or more disciplines in two or more languages (state language, English, other official languages of the EU) by a more balanced and clearly formulated wording.

The Venice Commission also suggested that the Ukrainian authorities extend the implementation period of the new norms.[226] However, the official Kiev introduced into the law just a provision allowing national minorities, whose native language is one of the official languages of the EU, to continue studying in it until 2023. The status of other languages was again left without attention.

Another point of the Commission's conclusion was the recommendation to exclude private schools from the scope of restrictions.[227] The Ukrainian authorities implemented it already with the adoption of the law "On complete general secondary education", after which announced the implementation of the Commission's recommendations in full. In practice, however, the measures taken did not affect the status of Russian and other languages not included in the official languages of the EU, and all discriminatory provisions were retained.

In December 2019, the Venice Commission published its opinion on the law "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language".[228] In it, experts noted the contradiction between the content of the act and Ukraine's international obligations. In particular, the Commission criticized the provisions allowing "double discrimination" of the Russian language (taking into account the preferential treatment chosen for the official languages of the EU) in public and political life, as well as in social and cultural spheres. According to the conclusion, the requirement to publish academic research exclusively in Ukrainian, English or other official languages of the EU is unjustified, which should be considered a violation of the right to freedom of expression. The same applies to the ban on cultural and entertainment events in Russian.

The Commission also criticized the establishment of the institution of the commissioner for the protection of the state language, as well as the introduction of a complaint mechanism and the imposition of sanctions in the form of administrative fines, since the legal grounds for the application of this measure by an official remain unclear.

The experts stressed that the language policy pursued by the official authorities is a source of constant interethnic tension, which makes it impossible to achieve peace and harmony in society. Kiev was recommended to urgently consult with representatives of the public to develop a separate legislative act to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities, to abandon the use of a differentiated approach in relation to the languages of national minorities, to consider the possibility of abolishing a complaint mechanism and imposing sanctions or at least limiting its application, and to generally review the law so that it is consistent with Ukraine's international human rights obligations.[229] The Commission's assessments and recommendations were supported by OHCHR.[230]

The legislative changes in the field of the use of languages, initiated by the Ukrainian leadership and affecting the rights of national minorities, were criticized in European states. For example, the restrictions of the Hungarian minority on receiving education in their native language drew criticism in Hungary. Despite the statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine D. Kuleba that he will contribute to the settlement of disputes between Kiev and Budapest in the field of education and language, the experts of Godinka Research Institute, working on the basis of Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute in Beregovo, concluded that such actions are the next step towards ukrainization.

During his visit to Ukraine on February 7, 2020, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary P. Szijjarto proposed two possible solutions to the language issue: granting the Hungarian minority the same status as indigenous peoples, or refusing to teach a number of disciplines in high school in the state language while simultaneously increasing the hours of teaching the Ukrainian language. However, both options were rejected by the former Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine A. Novosad.[231]

During the committee hearings on the topic "Problematic issues of legislative regulation and implementation of the policy to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities", held in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in early July 2020, the Democratic Union of Hungarians of Ukraine addressed the deputies with an appeal, in which it once again drew attention to the restriction of the linguistic rights of its community. The

representatives of the union described the legislative changes of recent years as "a gross and unprecedented in scope deprivation of the rights of national minorities in Europe." At the same time, according to the organization of Hungarians, the problem cannot be solved merely by the adoption of a new law, which would have regulated the status of representatives of non-majority nationalities. The restoration of violated rights will not be possible until the corresponding changes are made to the current normative legal acts. Otherwise, the appearance of a new document will be fraught with collisions, which means that it will not create an effective system for protecting rights and will not have the desired impact.[232]

On July 29, 2020, the Ambassador of Hungary to Ukraine I. Idyarto noted in an interview with the Interfax-Ukraine news agency that the situation with the protection of minority rights in his host country is a highly politicized topic. In his opinion, all three recent reforms contribute to its deterioration: language, educational and administrative. In this regard, the Hungarian diplomat said that Ukraine should return to the policy it pursued prior to the adoption of the laws "On Education", "On Higher Education" and "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language."[233]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, represented by Secretary of State D. Nekulescu, expressed concern that the implementation of the linguistic norms of the law "On complete general secondary education" may lead to infringement of the rights of the Romanian minority – the second largest minority in Ukraine. In total, there are about 500 thousand of its representatives in the country.

On July 16, 2020, the National Council of Romanians in Ukraine sent an appeal to the Romanian authorities in connection with the violation of the community's rights to education in their native language and administrative reform projects. In it, the authors pointed out that representatives of the Romanian national minority "are subjected to a well-organized systematized process of forced ukrainization" in "all spheres of public policy" and drew the attention of the Romanian authorities to the violation of their right to receive education in their native language, calling it "cultural and linguistic genocide".[234] The community representatives also asked the Romanian authorities to reach agreements with Kiev, similar to those already existing between Ukraine and Hungary, on the preservation of the mother tongue in schools of the Hungarian community.[235]

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Human rights violations by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies

The problem of observance of the right to liberty and security of person remains acute in Ukraine. International monitoring structures in the field of human rights continue to record numerous facts of illegal detention, torture, intimidation, ill-treatment, sexual violence, including with the purpose to force a confession of guilt or cooperation. Examples of this kind are regularly included in the reports of the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU).

Numerous violations of citizens' rights to a fair trial continue to occur, including in criminal cases related to the conflict in Donbas. There is still the widespread practice of forcing persons under investigation to conclude plea agreements, processing of cases in the absence of the accused, attacks on lawyers and intimidation by right-wing radicals,[236] as well as putting pressure on members of the judiciary.

The use of torture and violence against detainees by law enforcement officials and the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) is systemic and is characterized, as a rule, by impunity.[237] Cases of unlawful detention, torture and ill-treatment by the SSU against persons detained on charges related to the conflict in the south-east are regularly documented by the HRMMU.

Thus, the Mission's report for February – July 2020 notes that the use of torture and ill-treatment of detainees remains a systemic phenomenon among law enforcement officers in the territories controlled by Kiev. OHCHR emphasized that, despite the increase in the number of investigations into cases of torture or ill-treatment, their effectiveness remains very weak, in particular, the investigation resulted in notification of suspicion in only less than two per cent of cases.[238]

OHCHR also notes with concern the widespread problem of detention without judicial authorization of suspects on the basis of their possible membership in armed groups in cases related to the conflict in the south-east of the country. The mission has documented over 400 such cases. At the same time, OHCHR points out that there is no known case when law enforcement agencies effectively investigated such illegal detentions or brought perpetrators to justice. In some cases, the investigating judges rejected the suspects' complaints of unlawful detention on dubious grounds. On the rare occasions when judges recognized the detention as unlawful, legal protection was not provided. Many people have been imprisoned for long periods of time, some – for more than four years.

The problem of obtaining confessions is widespread. The HRMMU recorded complaints from people that they were forced by the SSU or the investigating authorities to confess in front of the camera that they belong to or have links with armed groups. In several cases, such videos were published on the official websites of the National Police or the SSU. At the same time, the detainees reported in an interview with the Mission that they made these statements against themselves as a result of torture, ill-treatment or intimidation by SSU officers.[239]

The human rights organization "Human Rights Watch" together with "Amnesty International" in a general report noted, with reference to their 2016 research, the illegal and violent nature of the detention of citizens by employees of the Ukrainian special services and the investigation. Also, according to the results of interviews with persons detained by the security forces and their relatives about the detention conditions, it is noted that in most cases the detained persons were systematically subjected to pressure, psychological violence, torture and other types of ill-treatment. In addition, many detainees pointed to overcrowded cells. Some of the victims were denied medical treatment. The relatives were not informed about their detention. As a rule, such persons were transferred from one prison to another several times. When they were released, they were usually taken to some unfamiliar place (for example, on a highway) and left there, giving them a small amount of cash so that they could return home. The attempts of the victims to bring the perpetrators to justice were unsuccessful: according to human rights activists, the complaints were not investigated, none of the victims of illegal detentions obtained compensation for damage, and none of the law enforcement and intelligence officers who committed crimes were punished.[240]

Human rights activists cited an example when K. Beskorovainy was illegally detained by SSU officers from November 2014 to February 2016 for participating in anti-Maidan rallies and events in defense of Soviet monuments. He was accused of preparing terrorist attacks. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment were actively used against him, as a result of which his health was seriously damaged. He also said that the cells in which he was kept were overcrowded, and the people in them, including those with disabilities and the elderly, were systematically beaten and held for the exchange of prisoners of war. After his release, he, along with other former prisoners, officially filed a complaint against the actions of the SSU. During the investigation, unreasonable delays in the proceedings and the intimidation of the victims began, which led to their refusal to participate in the criminal process. In particular, an attempt was made by the territorial

military prosecutor's office to change the applicant's status from victim to witness and to close the case. The investigation was reopened after several appeals.

A similar scenario was realized in relation to N. Vakaruk, who was also detained for over a year and was subjected to torture. After such harsh treatment, he was taken to hospital under an assumed name, where his damaged kidney was removed. Upon his return home, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies closed the case on his disappearance, and when he tried to bring the perpetrators to justice, he began receiving threats.

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Discrimination against believers and the clergy of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Ukraine continues to pursue a policy of persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the UOC, the largest religious organization of Ukraine, in whose jurisdiction, according to media reports, there are more than 12 thousand parishes[241]), which involves special services and the media controlled by authorities. Representatives of local authorities often take part in the seizures or authorize them. The authorities tacitly encourage members of Ukrainian right-wing extremist organizations to implement this course.[242]

To transfer churches and church property of the UOC in favor of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (the OCU), a religious structure created by Kiev, a number of laws were adopted that impose restrictions on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and facilitate the change of confessional affiliation by communities.[243]

There are many known cases when the bishops of the UOC were summoned for "conversations" and interrogations to the Security Service of Ukraine, detained under various pretexts and subjected to searches. In some regions of the country, special services carried out mass searches in churches, diocesan offices and priests' houses of the UOC.

At the suggestion of the authorities, a campaign was spread in the Ukrainian media to discredit the UOC, including groundless political accusations of priests and church communities of supporting the "separatists" and keeping weapons. The use of the coronavirus theme in the campaign aimed at discrediting should be noted separately. The media accused the clerics of the UOC and communities of spreading the new coronavirus infection, calling it a "source of contagion."

The campaign of attacks on the UOC was also accompanied by attacks on churches belonging to it. During 2016-2019, a significant number of cases of violent seizures of churches, acts of vandalism, arson, robbery, damage to church property, physical violence and intimidation of clergy and flock were recorded, often with the participation of radicals. In all cases of seizures of the UOC community, despite the pressure from the authorities, they refused to convert to the OCU and continued to gather for religious services in private houses and back rooms. In a number of cases, communities have to perform open-air religious services. In 2020, this happened not so often. Nevertheless, cases of attacks and seizures are still recorded.

On April 12, 2020, the church of the UOC in the village of Lipki (Rovno Oblast) was burned by unknown persons.

On April 15, 2020, the fire was set in the church of the UOC in the village of Lukovitsy (Chernivtsi Oblast).

On April 24, 2020, the Holy Dormition Monastery belonging to the UOC was set on fire in Odessa.

On May 4, 2020, the OCU activists attempted with the use of force to seize a church belonging to the UOC in the village of Zadubrovka (Chernivtsi Oblast).

In July 2020, it became known that in the city of Zolochev (Lvov Oblast), the priest of the UOC was subjected to pressure and threats from the mayor of the city I. Grinkiv and local radicals. Priest M. Yoenko came to the city and bought a private house, starting to reconstruct it. He conducted religious services in a trailer located nearby, and he fenced off the territory. Local authorities and activists called such actions illegal. The mayor and local activists gathered at the "veche" near the priest's house and demanded that the UOC priest leave the city. At the same time, the mayor came to the meeting with a sledgehammer, threatening to demolish the fence with it.[244] On this occasion, Metropolitan Filaret of Lvov and Galicia sent an appeal to the head of the Lvov regional administration N. Kozitsky. In it, he pointed out that the mayor of the city together with deputies and activists "violate the right to freedom of religion of the believers of the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and also prevent the priest's family from freely using the housing, which is privately owned." It was also noted that "...no confirmation of construction was found at the place of the priest's household. As follows from the media, the reason for the accusation of the alleged illegal construction was the prayer and religious services that the priest performed in his own courtyard." He also added that Zolochev City Council allocated three land plots for the

construction of the UGCC churches, two for the OCU and one for the RCC, and the believers of the UOC religious community are being persecuted for praying in the private household.[245] According to media reports, the church in Zolochev that once belonged to the UOC was taken away by the OCU supporters. Pressure began to be exerted on the UOC community. Believers were "strongly advised" to either join the "Kiev Patriarchate" or leave the city. The UOC parishioners had to travel to religious services to other cities of Western Ukraine.

On September 26, 2020, an ancient church restored by the forces of the canonical UOC in the village of Belovezhi Pervyye (Chernihov Oblast) was seized. The seizure was carried out by the OCU supporters. A group of activists from this association took possession of the key to the church doors, pressing on the construction workers, who were completing work for the altar consecration scheduled for September 27. At the same time, the film crew of the Ukrainian Channel 5 was present, which came specially to "create a picture of natural and legal penetration" into the temple.[246]

International human rights structures and monitoring mechanisms that observe the situation in Ukraine negatively characterize the situation with the transfer of churches and religious communities from the UOC to the OCU where Ukrainian right-wing radicals often play an active role. Thus, the HRMMU recorded a number of cases of infringement of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's worshippers, including the pressure exerted by the SBU (searches, interrogations of clerics of the UOC). It was noted that "a process of mandatory renaming of religious organizations that are affiliated with religious centers in the Russian Federation is primarily targeting the UOC and may be discriminatory." The Mission also acknowledged that the so-called "transfers" of communities from the UOC to the OCU "in a few cases were not voluntary and were initiated by state or local authorities or even representatives of extreme right-wing groups, who were not members of those religious communities."[247] However, in recent reports on Ukraine, OHCHR did not include information about attacks on churches belonging to the UOC and its clergy.

Illegal seizures of churches also came under the spotlight of the OSCE SMM, which noted the continued problematic situation regarding churches and parishes of the UOC. Among other things, the aforementioned arson of churches in the villages of Lipki (Rovno Oblast) and Lukovitsy (Chernivtsi Oblast), the Holy Dormition Monastery in Odessa in April 2020, as well as the forcible seizure of a temple in the village of Zadubrovka were recorded.

The Mission also found that the worshippers of the church in the village of Mikhalcha (Chernivtsi Oblast), despite the quarantine measures taken in the region to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection, continued to carry out round-the-clock duty around the church, which began as early as 2019. The SMM notes that UOC worshippers expressed their intention to remain on duty outside the church until the dispute over the establishment of ownership of this religious site is resolved in court.

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Violations of social and economic rights of the population of South-Eastern Ukraine

No progress has been registered on the issue of enjoyment of social and economic rights by residents of South-Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian authorities have continued to restrict their rights, often referring to the need to combat the so-called "Russian aggression" and separatism to justify the relevant actions and measures.

The permit regime for citizens crossing the "contact line" introduced by Kiev due to the ongoing internal armed conflict in the south-east of the country is still in place. These restrictions greatly hinder access to basic services, in particular water supply, heating and healthcare, for several millions of conflict-affected people, including more than a million of registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) and citizens living in areas of armed clashes, as lead to the lack of adequate housing, effective remedies and redress mechanisms.

Ukrainian authorities do not guarantee sustainable payment of pensions to all Ukrainian citizens regardless their place of residence and registration. Residents of the proclaimed DPR and LPR still find themselves in a dire situation with social benefits and pensions as they face significant difficulties in obtaining them. Restrictions imposed by the authorities in Kiev create most unfavorable conditions for residents of South-Eastern Ukraine and hinder payment of their benefits and other entitlements. Particular risks occur due to the requirement for residents of these territories to regularly confirm their status in the territory controlled by Kiev. To do that they have to regularly cross the "control line." Crossing is complicated by long queues as well as the persistent danger of the escalation of hostilities.

IDPs, who also face considerable difficulties in receiving social benefits, find themselves in a precarious situation.

This whole range of issues has drawn attention of a number of international human rights entities and mechanisms, as well as human

rights activists, who have pointed out with concern that ongoing hostilities adversely affected the entire population of the country, first of all people living in close vicinity to the theatre of military operations and IDPs, provoking mass impoverishment and stagnation of Ukraine's economy.[248]

The HRMMU expressed concern over the ongoing discrimination of conflict-affected citizens on the grounds of their place of residence and noted that the lack of access to quality basic services continued to adversely affect the rights of the residents of the South-East, in particular their freedom of movement and access to pensions and social benefits.[249].

The situation is further aggravated by ongoing clashes between Ukrainian Armed Forces and armed units of the proclaimed republics, which leads to the damage and destruction of civilian properties. According to the OSCE SMM, from 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2020, devastating damage inflicted on civilian properties was registered within certain areas in Donbass. Data provided in the OSCE SMM Thematic Report on civilian casualties in the conflict-affected area in Donbass covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 15 September 2020 also shows that as a result of hostilities, the larger share of casualties, including fatalities, occurred among civilians living in the DPR and LPR.[250]

In the third quarter of 2020, the SMM also noted the grave situation with civilian infrastructure in Donbass that was critical for supporting life in the region and meeting the vital needs of the populations. Severe constraints were regularly registered in the work of water supply facilities (first of all the Donetsk filtration station), as violations of ceasefire were recorded in their close vicinity. There were also registered instances of impact on educational facilities in the proclaimed republics' territories (including the DPR).

In its Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine for February to July 2020, the OHCHR points out that the hardships and deprivations faced by the conflict-affected population for more than six years, were further exacerbated by COVID-19-related restrictions on freedom of movement and by the overall impact of the pandemic on the enjoyment of economic and social rights by this category of population in Ukraine.

The closure of all five entry-exit crossing points (EECPs) from late March to mid-June resulted in the decrease of monthly crossings of the contact line from 1.3 million to a few hundred. As a result, thousands of people found themselves separated from their families, and lost access to quality healthcare, pensions and jobs. Women and older persons who

comprised the majority of those crossing before the COVID-19 lockdown, were particularly affected.

From mid-June 2020, when crossing was resumed, in part, through two EEC'Ps, and till the end of July 2020, the total number of crossings in Donetsk and Luhansk regions comprised 43,000, which was much lower than during the pre-pandemic period.

Since the end of June 2020, to leave the territory of the proclaimed republics, civilians must be registered in the Kiev-controlled territory. Additionally, they were required to install the 'Act at Home' mobile application, which, according to the HRMMU, effectively discriminated against those who could not afford smartphones.

The Mission noted that there were congestions of people near the crossing points due to the fact that many of those seeking to cross the contact line could not always comply with the various requirements to get permissions. Dozens of people were forced to spend nights in the open air in front of, or near, EECPs, and thousands of other people with pressing humanitarian needs, especially those without registration in the Kiev-controlled territory, were prevented from crossing the contact line.[251]

The OSCE SMM also acknowledged the aggravation of the humanitarian situation in south-eastern Ukraine caused by limitations on the crossing of the control line imposed on a pretext of lockdown measures (among these granting permissions based on check-lists, as well as the need to confirm place of residence and purpose of travel, and to undergo coronavirus tests and observe self-isolation).

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[1] Both organizations are declared extremist by the Russian Federation.

[2] Further details about Ukraine's legislative initiatives in this field can be found in the previous report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, as well as relevant sections of reports on the human rights situation in certain countries and on the glorification of Nazism, the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

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[9] Available at https://strana.ua/news/242588-posly-izrailja-i-polshi-vozmutilis-chestvovaniem-ukrainskikh-natsionalistov.html

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[12] District Administrative Court of Kiev ruled as illegal the conclusion of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance that the symbols of the SS Galicia Division is not Nazi and is therefore exempt from the prohibition of the symbols of communist and national-socialist regimes.

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