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The ways of achieving peace in the Donbas: Public attitudes, expectations and concerns[1]

From 4 to 19 November 2019, the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted a nationwide public opinion poll among Ukrainian citizens. The poll was carried out in 110 populated areas in all oblasts of Ukraine, except for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and non-government controlled areas in

[1] For more detail see: https://dif.org.ua/en/article/the-ways-of-achieving-peace-in-donbas-public-attitudes-expectations-and-concerns

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Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. During the fieldwork stage of polling, a total of 2,041questionnaires were gathered. The theoretical margin of error did not exceed 2.3%. The polling was financed by the EU Delegation to Ukraine.

According to the figures, **45.3% of Ukrainians define the conflict in the Donbas as "Russian aggression against Ukraine with the use of local belligerents**". This opinion is widespread in the Western (64.3%) and Central parts (54.0%), albeit it is less popular in the East (24.3%) and in the South (21.6%). Other interpretations of the conflict are not very common: only 17.4% of respondents think that this is "a domestic conflict where Russia backs one of the sides", 12.9% think it is "a war between Russia and the West in the territory of Ukraine" and only 11.7% believe that it is "purely internal civil conflict in Ukraine". Interpretation of the conflict in the Donbas as "purely internal civil conflict in Ukraine" is shared by 21.6% of respondents from the Southern regions and 24.3% from the East. Also, such opinion is shared by about 31% of those who voted for the political party "Opposition Platform — For Life", 12% of those who voted for the "Servant of the People" party, and only by 2.5% of the "European Solidarity" supporters.

30.2% of Ukrainians believe that the goal of Russian aggression in the Donbas was subordinating Ukraine and taking it back into Russia's sphere of influence. This opinion is shared by 40.9% of respondents in the West, 35.0% in the Centre, while only 20.3% in the Southern and 17.0% in the Eastern regions think so. 17.7% of citizens believe that the objective of the Russian aggression was to annex Ukraine's Southern and Eastern parts (the so-called "Novorossiia"). Only 9.2% of citizens take the view that the aim of the aggression was "protection of the Russian-speaking population". However, whereas only 2.8% of respondents in the West share this view, in the East this opinion is expressed by 21.6%. It is also worth noting that 35.1% of people from the South and 29.8% from the East do not choose any option.

The majority of respondents justify resistance to Russian military aggression and Russian proxies in the Donbas by the necessity of restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty within internationally recognised borders (39.4%), as well as defending the national independence and the right of Ukraine to independently decide its future (31.2%). However, 21.1% of citizens do not express their opinion on this issue (30.3% in the Southern, 24.5% in the Central and 22.9% in the Eastern regions).

28.7% of Ukrainians believe that "separatists" fight because they get paid by Russia for participation in military operations. Other interpretations of these men's motives are far less popular: 16.7% hold the view that they seek to "integrate with Russia", 11.4% agree that "separatists" want to "redistribute public and private property in their favour", 9.5% believe that these men "strive against imposing Ukrainian identity on Russian-speaking population", 9.0% think that "separatists" protect the local population from radical nationalists" (called "banderivtsi"[1]), 3.2% say that they "want to restore Soviet lifestyle". 20.9% of respondents do not answer this question.

[1] The followers of Stepan Bandera, a well-known leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the 1940s and 1950s

28.9% of Ukrainians believe that peace in the Donbas can be achieved by exerting international diplomatic pressure on Russia, toughening the sanctions and applying international legal mechanisms; 21.3% think that it would be possible through strengthening Ukraine's economic and military power. These views are more popular in the West (where 42.9% of respondents opt for the first set of methods and 27.4% for the second one), as well as in the Centre (where 30.3% and 26.7% respectively choose these alternatives). In the Eastern regions, by contrast, 24.3% of those polled take the view that peace can be established through negotiations with representatives of Donetsk / Luhansk "people's republics", and the latter should be recognised as legitimate proto-states. 28.5% of respondents choose the option of "holding talks with Moscow, along with accepting autonomy of the Donbas and forgetting about Crimea".

Only 14.4% of Ukrainians think that it is worth making any compromises for the sake of peace. Instead, 58.5% of Ukrainians take the position that some compromises are acceptable, whereas others are not (as opposed to 48.8% in June 2019). This standpoint is dominant in all regions of Ukraine: in the West (57.3%), the Centre (53.4%), in the South (59.7%) and in the East (66.9%). Peace at any cost is acceptable to 23.8% in the South, 18.4% in the East, 9.7% in the Centre and 13.1% in the West. At the same time, **19.8% of respondents in the West and 20.3% in the Centre believe that peace in the Donbas can be achieved only after decisive victory of either side**. Around 33% of those who voted for the "Opposition Platform — For Life" party, 14% of the "Servant of the People" supporters and only 5% the "European Solidarity" voters are ready to accept a peace agreement at any price.

The absolute majority of Ukrainians do not approve of the terms and conditions of the Minsk agreements. **Conducting elections in the non-government controlled areas (thus, according to the conditions demanded by the militants) is considered unacceptable by 66.0% of those polled and acceptable by 16.2%. Amnesty for all participants in military actions against the Ukrainian Army is unacceptable to 62.7% and acceptable to 18.6%. Establishment of "local militia, courts and the prosecution" in Certain Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (CDDLO) is regarded as unacceptable by 56.4% and acceptable by 21.0%**. Respondents from the Southern and Eastern parts of Ukraine are more inclined to make some concessions — 40.7% and 53.5% of them respectively do not mind if a provision for the "special status" for CDDLO is included in the Constitution of Ukraine; neutrality or non-bloc status of Ukraine is acceptable to around 60% of the residents of these regions; conferring official language status on Russian is considered appropriate by 51.5% in the South and 70.4% in the East; 67.5% and 64.2% respectively are looking for the resumption of trade with the occupied territories.

Many Ukrainians hold the view that **the most effective measures for establishing peace in the Donbas involve restoring a normal life in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (32.1%) and exerting international pressure on Russia (32.3%)**. Only 14.6% feel that granting Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" (i. e. "DPR" and "LPR") a "special status" within the territory of Ukraine would be effective. It is also important to note that nearly 22% of respondents do not express their opinion about the matter.

62.0% of Ukrainians take the position that the breakaway territories of "DPR" and "LPR" must be returned to Ukraine in their pre-war condition. Only 3.9% of those surveyed think that these areas should be separated from Ukraine. 22.3% believe that these territories should obtain more independence from the central government (including autonomy), but remain within Ukraine as a unitary state. 34.6% of respondents from the South and 38.9% from the East are in favour of granting more independence (as well as autonomy) to these regions, whereas the residents of Ukraine's Western and Central parts consider the pre-war conditions to be more acceptable (77.8% and 64.1% respectively).

Most Ukrainians (58.9%) have a positive attitude towards the deployment of the UN Peacekeeping Forces in the territories of "DPR" and "LPR". In addition, 70.0% of respondents from the West and 63.6% from the South are supportive of this idea (in comparison with to 46.7% from the East).

59.6% of Ukrainians believe that a bilateral withdrawal of combat troops along the front line is a good decision. 27.2% are opposed to this measure, and the rest are undecided. However, there are noticeable regional differences: 78.8% of respondents from the Southern regions and 73.6% from the East perceive this step positively, as compared to 53.2% from the Centre and 46.7% from the West. Electorate of the "Opposition Platform — For Life" party almost unanimously endorses this decision (about 90%). 69% of the "Servant of the People" voters readily accept this alternative too, whereas 20% of them disapprove of it and 10% are undecided. As for the "European Solidarity" supporters, only 19% of them are in favour of the troop withdrawal while 72% are quite critical of it.

By and large, Ukrainians have a wary attitude towards conducting local elections in the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts — only 20.2% of respondents think that the elections ought to be organised as soon as possible without stipulations from Ukrainian side (seeing this measure as a start of the reconciliation process). 21.4% favour holding the elections after the liberation of these territories from the Russian Army and disarmament of militants, whereas 24.5% believe that the elections cannot be called earlier than several years after Ukraine regains full control over these areas (in view of this part of respondents, the purpose of these elections is to mark the final stage of the reintegration process). The idea of elections without stipulations appears more agreeable to respondents from the Southern and Eastern parts of Ukraine — 37.7% and 37.1% respectively select this option. In the West and Centre, far fewer people (9.3% and 10.7%) are in favour of it. Besides, elections without stipulations are acceptable to approximately 52% of the "Opposition Platform — For Life" voters, 20% of "Servant of the People" supporters only 5% the "European Solidarity"

A general amnesty for all combatants from "DPR" and "LPR" is not acceptable to Ukrainian citizens — only 8.6% perceive this measure positively. Another 22.2% consider that amnesty can be granted to combatants from illegal armed units except for those who have committed violent crimes (murder of civilians, torture, etc.). Nearly one fourth (24.9%) of respondents are against any kind of amnesty. In their opinion, everybody should be prosecuted for their crimes.

All of the above figures reflect Ukrainians' opinions on the Donbas issue as of November 2019. *Tables 1–3* also make it possible to compare some of these data with findings from other nationwide polls. The latter are surveys carried out by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation jointly with KIIS (9–19 October 2015) and the Razumkov Center (11–16 May 2016, 9–13 June 2017, 15–19 December 2017, 19–25 May 2018, 19–25 December 2018 and 13–20 June 2019).

Table 1

Do you think it is worth compromising with Russia and leaders of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk "people's republics" for the sake of establishing peace?

	May 2016	*December 2017*	*May 2018*	*December 2018*	*June 2019*	***November 2019***
Peace must be attained at any cost	22.5	18.1	19.7	16.2	20.1	**14.4**
It is worth making compromises for the sake of peace, but not all compromises are acceptable	47.3	49.0	50.2	51.2	48.8	**58.5**
Peace in the Donbas can only be achieved after decisive victory of either side	17.8	17.1	16.8	17.8	17.4	**15.8**
Difficult to say	12.3	15.7	13.2	14.8	13.7	**11.3**

Table 2

If asked about the political future of the territories of "DPR" and "LPR", which alternative would you prefer?

	October 2015	*May 2016*	*June 2017*	*June 2019*	***November 2019***
These territories must be returned to Ukraine in their pre-war condition	49.1	47.9	55.0	54.3	**62.0**
These areas should be returned to Ukraine but obtain more independence from Kyiv	22.4	24.6	20.1	16.9	**12.2**
These territories should obtain autonomy within Ukraine	9.5	–	–	12.3	**10.1**
These areas should secede from Ukraine (and become independent states)	4.5	7.4	6.6	2.6	**2.4**
These territories should become part of the Russian Federation	2.0	3.2	2.1	1.7	**1.5**
Difficult to say	12.2	16.9	16.3	12.2	**11.9**

Table 3

What is your attitude towards the proposal to deploy the UN Peacekeeping Forces in the territories of "DPR" and "LPR"?

	May 2016	*June 2017*	*May 2018*	*December 2018*	*June 2019*	***November 2019***
I support this proposal	58.0	60.2	60.6	54.4	55.5	**58.9**
I do not support it	21.1	21.1	19.6	24.8	24.8	**22.7**
Difficult to say	20.9	18.7	19.8	20.8	19.6	**18.3**

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The ways of achieving peace in the Donbas: Public attitudes, expectations and concerns

The paper presents the findings of a recent (4–19 November 2019) nationwide survey conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv "Democratic Initiatives" Charitable Foundation jointly with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. In total, 2,041 people aged over 18 were questioned about their perceptions of an ongoing armed conflict in the Donbas and views on the possible ways of restoring peace in this territory. For this purpose, a number of questions were asked including a person's opinion on the main objective of Russian intervention in the Donbas, acceptability (or unacceptability) of some compromises for the sake of establishing peace in this region, the respondent's attitude towards the withdrawal of military forces, ideas about the political future of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics", etc. The study covered all Ukraine's regions, except for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and non-government controlled areas in the East.

Keywords: *the Donbas, armed conflict, self-proclaimed entities, "DPR" ("Donetsk People's Republic"), "LPR" ("Luhansk People's Republic"), peace talks, the Minsk agreements, mutual withdrawal of combat troops along the front line*

ІРИНА БЕКЕШКІНА

Шляхи досягнення миру на Донбасі: суспільні настрої, очікування та проблеми

У статті подано результати нещодавнього (4–19 листопада 2019 року) Загальнонаціонального опитування, проведеного Благодійним фондом імені Ілька Кучеріва "Демократичні ініціативи" спільно з Київським міжнародним інститутом соціології. Респондентів (N = 2041) віком більш як 18 років було опитано стосовно їхніх уявлень про тривалий збройний конфлікт на Донбасі та бачення можливих шляхів відновлення миру на цій території. З цією метою їм пропонували низку запитань, зокрема про їхні думки стосовно головної мети російського втручання на Донбасі, прийнятності (або неприйнятності) деяких компромісів задля встановлення миру в цьому регіоні, ставлення до відкликання військових сил, уявлення про політичне майбутнє самопроголошених Донецької та Луганської "народних республік" тощо. Дослідження охоплювало всі регіони України, крім Автономної республіки Крим та непідконтрольних Україні східних районів.

Ключові слова: *Донбас, збройний конфлікт, самопроголошені квазіреспубліки, "ДНР" ("Донецька народна республіка"), "ЛНР" ("Луганська народна республіка"), мирні перемовини, Мінські угоди, розведення військ уздовж лінії фронту*

ИРИНА БЕКЕШКИНА

Пути достижения мира на Донбассе: общественные настроения, ожидания и проблемы

В статье представлены результаты недавнего (4–19 ноября 2019года) Общенационального опроса, проведенного Благотворительным фондом имени Илька Кучерива "Демократические инициативы" совместно с Киевским международным институтом социологии. Респондентов (N = 2041) в возрасте старше 18 лет опросили относительно их представлений о затяжном вооруженном конфликте на Донбассе и видении возможных путей восстановления мира на этой территории. С этой целью им предлагали ряд вопросов, в частности об их мнении относительно главной цели российского вмешательства на Донбассе, приемлемости (или неприемлемости) некоторых компромиссов для установления мира в этом регионе, отношении к разведению вооруженных сил, представлении о политическом будущем самопровозглашенных Донецкой и Луганской "народных республик" и др. Исследование охватывало все регионы Украины, кроме Автономной республики Крым и неподконтрольных Украине восточных районов.

Ключевые слова: *Донбасс, вооруженный конфликт, самопровозглашенные квазиреспублики, "ДНР" ("Донецкая Народная Республика"), "ЛНР" ("Луганская Народная Республика"), мирные переговоры, Минские соглашения, разведение войск вдоль линии фронта*

Поки ми живі, нічого не вирішено остаточно!

— Ірина Бекешкіна

Це був удар для всіх. Як же так, ніби щойно говорила з телеекрана, виступала на радіо та коментувала актуальні теми в інших ЗМІ. Провела фокус-групи з жінками-ветеранками у Дніпрі, Львові та Маріуполі. Їй аплодували й фотографувалися з нею в Івано-Франківську місцеві журналісти після тренінґу із соціології. І хоч як їй було важко за станом здоров'я, вона завжди усміхалася й не втомлювалась повторювати своє життєве кредо: "Поки ми живі, нічого не вирішено остаточно!"

А попереду ще купа планів — дописати статтю для спеціалізованого видання в Інституті соціології, де вона працювала старшим науковим співробітником. Нові проєкти у Фонді "Демократичні ініціативи" імені Ілька Кучеріва, який вона очолила 2010 року. Наради, конференції, опитування, ефіри, участь у міжнародних заходах — і вмить усе це обірвалося.

Ірина Бекешкіна померла 20 березня 2020 року від складного й пізно діагностованого онкологічного захворювання, і, як кажуть її близькі — родичка та подруга, які до останньої хвилини були з Іриною Ериківною, її дихання поволі уповільнювалося, й вона тихо відійшла в інші світи. А ще за кілька днів до цього фатального вечора вона говорила, що "настрій і стан здоров'я хороші, а от аналізи — не дуже!".

Отакою непереборною оптимісткою та життєлюбкою була ця людина.