

## Ukrainian society rallies against the aggressor

Jadwiga Rogoża

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, Ukrainian society, as well as the military, central and local authorities, have demonstrated courage and determination in standing up to the aggressor, and displayed the ability to take effective action in extremely difficult conditions. Despite Russia's military advantage, the brutality of its army and the enormous scale of destruction and casualties suffered by the Ukrainian people, the prevailing attitudes are rage against the invader and pride in their country, people and army. A large stream of refugees, primarily women and children, has poured out of Ukraine, but those who have remained in the country are putting up stiff resistance, even in cities that have already been occupied by the enemy. 'Grassroots work' is also progressing steadily with various forms of self-organisation and solidarity, together with support for the army and internally displaced persons. These attitudes – contrary to Moscow's expectations – are also being adopted by the residents and authorities of the eastern Ukrainian regions most affected by the war, most of whom are Russian speakers. Throughout the country, a fellowship of hatred is forming rapidly – not only towards the Russian state, the Russian authorities and the invading army, but also towards almost everything Russian, thus crystallising the myth of a reborn Ukraine as an 'anti-Russia'. Such attitudes do not bode well for plans to occupy the country by Russian troops. Even if some territories are seized and puppet administrations are installed, Russia will have to face a strong resistance movement, which will sharply increase the costs of such a project.

### Defence across divides

The Russian invasion, which is encompassing ever greater areas of Ukraine, has become the ultimate test for the local authorities, military and society. Although the enemy's military advantage and brutality mean that the immediate outlook for Ukraine is bleak, the state and society have shown great ability to rally round under these extremely difficult conditions. President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has remained in Kyiv, consistently demonstrates an uncompromising attitude and maintains daily contact with citizens through social networks, which has earned him unprecedented support (according to a RatingGroup poll from 1 March, 93% of respondents approve of his actions) and praise from many of his former opponents.

The war has muted political disputes, uniting politicians of various stripes. Most of them have condemned Russian aggression, supported Zelensky's request for accession to the European Union, and appealed



for help from the West. The pro-Russian party Opposition Platform/For Life, whose deputies fled Ukraine in great numbers immediately after the invasion began, is clearly in crisis. Powerful anti-Russian sentiments eventually forced the party's politicians to condemn the aggression and declare they would join the territorial defence, but this shift is unlikely to be seen as credible. Moscow's actions have been openly criticised by some Ukrainian oligarchs, including Rinat Akhmetov, Viktor Pinchuk and Vadim Novinsky, who have declared that they no longer have any business ties with Russia.

Society stands united around the Ukrainian armed forces, with 98% support for its actions. The citizens have become actively involved in helping the army. More than 100,000 people have already joined the territorial defence, including many celebrities. Payments to the army have broken records: just one special account in the National Bank of Ukraine has received about US\$380 million, mostly from domestic donors. The army and territorial defence are supported by the majority of Ukrainian business: 41% have done so financially, 35% by providing payments to employees involved in the country's defence, 31% by donating supplies, 29% by providing services, 16% medicines, etc. (data from a survey by the Centre for Strategic Communications of 6 March). Entrepreneurs are also helping the residents of besieged cities by delivering grain to mills at their own expense and distributing food parcels to the poorest, while those in the pharmaceutical sector are donating medicines and first aid kits. Business owners are showing solidarity towards the state (paying taxes in advance) and their employees. According to the same survey, more than half of Ukrainian businesses are operating despite martial law, and 63% of them are continuing to pay salaries in full.

During the invasion, Ukrainian television stations owned by different, often competing oligarchs also joined forces. From day one, they have conducted joint broadcasts, alternating programming on air. They emphasise the need to rally round and support the authorities and the army in keeping public morale high. Finally, the western oblasts of Ukraine, which have so far been relatively unaffected by the hostilities, are exhibiting solidarity. These regions – primarily Lviv, the rest of Galicia, but also Zakarpattia – are hosting refugees from the eastern and central parts of the country, collecting humanitarian aid, setting up mobilisation headquarters and forming new territorial defence brigades. The forced migrations and shared adversities are fostering solidarity, blurring regional and worldview differences, and consolidating the inhabitants of all Ukraine's regions into one modern political nation.

## **Total resistance**

The Russian aggression has triggered a mass exodus from Ukraine: 2 million people, including 1 million children, have already left the country, and this outflow can only grow stronger as casualties multiply, more destruction follows and humanitarian corridors are opened. It is mainly women, children and the elderly who are fleeing the besieged and shelled cities. At the same time, as many as 170,000 Ukrainians, mostly men, have returned from abroad to join the defence effort. Even those who have remained in the country and witnessed the widespread war atrocities show no signs of defeatism at this stage. In spite of the constantly deteriorating situation and the natural fear for life in these conditions, the public are continuing to express its rage against the occupier and pride in their country, and are putting up stiff resistance. People are joining in to help the army by tracking down saboteurs and preparing Molotov cocktails. There have been very few acts of betrayal, collaboration with the occupier or looting of property, but many more acts of resistance, often requiring great courage and driven by a desperate desire to defend the country. The slogan 'Glory to Ukraine', a historical greeting coined by the national poet Taras Shevchenko, but associated with the OUN nationalists during World War II, has become the most popular greeting, and is now a feature of almost every speech or conversation, thus completely shedding its nationalist connotations.

It is doubtful that the current atmosphere of popular mobilisation will remain unchanged; the hostilities are likely to drag on, more terror is unleashed on the population, more humanitarian disasters occur, the Ukrainian military's potential might collapse, or President Zelensky's attitude might change (hypothetically he could resort to surrender and/or flee the country). The spectre of hunger, fear for life and unclear prospects for the future are broadening the ranks of the 'silent' part of society, whose numbers are difficult to estimate at this point. While shocked by Russian brutality, they do not resist openly, but are rather frightened and tired of war, possibly more inclined to make concessions, but also marginalised and intimidated by the prevailing attitude of resistance. At the same time, the anti-Russian sentiments triggered by the aggressor's atrocities seem so deep that even if at some point active opposition is no longer possible, we can expect to see the spread of partisan and subversive methods, rather than a proliferation of collaborationist attitudes.

## The final break-up

A certain 'fellowship of hatred' towards the invader has rapidly formed and crystallised in Ukraine since the start of the invasion. It primarily targets the Russian state, its government and army and the Russian Orthodox Church, but often extends to everything Russian: its products, culture, society. Many Ukrainians are severing ties with friends or even family from Russia because of their diverging assessments of events. Many declare that the culture of this country no longer exists for them. Large numbers of inhabitants of eastern Ukraine, whose everyday language has always been Russian, are demonstratively switching to Ukrainian. It is also increasingly common to express contempt for Russia: Ukrainians mock the 'slave mentality' of its people, the submissiveness with which they allow themselves to be led towards economic collapse, pacified and incarcerated, and even the fact that only a handful of people have protested against the war there. Hostility to Russia is being expressed by politicians, led by the president, journalists, military officers, and ordinary people of all ages, including the elderly.

The war has blurred regional differences in attitudes towards Russia. Politicians from eastern Ukraine, who have spoken Russian all their lives and welcomed contacts and ties with Russia (such as the mayor of Kharkiv, Ihor Terekhov), now speak of Russia as a mortal enemy that is wrecking their cities, power plants and water supplies, and is aiming to 'cleanse Ukraine of Ukrainians'. It can be assumed that the change in their position has been driven by the shock at the scale and brutality of the Russian invasion, as well as their reluctance to submit to Russian rule. The effects of such collaboration are clear to see in the so-called separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR), which have been mired in economic and social collapse since 2014. The elites of eastern Ukraine, including local authorities and business, are aware that Russian occupation would result in the loss of their life's work as well as their sense of personal security.

Many clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), and above all their flocks, are dissociating themselves from Russia. According to a 10 March poll by RatingGroup, 63% of respondents are in favour of severing ties between the UOC-MP and the Russian Orthodox Church, while among the faithful of the Moscow Patriarchate the figure is 52%. However, a *de facto* pro-Russian stance (avoiding any moral evaluation of the invasion) has been taken by the clergy of the Pechersk Lavra monastery in Kyiv, which has long been a strong centre of Russian influence.

Regardless of developments in the immediate future, the persistence of anti-Russian attitudes bodes ill for the Kremlin in the context of its plans to occupy Ukraine. Russian calculations as to how their troops would be welcomed by residents of eastern Ukrainian cities and how easily successive people's republics (like the DPR and the LPR) are established there have so far been

proven wrong. In the occupied cities, the Russians have resorted to staged/phony media events to demonstrate to their domestic audience that Ukrainians are welcoming them as liberators. Local authorities who have been offered to surrender their cities (such as Kharkiv) have rejected these offers and made them public.

Hostility towards Russia permeates all of Ukraine, uniting citizens of different nationalities and regions. It is becoming the most powerful catalyst in the last 30 years for the crystallisation of the Ukrainian political nation, built in opposition to Russia, and of the myth of the new Ukraine as an 'anti-Russia'. From the first days of the onslaught, President Zelensky began to refer to this national uprising as the 'patriotic war', fought in solidarity by all Ukrainians against an invader commonly described as fascist. These processes seem irreversible, and confirm the final failure of the so-called 'Russian world' project in Ukraine.