

Veteran Political Capital: from Brotherhood to Participation in State-Building and Party Development

Key messages of the conference

06/26

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INTRODUCTION

On 29 June 2026, the conference "Veteran Political Capital: from Brotherhood to Participation in State-Building and Party Development" was held in Kyiv. The event was organised by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine in partnership with the Centre for Security Studies "CENSS".

The conference brought together veterans, Members of Parliament of Ukraine, representatives of public authorities, civil society organisations, the expert community and international partners for an in-depth discussion on the role of veterans in Ukraine's political future.

Across four thematic panel discussions, participants explored the role of veterans in strengthening democracy, prospects for their political participation, lessons from the post-war transformation of the Western Balkans, as well as the legal and reputational challenges of integrating veterans into public administration.

Below is a selection of the key messages and insights shared by the conference speakers.

From hosts

Dr Jan Philipp Wölbern, Deputy Director, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine

- Ukraine's defenders are fighting not only for their own country but also for the shared European values of freedom, democracy and human dignity. This is why so many Europeans stand in solidarity with Ukraine and are deeply grateful for its sacrifice.
- Ukraine's future cannot be imagined without its veterans. This is not only about supporting them after military service, but also about recognising them as active contributors to public and political life. Their unique experience can strengthen local communities, public institutions and democratic governance.
- Veterans' issues must be addressed at the highest political level. They are not solely a matter of social support and post-service reintegration, but also of national security, democracy and the country's long-term resilience.
- Veterans' voices must be heard. Their experience, expertise and values should become an integral part of decision-making processes at the local, national and European levels.
- A strong, democratic and successful Ukraine is in the interest of all of Europe. While we have much to learn from one another, Ukraine is already generating experience and expertise that will shape Europe's future as well.



Dr Vadym Chernysh, Chair of the Governing Board, Centre for Security Studies "CENSS"

- Veterans have different pathways to political engagement. One is the advocacy approach: remaining outside government while influencing public policy and holding decision-makers accountable. Many veterans can make a significant impact in this role. The other is direct political participation by seeking elected office or public positions to implement their own vision for the country's development. Motivations may include defending veterans' rights, advancing their interests, or contributing to Ukraine's broader political future. Veterans may engage through existing veteran-oriented political parties, established political parties that recruit veterans, or new political movements that may emerge in the future.
- Ukraine's integration into the European Union requires more than legislative approximation. It also means integrating Ukraine's political life into the broader European political space.
- Veterans will inevitably join different political parties and represent diverse ideological positions. This makes the ability to engage in dialogue and cooperate across political differences particularly important.
- Some politicians currently serving in Ukraine's Defence Forces will return to political life after the war as veterans. This requires careful consideration of the risks associated with the re-

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surge of old political forces and ideologies, particularly those linked to pro-Russian narratives.

- Ukraine should draw on the international experience of countries that have already undergone post-war political transformation and adapt these lessons to its own democratic development.
- Veterans' political participation should extend beyond representing the interests of the veteran community. It should also contribute to shaping Ukraine's long-term development and future.

Viktoriia Voronina, Executive Director, Centre for Security Studies "CENSS"

- According to various estimates, Ukraine is now home to approximately 1.3 million veterans. While they enjoy a high level of public trust, they may also become targets of political manipulation. This underscores the importance of strengthening veterans' political awareness and civic competencies.
- The conference was designed to examine the role of veterans in society, the engagement of political parties, the opportunities and risks of veterans' political participation, and comparative lessons from the Western Balkans.
- The experiences of Croatia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina provide valuable insights into both successful approaches to veterans' political integration and the challenges and risks these countries faced in the post-war period.



Panel 1. The Role of Veterans in Strengthening Democracy and Political Representation



Dmytro Finashyn, Veteran, Adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine on Veterans Policy, Lieutenant of the Hero of Ukraine Major General Serhii Kulchytskyi Operational Battalion of the National Guard of Ukraine

- Veterans are not a homogeneous group. Some aspire to continue serving the country in new roles, while others simply wish to return to a peaceful civilian life. Both choices deserve equal respect.
- Veteran status should not define a person's identity or determine their suitability for public office. Veterans should be judged

by their actions, qualifications and professional competence rather than by their legal status or military experience alone.

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- Military service and veteran status do not automatically prepare someone for a career in politics or public administration. A genuine desire to contribute to the country's development must be accompanied by the necessary knowledge, skills and professional preparation.
- Veterans currently enjoy an unprecedented level of public trust and have a unique opportunity to make their voices heard. However, this trust can only be sustained if public engagement is grounded in competence, responsibility and well-informed positions.
- There is no universal model for returning to civilian life. Every veteran's transition is shaped by individual circumstances and personal experience.
- Family members, comrades, friends and trusted communities play a crucial role in helping veterans reintegrate into civilian life. Strong personal relationships reduce isolation and provide essential support during the transition.
- Both positive and difficult interactions with veterans are meaningful. Withdrawal, refusal to communicate or requests to be left alone should not be interpreted as rejection, but may indicate that a person is experiencing a difficult psychological or emotional state and may require continued support.
- Maintaining respectful and unobtrusive contact with veterans, while recognising their personal boundaries, can help identify moments of crisis and ensure that support is available when needed.
- Challenging experiences in working with veterans should not discourage those who support them. On the contrary, they highlight the importance of improving approaches and continuing efforts to assist veterans in their return to civilian life.
- Veterans bring valuable experience and perspectives that should not be lost after the war. Their participation in public institutions can help ensure that public policies remain connected to the realities of military service and the values for which Ukraine is fighting.
- A veteran can be almost anyone in this room—or anyone you pass on the street. To me, the ideal image of a veteran is someone who enters public service carrying forward the experience of war, ensuring that it is never forgotten, upholding the values for which Ukraine fought, and reminding those who make decisions of the principles and responsibilities on which the country's future depends. Over time, people working in public institutions can become detached from everyday realities. The presence of veterans in public service helps preserve the connection between state decisions and their real impact on people's lives.



Veteran Political Capital: from Brotherhood to Participation in State-Building and Party Development**Yurii Hudymenko, Veteran, Chair of the Public Anti-Corruption Council under the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Political Leader, Head of the Democratic Axe Movement, Author of Stories and Wars**

- Politicians belong to the society they represent. In times of national crisis, they must stand alongside their fellow citizens, lead by example and share responsibility for the country's future.
- Ukraine is currently undergoing a unique period of transformation. The war has created an unprecedented opportunity to reshape state institutions and redefine the principles of governance. Once the war ends, the political system will gradually become more rigid, making fundamental reforms significantly more difficult. The decisions taken today will shape Ukraine for decades to come.
- Political engagement is not only about influence, but also about responsibility. Disappointment or setbacks should not discourage people from participating in politics, as mistakes are an inevitable part of public service and democratic development.
- The period between demobilisation and the first post-war elections is likely to be very short. Many veterans will have little time to adapt to civilian life, build public recognition or prepare for electoral campaigns. As a result, many are more likely to enter politics through established political parties than as independent candidates, making cooperation with political parties almost unavoidable.
- Veterans who choose to engage in party politics may face criticism from within the veteran community itself, particularly from those who underestimate the importance of political participation or view cooperation with political parties with suspicion.
- Among veterans entering party lists, two broad groups are likely to emerge. Some may be included primarily because their military service strengthens a party's public image and electoral appeal. Others will already possess recognised professional, political or community leadership and will contribute their own credibility and public support to political parties.
- In both cases, there is a risk that political party leadership may seek to limit veterans' influence after elections, reducing their role to endorsing decisions rather than shaping them.
- Remaining active and engaged proved to be one of the most important factors in the speaker's own transition from military to civilian life. Continuous involvement in meaningful work made this transition gradual, natural and almost unnoticeable.
- As veteran status becomes increasingly common in Ukrainian society, the key challenge will not be the number of veterans, but the conditions the state creates for their successful reintegration. Veterans' future will depend largely on Ukraine's economic development. If the country offers meaningful employment, decent incomes and opportunities for professional fulfilment, veterans can become a driving force for national development. In times of economic decline, however, there is a risk that they will instead be perceived as a growing social challenge.
- The war will continue to shape Ukrainian society in unexpected ways. In the years ahead, it will become increasingly common to encounter veterans who speak Spanish, Portuguese or English, reflecting the growing international dimension of Ukraine's defence and the diverse backgrounds of those who have fought for the country.

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Dmytro Shatrovskyi, Veteran, Chair of the Public Council under the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine

- As Chair of the Public Council under the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, he identified several priorities for the Council's work, including preferential customs procedures for veterans importing vehicles, improved parking access for veterans with disabilities, and support for veteran entrepreneurship.
- The state must not need veterans only in times of war. Effective veterans' policy means ensuring that veterans remain valued members of society long after military service has ended.
- Even when veterans become involved in politics or public life, they should remain mindful of the ongoing existential threat facing Ukraine and continue contributing to national defence—whether directly or through initiatives that strengthen the country's security and resilience.
- Running a competitive parliamentary campaign in Ukraine requires substantial financial resources. The high cost of campaigning remains one of the main barriers preventing veterans from standing for election independently, even when they enjoy broad support within the veteran community.
- Military service and close encounters with death fundamentally change a person's worldview. As a result, many everyday difficulties lose their significance, and setbacks are often perceived differently than before the war.
- Despite the challenges of working in veterans' policy and public administration, the speaker remains motivated by focusing on what can be achieved within his responsibilities and continuing to pursue practical solutions step by step.
- Allegations that candidates have cooperated with the occupying authorities or are involved in criminal proceedings should be carefully verified through the legal mechanisms available. This includes submitting formal requests to law enforcement authorities and the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, as well as ensuring that the veteran community has access to reliable information about candidates in order to make informed decisions. Safeguarding the integrity of political representation requires both institutional accountability and the active engagement of veterans themselves.
- The future role of veterans will depend on the circumstances in which Ukraine continues to develop—during the war and after its end—as the composition and needs of the veteran community will continue to evolve. Successful reintegration requires not only employment opportunities, retraining, education and professional development, but also meaningful roles for those veterans whose military experience can continue to benefit society. Effective veterans' policy therefore requires sustainable funding, long-term political commitment and a strategic vision that recognises veterans as an integral part of society both during wartime and in peace. The first months of Russia's full-scale invasion demonstrated the exceptional level of trust placed in veterans: they were entrusted with weapons to defend the country, fulfilled their responsibilities, and returned those weapons after completing their service without significant incidents.

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Ivona Kostyna, Co-Founder of Veteran Hub

- Since Russia's full-scale invasion, the veteran community in Ukraine has grown significantly. According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, nearly 1.8 million people have been granted combat veteran status. As a result, veterans will naturally become increasingly represented across all areas of public life after completing their military service.
- At present, most of those returning to civilian life are veterans who have left military service because of age, injuries, family circumstances or release from captivity. Their immediate priority is recovery and adaptation, which explains why there is currently no large-scale demand for political participation among veterans.
- Transitioning into public administration or politics represents a major career change. Military service does not automatically prepare individuals for work in government or political leadership.
- The widespread assumption that veterans will naturally become successful politicians is misleading. Effective political leadership requires knowledge, practical skills and professional preparation. Many people entering politics underestimate the demands and responsibilities of public office. This does not mean that veterans cannot become successful politicians; rather, they need opportunities to acquire the necessary competencies.
- To enable meaningful veteran participation in public life, Ukraine should invest in systematic education and professional training, particularly in public administration, democratic governance and political leadership. Equally important is providing an honest understanding of the responsibilities and challenges associated with political careers.
- Veterans should enter politics well prepared in order to preserve their motivation, credibility and personal resilience.
- Building public recognition beyond the veteran community is an important prerequisite for political participation. While veterans enjoy broad public respect, many remain known primarily within veteran circles. Engaging wider audiences is essential for those seeking elected office or public leadership positions.
- One of the obstacles to veterans' political participation is the stigma that exists within parts of the veteran community itself, where veterans who become politically active may be labelled as "traitors" or accused of abandoning their community. Raising awareness about the role of democratic political engagement is therefore essential.
- The relatively low participation of veterans in educational and professional development programmes often reflects the fact that such initiatives fail to take into account the stage of reintegration veterans have reached after leaving military service.
- Veteran Hub's research on veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and Joint Forces Operation (JFO) found that, on average, veterans needed more than three years after returning to civilian life before they were ready to invest in long-term professional, civic or public engagement.
- The stereotype that veterans return from war unwilling to work or prone to alcohol abuse is both inaccurate and harmful. Successful reintegration takes time, as veterans must first rebuild their everyday lives, care for themselves and their families, and address accumulated personal challenges.



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- Many veterans also face additional difficulties, including disabilities, displacement, finding a place to live and rebuilding family relationships. These circumstances make immediate engagement in professional or political life unrealistic for many.
- Social support should be the starting point of reintegration, while education, retraining and professional development programmes should be tailored to veterans' actual needs and readiness, rather than assuming they can engage immediately after demobilisation.
- Ukraine's current Law on Veterans, adopted in 1993, groups together very different categories of beneficiaries, many of whom do not share the experience of military service or combat. The legal framework should clearly distinguish those who defended Ukraine's independence from other categories holding veteran status. At the same time, the system of social support must be redesigned to reflect the state's financial capacity and the real needs of veterans. A new concept for state veterans' policy and draft legislative reforms have already been prepared and submitted to the Verkhovna Rada and other relevant institutions, but progress has been slow. Determining eligibility for veteran status and assessing military service should remain the responsibility of military institutions, while civilian authorities should focus on building an effective system of post-service support. Ukraine will not be able to provide unlimited lifetime benefits to all veterans. Instead, it must develop a sustainable and realistic model of support capable of serving both today's veterans and future generations. Delaying reform risks preserving a system that no longer reflects the realities and needs of Ukraine's veteran community.



Solomiia Bobrovska, Member of Parliament of Ukraine, Member of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on National Security, Defence and Intelligence

- Veterans make an important contribution to parliamentary work by bringing first-hand military experience, a different perspective on public policy and a practical understanding of the needs of Ukraine's security and defence sector.
- Veterans' participation in politics should be regarded as a natural part of democratic development rather than as an exceptional phenomenon requiring separate justification.
- Veterans' issues should be integrated across all areas of public policy. A formalistic approach to veterans or a lack of understanding of their needs—whether within public institutions or social services—is unacceptable.
- Political parties will inevitably place greater emphasis on veterans' issues. The challenge is to ensure that this strengthens democratic processes rather than turning veterans into instruments of political competition or manipulation.
- Parliamentary decisions directly shape Ukraine's security and defence policy. For this reason, veterans' participation in the legislative process is particularly valuable. At the same time, the armed forces should not be responsible for drafting legislation. Law-making remains the responsibility of elected politicians operating under the principle of democratic civilian control over the security and defence sector.
- Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, relatively few veterans entered the Verkhovna Rada, highlighting the limited political representation of the veteran community at that time.

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- Estimates of the financial resources required to run a parliamentary election campaign vary considerably depending on the electoral system and the conditions under which elections are held.
- Veterans should not be viewed through simplistic stereotypes or divided into "good" and "bad" veterans. Every veteran has a unique service record and personal story. Public perceptions are often shaped by prejudice, including towards veterans who served in different roles, returned after unauthorised absence from military service, or had criminal convictions before joining the Armed Forces.
- Public attitudes towards veterans will inevitably evolve over time. The broad public support veterans receive today does not guarantee that stereotypes, fears or criticism will not emerge in the future. Concerns already exist regarding veterans' return to civilian life, including fears about possible increases in violence. These issues require open public discussion rather than avoidance.
- Discussions about veterans' challenges often remain confined to the veteran community itself, while much of society has limited understanding of veterans' experiences. Broader public dialogue is therefore essential.
- The Verkhovna Rada has launched an internship programme for veterans within its Secretariat, creating an additional pathway for people with military experience to contribute to parliamentary work.
- Ukraine's public institutions must adapt to the realities of a country at war. Even civilian public servants who do not serve in the Armed Forces should receive at least basic military training. Ukraine will not return to its pre-war reality, and future public policy must reflect both the experience of war and the sacrifices society has made.
- Veterans' support should begin with a comprehensive case management system, including qualified veteran support specialists, particularly for those requiring the greatest assistance. Today, the quality of veterans' services depends heavily on the capacity of individual communities: large cities are often able to provide comprehensive support, while smaller municipalities frequently struggle to deliver even basic services. Ukraine's veterans' policy should therefore be coherent, nationwide and equally accessible regardless of where a veteran lives. Veterans in remote communities are too often left without adequate access to healthcare, rehabilitation and social services, creating unequal opportunities across the country. Effective veterans' policy is therefore not only a matter of social protection, but also of the rule of law and the state's ability to guarantee equal rights and opportunities. Delays in reforming veterans' legislation and implementing a modern support system risk deepening tensions between veterans and the state, particularly if the war continues and elections are further postponed.



Panel 2. The Political Party as an Instrument of Change: from the Community to Brussels



Dr Vadym Chernysh, Chair of the Governing Board, Centre for Security Studies "CENSS"

➤ Understanding contemporary political processes requires an appreciation of the ideological differences between political parties and the values that shape their political agendas.

➤ In Europe and the United States, various models of the political compass are widely used to map the ideological positions of political parties and voters. However, these models cannot always be directly applied to the Ukrainian political context.

➤ Political parties differ in their approaches to economic policy, the role of the state, private property, traditional values, human rights and other key public policy issues. European experience demonstrates

that ideological orientation often shapes parties' positions on specific policy decisions, including international agreements and social policy.

- Ukraine's political landscape also reflects a diversity of ideological approaches, creating an important context for discussing the role of veterans within the country's party system.
- One of the key questions for Ukraine concerns the mechanisms through which veterans can engage in politics—whether by joining existing political parties, establishing new political movements, or through dedicated party or legislative quotas designed to promote their political representation.

Maksym Kolesnikov, Political Consultant, Party Development Expert, K&K Group

- Introducing dedicated quotas for veterans within political parties is not currently necessary, as there is already strong public demand for veterans' participation in politics. Among all social groups, veterans—and, to a somewhat lesser extent, volunteers—enjoy the highest level of public trust and public expectations regarding political engagement.
- Political parties are interested in veterans not only as electoral candidates but also as future political leaders capable of representing the party and effectively implementing its political agenda.

- Veterans' political participation should be based on mutual initiative: veterans need to be proactive and engage in civic life, while political parties should remain open to integrating them into their structures.



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- Veterans should not be involved in politics only during election campaigns or be used merely to enhance a party's public image. Their participation should be meaningful, long-term and substantive.
- Ukraine's experience since 2014 has demonstrated the shortcomings of ad hoc veteran engagement in politics. Cooperation between veterans and political parties should therefore be built on long-term partnerships and shared responsibility.
- Such cooperation should begin well before election campaigns. During non-election periods, veterans and political parties can work together on joint initiatives, allowing both sides to assess whether they share common values, ideological principles and a common vision for Ukraine's development.
- Long-term cooperation helps build mutual trust and reduces the risk of veterans being used by political parties solely for electoral purposes—or, conversely, of parties being treated merely as electoral vehicles by individual candidates.
- Ukrainian society often holds an overly romanticised view of politics and party-building. While establishing a political party is relatively easy, sustaining it as a functioning organisation with regional branches, internal structures and continuous political activity is far more challenging. Ukraine has witnessed the repeated emergence of new political projects and rebranded parties, yet changing names or political brands alone does not transform political culture or governance practices. Veterans can make one of their most important contributions by helping to reshape Ukraine's political culture. Political parties and public institutions ultimately reflect the society from which they emerge, meaning that the quality of politics depends on the political culture of citizens themselves. Genuine change requires long-term efforts, practical engagement and the gradual development of shared democratic values rather than simply creating new political projects. Political movements established shortly before elections around prominent personalities often lack a coherent ideological foundation. Once elected, such parties frequently experience internal divisions because common values and political priorities were never properly established beforehand. New political projects should therefore not be romanticised. Lasting change will come through stronger political institutions, healthier political culture and more responsible political behaviour. Current polling suggests that political parties formed around military personnel or veterans could potentially attract around 20–25% of the electorate. However, this does not mean that a single veterans' party would automatically secure such support. It is far more likely that several veteran-oriented political projects would emerge, dividing this electoral constituency. At present, it is impossible to predict their electoral performance, as outcomes will depend on the broader political landscape, the electoral system, election rules and public sentiment at the time of the vote.
- The current electoral system would provide the best framework for future parliamentary elections. Having already been used in two rounds of local elections, it has demonstrated a reasonable balance between party representation and competition among individual candidates. It allows political parties to develop as stable institutions while enabling strong and well-known candidates to improve their position on party lists through voter support. At the same time, Ukraine's political practice has repeatedly shown that electoral legislation is often amended to serve the interests of those in power. The problem extends beyond electoral rules themselves and reflects a broader challenge: the insufficient entrenchment of the rule of law, where changing legislation to suit the incumbent government is too often perceived as acceptable political practice.

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Mariia Ionova, Member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Member of the Committee on Foreign Policy and Interparliamentary Cooperation

➤ A political party is a community of people united by shared values, principles, and ideology—not merely an electoral vehicle.

➤ Building a modern democratic party requires continuous engagement with society, regional consultations, and learning from European experience in party development.

➤ A strong state is built on strong local communities and strong political institutions. Communities therefore become the primary environment for veterans' reintegration, meaning that veteran policy

should be implemented not only at the national level but, above all, through local governance.

- While European models provide valuable guidance, Ukraine must develop its own model of democratic governance that reflects its unique circumstances.
- Service members and veterans have long been integrated into internal party structures, contributing to policy development rather than serving merely as symbolic candidates during election campaigns. Their participation should be continuous rather than limited to electoral cycles.
- Effective party policy is shaped through constant dialogue with regional branches, internal discussions, educational initiatives, and veterans' forums, with these discussions subsequently informing legislative proposals and public policy.
- Political parties should be viewed as permanent institutions that develop public policy between elections, rather than organizations that become active only during election campaigns.
- Many local communities remain insufficiently prepared for veterans' return and reintegration. At the same time, many veterans seek not financial assistance but meaningful opportunities to contribute to community life and local development, becoming trusted community leaders through their experience and leadership.
- Veterans should not be divided into "good" or "bad" categories or reduced to stereotypes. Every individual should have opportunities to realize their potential according to their abilities and aspirations.
- Veterans can contribute not only through politics but also through local self-government, public administration, business, civil society, and many other fields.
- Veterans represent a new generation of Ukrainian leadership shaped by wartime experience, rapid decision-making, responsibility, and teamwork. This experience is valuable not only for Ukraine but also for European partners, who increasingly need to prepare for evolving security challenges.
- Veterans' participation in international forums is a particularly effective instrument of international communication, as personal experience often carries greater credibility than political rhetoric.
- Veteran-led cultural and civic initiatives can also strengthen Ukraine's soft power and reinforce international support for the country.
- Political parties should demonstrate that veterans can genuinely influence decision-making and policy development. Veteran participation must be meaningful rather than symbolic,

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with parties showing through their actions that veterans are true partners in shaping public policy.

- Given the ongoing war, discussions about future elections should remain secondary to Ukraine's immediate security priorities.
- Political leadership changes only when society itself changes. The quality of political leaders ultimately reflects the values, expectations, and choices of the society that elects them.
- Veterans should become active participants in community life rather than passive recipients of social assistance. Reintegration is therefore not limited to employment or social support but includes meaningful participation in local decision-making and governance.
- Local communities should assume greater responsibility for national resilience by supporting territorial defence units and military formations stationed in their regions. Veterans can play an important role in encouraging local politicians, elected officials, and younger generations to take security and defence issues more seriously.
- One of Ukraine's key challenges remains the absence of a genuine social contract between veterans, communities, and the state, leaving many communities insufficiently engaged in supporting those who have served.
- Challenges also persist within state institutions and Parliament, where important initiatives often struggle to secure sufficient political support.
- Expectations that a new generation of politicians would automatically deliver better governance have not always been fulfilled, as a number of parliamentary decisions continue to raise serious concerns.
- Ukraine's European integration should not rely solely on expectations of support because of the war. Progress toward EU and NATO membership also requires sustained domestic reforms, stronger institutions, and consistent implementation of commitments. Within the framework of cooperation with the European People's Party, discussions already address broader European security issues, including mechanisms of collective defence.
- Responsibility for reform rests with today's political leaders and cannot simply be postponed to future generations or transferred to veterans. Veterans should not become a separate political category or an instrument of political technology. Political parties with clear ideological foundations play a crucial role in strengthening democratic institutions. Public financing of political parties can promote transparency and support initiatives, including veteran-focused projects through competitive grant mechanisms. Political participation extends far beyond Parliament: local councils and communities already possess significant decision-making authority, although many still lack sufficiently trained professionals willing to assume responsibility for difficult decisions. Veterans should therefore be integrated into political life at every level—not only during candidate selection but as long-term contributors to democratic governance.

Yevhen Mahda, Political Scientist, Professor at the Kyiv Aviation Institute, Chairman of the Institute of World Policy

- Elections cannot be held under martial law. Parliamentary elections will only become possible after the end of hostilities and a transitional period of approximately three to six months. As he noted, *"Anyone who expects elections in 2026 is living in a world of fantasy or illusion."*



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- Although more than 300 political parties are officially registered in Ukraine, only around 10% actively participate in elections, while most exist only as legal entities.
- Ukraine's electoral legislation has changed almost every parliamentary election, preventing the development of a stable and institutionalized party system.
- One of the fundamental weaknesses of Ukrainian political parties is the concentration of power in the hands of a single party leader, who often simultaneously serves as political leader, chief ideologue, and principal financier.
- The next parliamentary elections are expected, under the current Electoral Code, to be held under an open-list proportional system, although this model has never been used in nationwide elections. Open lists would allow voters—not only party leadership—to influence the ranking of candidates.
- Organizing post-war elections will present significant practical challenges, including the occupation of approximately 20% of Ukraine's territory, outdated voter registers, and uncertainty regarding the number of citizens residing inside and outside the country.
- Ukrainian politics has seen growing support for right-leaning political forces and simplified political narratives. At the same time, traditional distinctions between the political right and left remain blurred in Ukraine, where parties often define themselves differently than in Western Europe. Issues such as migration, same-sex marriage, and LGBTQ+ rights are among those most commonly associated with the right of the political spectrum.
- Traditional left-wing political parties are unlikely to regain significant influence after the war, as much of the left has been discredited through the cooperation of certain political actors with Russia.
- Because most Ukrainian parties lack a clearly defined ideological identity, many new political projects are likely to emerge shortly before elections rather than develop as long-term political institutions.
- The next electoral campaign is expected to be exceptionally competitive due to its compressed timeframe, unequal financial resources among candidates, and the extensive use of modern information technologies.
- Ukrainian society has not yet fully grasped the scale of the country's human losses caused by the war. Public acknowledgment of these losses will become one of the major challenges of the post-war period.
- Ukraine's accession to the European Union will ultimately be decided by a new generation of both Ukrainian and European political leaders.
- Creating a separate "veterans' party" or building a political party around a prominent military commander is unlikely to be the optimal solution. Since Ukraine's Armed Forces reflect the diversity of Ukrainian society, veterans should naturally become part of different political parties rather than a single political movement.
- Granting veterans separate political privileges or additional electoral rights would raise difficult questions regarding equality before the law and democratic representation.
- Since Ukraine has not held parliamentary elections since 2019, an entire generation of young citizens has never had the opportunity to vote in national elections.
- Once the war ends, both the government and the political system will face a large number of accumulated public expectations and unresolved societal demands.
- Future Ukrainian elections will almost certainly become a primary target of Russian hybrid interference through disinformation campaigns, political manipulation, and attempts to recruit individuals for destabilizing activities.
- The prospects of a political project formed exclusively by veterans from a single military unit cannot be assessed without knowing the future electoral system, campaign model, and

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broader public support. Membership in the same military formation alone is unlikely to translate into electoral success. Veterans will need to appeal not only to fellow service members but also to the wider civilian electorate. Rather than a single "pixel party," multiple veteran-led political initiatives with different political orientations are more likely to emerge. The post-war political landscape remains highly unpredictable, as neither the timing of the end of the war nor the future configuration of political forces can yet be anticipated. Russia, meanwhile, is already systematically preparing for Ukraine's post-war political environment, underscoring the need for Ukraine to prepare just as thoroughly for future democratic competition.

- Veterans and society should be united not by belonging to a single political party but by a shared commitment to Ukraine's national interests and democratic values, above all the preservation of an independent Ukrainian state. The war has demonstrated the value of Ukrainian statehood despite widespread international skepticism at the outset of the full-scale invasion. Building on this common foundation, society should develop a shared vision of key public policy questions—including defence, taxation, and electoral reform. The war should become a catalyst for rethinking Ukraine's entire political system rather than returning to outdated electoral technologies. Veteran organizations can play an important role in shaping a common framework of national priorities without necessarily transforming into a single political force.
- Although the Electoral Code currently provides for open-list proportional elections, political actors may ultimately decide to return to a mixed electoral system, citing political expediency or the need to reduce internal competition. As one possible alternative, he suggested considering a majoritarian system combined with a two-year parliamentary term and a prohibition on immediate re-election, allowing Parliament to adopt necessary but potentially unpopular reforms before transferring responsibility to a newly elected legislature.

Panel 3. The Path from Defense Forces to Political Institutions: Experience of the Western Balkans



Miljenko Vahtarić, Croatian War Veteran, Former Deputy Director of the Croatian Mine Action Centre, Mine Action Advisor within the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine (Croatia)

- He was first mobilized at the beginning of 1991, when the war in Slovenia broke out. That deployment lasted only two weeks before the signing of the Brioni Agreement. He was mobilized again in October 1991, this time for the war in Croatia.
- The first months of the war were marked by a severe shortage of weapons, as the Yugoslav People's Army had removed much of Croatia's armaments before hostilities began. After weapons depots were captured, Croatia was able to establish military units, including the brigade that defended the Sisak area near Zagreb.

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- Following the Sarajevo Agreement, part of the armed forces was temporarily demobilized. Priority was given to university students so they could complete their studies, employees of strategically important enterprises, and service members whose families required support because multiple family members had been mobilized.
- Before the war, he studied economics at the University of Zagreb and completed his degree after returning from military service. He then joined the Ministry of the Interior, where he worked on humanitarian demining. Later, he moved to the newly established Croatian Mine Action Centre, where around 95% of the staff were war veterans. Although he was never involved in party politics, he considered public service and politics to be closely interconnected.
- Immediately after the war, the Croatian government placed limited emphasis on veterans' employment. Financial benefits and monthly allowances became the primary form of state support.
- Veterans were granted a range of benefits, including tax exemptions for vehicle imports, double recognition of military service for pension purposes (one year of service counted as two years of employment), financial assistance programmes, disability compensation, and housing support. However, comprehensive veterans' legislation was adopted only five years after the war had ended.
- For most young veterans, the highest priority after the war was not benefits but the opportunity to find stable employment and return to normal civilian life.
- One of Croatia's greatest mistakes was providing social benefits without creating sufficient employment opportunities. This left many veterans socially isolated, disconnected from broader society, and confined largely to veteran circles. Meaningful employment, rather than benefits alone, is the most important foundation for successful reintegration.
- He emphasized that his recommendation to Ukraine was simple: "Give veterans good jobs, not just benefits." Meaningful employment enables veterans to remain active, feel needed, and continue contributing to their country as full members of society rather than living separately from it.
- During the war, Croatian veterans did not fight with political ambitions; their goal was to defend the country's independence. As a result, many showed little interest in politics after the war, while political life was shaped largely by others.
- Today, Croatian veterans are well represented in the defence sector, veterans' affairs institutions, public administration in border and formerly occupied areas, as well as in local self-government.
- At the time of the war, Croatia had a population of approximately 4.3 million. More than 500,000 people obtained veteran status, including around 460,000 who participated directly in combat and about 40,000 who served in logistics and other support roles. Overall, approximately 42% of those eligible for mobilization took part in the war.
- Veteran organizations did not function as a single political force and often held different political views. Their primary focus was supporting veterans and their families rather than pursuing political objectives. Their activities centred on mutual assistance, healthcare, family support, and maintaining ties among former comrades. Croatia's Ministry of Veterans plays a central role in implementing veterans' policy under a dedicated veterans' law. Particular emphasis is placed on veterans' economic reintegration through financial support for veteran-owned businesses, including farming, beekeeping, berry production, and other entrepreneurial activities.
- Another major mistake was allowing veterans to become increasingly isolated within their own communities of wartime comradeship after the war. While the state provided pensions

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and benefits, insufficient attention was paid to education, retraining, and professional development. Veterans need opportunities to acquire new skills, pursue new careers, and remain active members of society, rather than relying solely on social assistance. Media practices also contributed to negative public perceptions by routinely emphasizing a person's veteran status when reporting crimes. Responsibility always lies with the individual, not with the veteran community as a whole.

- Veterans also influence public policy through veterans' organizations and political parties, which increasingly involve them in policymaking and public service at the regional and local levels.

Xhafer Gashi, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/UÇK) Veteran, Mayor of Obiliq Municipality (2013–2025), Founder of Katana, a company specializing in security and defence products and services (Kosovo)



- Before the war, he was engaged in business and returned to entrepreneurship after the conflict. In 2006, he was invited to join the government by then-Prime Minister Agim Çeku, who had served as Chief of Staff of the Kosovo Liberation Army during the war. In 2007, he was elected Mayor of the Municipality of Obiliq and served in this position for 12 years.
- After completing his tenure in local government, he returned to the private sector. Today, his company supplies equipment to the Kosovo Security Force, the police, and civilian clients, while also providing training and certification programmes for both security professionals and civilians.
- Veteran-led businesses can provide an effective way for veterans to continue serving their country after military service by combining entrepreneurship with the development of the security and defence sector.
- In a democratic society, leaders should always be chosen based on their competence, integrity, and commitment rather than their military background. At the same time, veterans possess at least one quality that has already been proven—their patriotism. Military service fosters responsibility, discipline, teamwork, and the ability to make difficult decisions under pressure, all of which are valuable in public service. However, veterans must also recognize that democratic leadership differs fundamentally from military leadership: success in politics depends not on command, but on dialogue, compromise, and public trust.
- Veterans inevitably become part of political debate from time to time. However, the Kosovo Liberation Army did not belong to any political party—it belonged to the people. The values for which its members fought—freedom, dignity, democracy, and the right of people to determine their own future—belong to every citizen, regardless of political affiliation. For this reason, veterans should never become instruments of political division. Instead, they should serve as bridges between political forces, united by a shared history.

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Mato Franičević, Politician, War Veteran, Colonel, Member of the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2002–2010), Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010–2014), First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015–2019) (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

➤ He became interested in politics before the war. In the late 1980s, he joined the country's democratic movement and took part in establishing new political parties following the end of the one-party system.

- Originally from Livno, he studied in Zagreb before returning to his hometown, where he became the head of the local branch of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH). In the country's first democratic elections, the party won approximately 75% of the vote in the municipality.
- Following the elections, he stepped down from the party leadership because he believed his priority should be preparing the region for the possibility of war, which, following the outbreak of hostilities in Croatia, was increasingly likely to spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- During the war, he participated in the formation of the first brigade in the Livno region and was responsible for personnel management as well as information and political affairs.
- After the war, he was elected Mayor of Livno. He decided to pursue a political career because, during the war, he had witnessed significant injustice behind the front lines: while soldiers were fighting, some individuals secured positions and privileges through personal connections.
- He believed that veterans should enter public office in order to promote a fairer and more merit-based approach to public appointments.
- After taking office, the new administration reviewed personnel decisions and the allocation of public resources. Appointments were made in accordance with the law while also taking merit, wartime service, and social circumstances into account. However, this principled approach was not applied consistently, as many politicians were unwilling to challenge influential individuals.
- Particular attention was devoted to supporting veterans by creating opportunities for employment, maintaining social connections, and encouraging their active participation in community life.
- It is difficult to offer universal recommendations without a full understanding of the situation in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories. Not only the ethnic composition of the population but also people's values, political views, and vision for the country's future should be taken into account. Ukraine is steadily moving closer to European institutions, and despite widespread expectations that EU accession will be a lengthy process, it could happen much sooner than many anticipate. European integration has the potential to become one of the key factors in uniting society by helping reintegrate residents of the de-occupied territories into a common European space founded on democratic values, the rule of law, and a shared vision of the future. Ultimately, there are only two competing paths of development: a European path based on democracy and cooperation, and an outdated imperial model with no sustainable future. Over time, people themselves will be

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able to see that the European path offers greater stability and better serves their long-term interests.

Anton Quni, politician, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/UÇK) veteran, former Minister of Defence of Kosovo (2020–2021), former member of the Parliamentary Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Oversight of the Kosovo Security Force (2010–2017), former member of the Parliamentary Committee on Oversight of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (2017–2019), Vice President of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) (Kosovo)



- Following the end of the war in 1999, the Kosovo Liberation Army signed a demilitarisation agreement with NATO. Demilitarisation did not signify abandoning the struggle but rather transitioning to state-building. To facilitate the reintegration of former fighters, the Kosovo Protection Corps was established as a civilian emergency response structure, incorporating thousands of veterans. It was later transformed into the Kosovo Security Force.
- Former commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army went on to lead major political parties and later served as prime ministers, ministers, and other senior state officials following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.
- Veterans are not merely beneficiaries of state support but represent one of the country's greatest sources of human and political capital. Brotherhood, mutual trust, moral authority, and leadership forged during wartime constitute the core of this capital.
- Experience in crisis management, rapid decision-making, and operating under conditions of limited resources provides a valuable foundation for veterans' subsequent participation in public administration.
- The reintegration of veterans into post-war society should be based on a structured transition into public service, the security sector, diplomacy, government institutions, and local self-government.
- Veterans should be represented in parliament and actively participate in shaping national security policy. Integrating veterans into democratic political parties also helps prevent populist forces from exploiting their public authority.
- The political integration of veterans should form part of the broader post-war state-building process. One of the key challenges is ensuring meaningful employment and opportunities for active participation in public life, as no state budget can meet veterans' needs solely through social benefits.
- Political divisions between veterans and wider civil society should be avoided.
- A transparent and reliable veterans' register is essential to prevent individuals who did not participate in combat from being granted veteran status.
- Veterans should serve as mentors for future generations of service personnel and contribute to the development of state institutions after the war.

Panel 4. Challenges and Opportunities for Veterans' Political Participation: a Strategic Perspective



Dr. Bohdan Bondarenko, Lecturer at the Department of Constitutional Law, Educational and Scientific Institute of Law, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; expert in constitutional law and security; combat medic (2022–2024)

➤ Following the wars in the former Yugoslavia, all parties faced issues related to international humanitarian law and international criminal law. Many actions that had appeared justified during the conflict were later assessed very differently by international judicial institutions. Ukraine should recognize these potential risks in advance to avoid similar consequences.

- The criteria used to assess international armed conflicts may evolve over time, as demonstrated by the jurisprudence of international tribunals. The case of General Ante Gotovina illustrates how new legal approaches to assessing the use of artillery were developed.
- Military training should include comprehensive instruction in international humanitarian law.
- Ukraine should already be preparing for the potential legal challenges that may arise after the war. As part of its European integration process, the country must be ready for its actions to be scrutinized by international partners.
- Measures designed to protect military personnel from international legal liability should not create additional legal risks for commanders.
- Many effective practices within the Armed Forces of Ukraine—including patronage services and certain mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law—currently exist because of the initiative of individual brigades and commanders rather than as a result of systematic state policy.
- Shifting the primary legal responsibility onto military commanders could have long-term consequences for Ukraine's military leadership.
- Croatia's experience demonstrates that international judicial mechanisms can be used to prosecute military commanders even many years after the end of a conflict.
- Potential allegations against Ukrainian commanders could become a tool of Russian information and political pressure aimed at discrediting the Armed Forces of Ukraine.
- Even if Russia is unable to initiate formal proceedings itself, information documented by other individuals or organizations may still be submitted to relevant international legal mechanisms.
- Kosovo illustrates the differing approaches taken by opposing parties toward international legal mechanisms. Kosovo accepted the relevant legal framework as part of its European integration process, whereas Serbia did not recognize the jurisdiction of the Specialist Chambers. A similar contrast is evident in Russia's war against Ukraine: Ukraine seeks to

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act in accordance with international law and established legal procedures, while Russia does not.

- Russia may attempt to exploit international legal mechanisms to create artificial obstacles and additional risks for Ukraine. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated efforts by the state, society, and the veteran community. Such risks are an inherent feature of the current international legal environment and should therefore be mitigated proactively.
- One important way to reduce these risks is to ensure that military commanders receive appropriate legal training and fully understand their responsibilities, particularly regarding the protection of the lives of their personnel. Although these legal issues are complex, addressing them is essential for understanding the challenges Ukraine may face in the future.

Nadiia Stefaniv, Judge of the Grand Chamber of the Supreme Court of Ukraine; President of the All-Ukrainian Association of Women Judges

- The end of armed conflicts is typically followed by the work of international courts and tribunals, which assess the conduct of the parties under international humanitarian law and international criminal law.
- In light of international judicial practice, compliance with international humanitarian law should become one of the fundamental tools of Ukraine's military personnel and veterans.
- Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine receive training in international humanitarian law, including during their education at military training centers.
- The core international crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity, the crime of aggression, and war crimes, the latter encompassing a broad range of distinct criminal offences.
- The Geneva Conventions remain the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and compliance with their provisions is essential both during hostilities and in the subsequent legal assessment of military conduct.
- The International Criminal Court is already examining materials submitted by the Prosecutor General concerning crimes committed on the territory of Ukraine.
- Military personnel should understand who may bear responsibility for international crimes. Liability may extend to direct perpetrators, military commanders, and senior political leaders, depending on the circumstances of each case.
- Following the ratification of the Rome Statute, Ukraine has begun incorporating its provisions into national legislation, including those relating to crimes against humanity and command responsibility. Command responsibility does not imply automatic liability for every action committed by subordinates. Rather, it may arise where commanders fail to take necessary measures to prevent crimes or issue unlawful orders.
- The jurisprudence of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia demonstrates that responsibility may also extend to individuals who exercised de facto authority or control, even without formal appointment to a command position.

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- Kosovo's experience demonstrates that special international judicial mechanisms may prosecute individuals who continue to be regarded as war heroes within their own country.
- International crimes are not subject to statutes of limitation; individuals may therefore be prosecuted regardless of how much time has elapsed since the offences were committed.
- The Kosovo Specialist Chambers formally operate within Kosovo's judicial system but are located in The Hague and staffed by international judges. They were established to adjudicate cases involving crimes allegedly committed by Kosovo commanders during the war.
- The case of Hashim Thaçi was presented as an example of the complex interaction between criminal accountability and public perception, as many citizens continue to regard him as a war hero despite the ongoing proceedings. At the same time, Serbia did not recognize the jurisdiction of this judicial mechanism.
- There are important differences between the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the International Criminal Court. Proceedings before the ICC require a substantial body of credible and reliable evidence, and the Court's jurisdiction is limited to the gravest international crimes, including the crime of aggression and serious war crimes.
- Decisions of Ukrainian national courts may be taken into account by international judicial bodies. However, unlike the Ukrainian legal system, international criminal proceedings do not provide for trials in absentia.
- War crimes should be documented and investigated as thoroughly as possible. Investigations should establish the systematic nature of crimes committed by the aggressor state while reducing the risk of potential allegations against Ukrainian military personnel.
- International crimes are subject to the principle of universal jurisdiction, meaning that competent authorities in other states may initiate proceedings regardless of the position of the Russian Federation. Consequently, international legal mechanisms could potentially be used to create additional challenges for Ukraine, making it essential to anticipate these risks and take them into account when shaping state policy.



Dr. Oleksandr Bakumov, Member of Parliament of Ukraine; Chair of the Subcommittee on Criminal Legislation and Crime Prevention of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Law Enforcement; participant in the Russo-Ukrainian War

- Following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, the Verkhovna Rada established a dedicated commission on international humanitarian law and international criminal law. Its purpose is to align state actions, as well as the activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations, with international legal standards in order to ensure the highest possible level of compliance with international humanitarian law.
- The treatment of prisoners of war is organized in accordance with international standards, demonstrating the difference between Ukraine and the aggressor state. To facilitate prisoner exchanges, Parliament adopted a number of legislative measures under an expedited procedure, ensuring their compliance with international humanitarian law.

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- One of the key priorities is to promote knowledge of international humanitarian law, international law, and international criminal law. A clear understanding of war crimes, the crime of aggression, and crimes against humanity is essential.
- Russia's aggression should be regarded as a long-term challenge that requires the systematic legal preparedness of Ukrainian society.
- Within veteran policy, veterans should be viewed both as beneficiaries and as active participants. As beneficiaries, they require social protection, support, and assistance with reintegration into civilian life. As active participants, they should be involved in political processes and public decision-making.
- The high level of public trust enjoyed by veterans must be accompanied by professional training, competence, and expertise. Otherwise, public confidence may quickly erode. Veterans entering politics must also be prepared for a high level of responsibility and exposure to information-related risks.
- Information security and countering disinformation remain among Ukraine's key wartime challenges. Russia has developed extensive influence networks across Europe that have sought to shape public opinion and affect the policies of partner states through disinformation. Strengthening information resilience and countering information attacks therefore remain essential components of state policy.
- Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and international humanitarian law constitutes an integral part of Ukraine's accession negotiations with the European Union.
- Ukraine has strengthened its cooperation with the International Criminal Court, particularly regarding the exchange of information and the collection and transfer of evidence through the Office of the Prosecutor General.
- It should be recognized that international legal proceedings may potentially concern not only military personnel of the aggressor state but also Ukrainian service members.
- A key priority is to ensure the effective functioning of Ukraine's national justice system so that alleged violations are properly investigated while safeguarding the rights of Ukrainian military personnel.
- The International Criminal Court exercises jurisdiction only where national judicial systems are unwilling or unable to conduct genuine investigations and prosecutions.
- Ukraine's judiciary and law enforcement agencies have already acquired unique practical experience in investigating and classifying international crimes arising from armed aggression.
- An important objective remains ensuring legal certainty regarding the actions of Ukrainian military personnel and confirming their compliance with international humanitarian law and military regulations.
- The ratification of the Rome Statute was preceded by a lengthy process of preparation and legislative implementation. Work on incorporating the Statute's provisions into the Criminal Code of Ukraine began at the start of the ninth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada. An earlier implementation bill was adopted by Parliament but never entered into force, and the issue was subsequently postponed on several occasions. Before the final decision on ratification, consultations were held with the command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and military unit commanders. Ratification was driven in part by Ukraine's international obligations and the expectations of partner states regarding compliance with international criminal law. It is viewed as an important instrument for strengthening military personnel's understanding of the lawful methods and means of warfare under international humanitarian law. Ratification has not resulted in a wave of criminal proceedings against Ukrainian service members. Rather, it was presented as a necessary and timely step in the devel-

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opment of Ukraine's legal framework and fulfilment of its international commitments, while the timing of ratification remained a matter of political judgment and public debate.

Bohdan Krotevych, Advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine; former Chief of Staff of the 12th Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine "Azov"; defender of Mariupol



- An officer's primary duty is to ensure that subordinates do not bear responsibility for decisions and orders issued by the command.
- The principles of the Rome Statute and international humanitarian law are based on clear and comprehensible rules that commanders must thoroughly understand rather than repeatedly consult in legal texts.
- One of the key responsibilities of a chief of staff is to ensure that commanders' orders are implemented in accordance with the law and to prevent actions that could expose the command to criminal liability.
- Political decisions regarding the ratification of international legal instruments remain a matter of debate. However, training in international humanitarian law should move beyond formal instruction toward its practical application.
- Commanders at all levels must remain aware that their decisions may be subject to legal scrutiny after the end of hostilities.
- Prolonged participation in combat, sustained psychological pressure, and extensive battlefield experience may affect both situational perception and decision-making.
- Several military brigades have already introduced the practice of employing in-house legal advisers to review combat orders and identify potential legal risks before they are issued. Although these initiatives currently depend largely on individual commanders, they should be institutionalized through formal positions or mandatory procedures within the Armed Forces of Ukraine.
- Responsibility for orders issued and decisions taken is an inherent part of an officer's service and should be regarded as a natural component of military command.
- A commander who makes decisions bears greater responsibility than a servicemember who executes lawful orders, reflecting the fundamental principles of military leadership.
- All combat orders and operational decisions are documented in combat logs and may later become subject to legal review.
- Where violations of the law are established, officers must be held accountable in accordance with applicable legislation.
- Willingness to accept responsibility for one's own decisions is a fundamental principle of the officer profession, while attempts to evade such responsibility are incompatible with military honour and professional ethics.
- Commanders are responsible not only for accomplishing combat missions but also for the future well-being of their servicemembers after they return to civilian life. One of the most vulnerable veterans is an 18-year-old volunteer who chose to serve despite having no legal obligation, sustained severe injuries, and, after demobilization, is left without a clear vision of future opportunities.

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- Patronage services established within several military units have proven valuable by providing rehabilitation, legal assistance, employment support, and help with social reintegration. However, this practice has yet to become sufficiently widespread.
- Veterans are best understood by fellow servicemembers and veterans themselves. Expanding patronage services and long-term support systems after military service should therefore become one of the key pillars of veteran policy.
- One of the greatest risks arises when veterans are left without adequate support from state institutions and civil society. Under such circumstances, their public authority and combat experience may be exploited by political actors or other individuals for political or reputational purposes. Responsibility for such situations cannot rest solely with veterans themselves. Without meaningful support, employment opportunities, and reintegration mechanisms, veterans become more vulnerable to external influence.
- The state and society should play a more active role in supporting veterans through employment assistance, social reintegration, and their return to civilian life. The transition process is often difficult, while the psychological consequences of war may further complicate reintegration.
- Even the most comprehensive support system cannot eliminate all challenges. Nevertheless, timely assistance and sustained attention can significantly reduce the risks of social isolation and political manipulation affecting veterans.
- Patronage services embedded within combat units represent one of the most effective mechanisms for supporting veterans. They provide not only legal and social assistance but also day-to-day support for individuals recovering from severe injuries, psychological trauma, addiction, and other complex life circumstances. Their effectiveness stems from remaining an integral part of the military structure rather than functioning as separate NGOs or civilian veteran institutions, which ensures a much higher level of trust among servicemembers and veterans. Veteran support should therefore be more closely integrated into the Ministry of Defence rather than separated into an independent institution, as veterans should maintain their connection with the armed forces even after completing military service. Veterans' military experience remains a valuable national asset, and the armed forces should retain responsibility for supporting them after service.
- Police officers are already receiving training for operating in wartime conditions, including basic military training. However, military and police service require different professional competencies: combat experience alone does not make someone an effective police officer, just as police training does not automatically prepare someone for combat. The principal value of such training lies in developing the psychological readiness to act under dangerous conditions, remain composed under risk, and protect civilians. At the same time, neither veteran status nor combat experience can justify unlawful conduct or exempt individuals from accountability. Public perceptions are often shaped by isolated negative incidents, with the misconduct of a few affecting attitudes toward an entire profession, much as stereotypes may influence perceptions of veterans. As an example, he referred to a police officer who risked his own safety by securing a discovered grenade and protecting nearby civilians until explosive ordnance disposal specialists arrived, demonstrating the high level of professionalism displayed by many officers.

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