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POLICY BRIEF

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Security sector governance (SSG) in Ukraine

International lessons, general principles
& Ukraine's post-2014 progress

Sarah Detzner (International SSG Specialist)

Polina Beliakova (Dartmouth College)

Radmila Šekerinska (Former Prime Minister
and Defence Minister, North Macedonia)



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Background

On 21st November 2022, PeaceRep's Ukraine team hosted a private seminar discussion on the topic, 'Security sector governance (SSG) in Ukraine: international lessons, general principles and Ukraine's post-2014 progress'.

This readout contains a non-verbatim summary of key points made by panellists in their presentations. The audience was a group of experts, academics, civil society advocates and policy-makers.

PeaceRep's Ukraine programme

The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) is a research consortium led by the University of Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics in the 21st century. PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is a multi-partner initiative that provide evidence, insight, academic research and policy analysis from Ukraine and the wider region to support Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity and democracy in the face of the Russian invasion.

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PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is led by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) partnering with the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) in Ukraine, the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Germany, the Institute of Human Sciences (IWM) in Austria and Jagiellonian University in Poland. Through our collaboration with KSE we work closely with researchers, educationalists and civic activists in Ukraine to ensure that policy solutions are grounded in robust evidence and are calibrated to support democratic outcomes.

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Introduction

This policy briefing reviews general principles and lessons internationally from successful SSR in the context of considering the challenges facing Ukraine. It considers the following key questions:

- How do we assess the key general principles of SSG such as civilian control and civic scrutiny and their potential application in Ukraine's very specific and challenging circumstances?
- How do we assess Ukrainian progress with SSG since 2014?
- How do we assess the response of Ukrainian security sector to the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022?
- What are the downstream risks / challenges?
- What should be the vision for Ukraine's SSG in the short, medium and long-term? What role could external actors play in this vision?

It brings together a non-verbatim summary of presentations made by three speakers at a recent private seminar organised by PeaceRep's Ukraine team.

Contributors

Sarah Detzner is a leading international specialist in SSG/SSR.

Polina Beliakova is a postdoctoral fellow at Dartmouth College working who has researched civic-military relations in Ukraine, Russia and Israel.

Radmila Šekerinska is the former PM and Defence Minister in North Macedonia, which saw her playing a leading role in post-communist SSR.

Sarah Detzner: 'Success depends on having already built a coalition for SSR'

Sarah Detzner

Leading international SSG specialist.

General Trends

As a lead-in to case specific analysis, this discussion will start with general trends in security sector reform (SSR) and draw lessons from comparative research on attempted SSR in post-conflict and post-transition contexts. I'll focus on general patterns most likely to be most relevant to the Ukrainian experience. Firstly, **significant societal disruption is a strong necessary condition for major SSR progress, a pattern that is universally present in case studies.** Usually civil war or internal upheaval (for instance, prolonged mass protests) is necessary to create an opening for broad security sector reform. It's important to understand the politics here. This disruption is necessary because the control over unreformed security forces and resources is too valuable and central to state power to give up unless absolutely necessary.

The reason we never see significant security sector reform in autocracies is because popular pressure to reform from below isn't (in an autocracy) an existential threat, unlike giving up direct control of security resources, which leaves an autocrat vulnerable to coups, and uprisings they don't have the means to suppress, as well as less able to supply patronage to important supporters. Conversely and applicable to the Ukrainian context, **the states most susceptible to reform pressure are new regimes that came to power on the promise of reform and now have to deliver; to sell people not just on a new government, but on a new system.**

It's useful to think of this process in coalitional terms when unpacking what that politically-salient domestic demand for security sector reform looks like. Where there is a moment of political opportunity in which SSR becomes possible, success depends on domestic pro-reform actors having already built a coalition for SSR that is broader and more cohesive than that of anti-reform forces, and upon the rapid use of political momentum to lock in gains. The lynchpin of those coalitions that exert real pressure for change from below is usually civil society groups with expertise regarding security and justice issues and a broadly shared reform agenda with clear goals.

Often, when reform momentum fizzles out, it is because when the moment of opportunity comes, civil society and other pro-reform actors have been excluded from security and defence policy so long that they cannot articulate what specific reforms are most important to their larger goals, and/or they are divided. Almost always, you have wealthier professionals in the centre, divided from activists in the periphery, but also divides based on ethnicity, religion, etc. Lack of mutual trust creates stalling opportunities for anti-reform forces. Think here about South Africa versus Sudan.

However, anti-reform coalitions have weaknesses as well. Divisions between political elites and the military, or within the security forces, create opportunities for more unified pro-reform courses to quickly push through those hard to reverse reforms.

It's notable that for security forces, their acceptance or rejection of reforms is about personal and institutional interests, but also threat perception. Tolerance of corruption and incompetence tends to

drop considerably when there is an external threat to the state (such as, in the Ukrainian context, the Russian incursions post-2014 and full-scale invasion in 2022).

So, what does a prepared civil society look like? Civil society coalitions that can exploit these divisions and keep pro-reform forces together are those that are able to perform widespread advocacy and public communication. This is how agenda influence takes place. These coalitions are also able to unify and stay unified behind an agenda, which means networking, engaging and ongoing dialogue both with each other and with other forces. They're preferably already in dialogue with these forces, e.g. interests allied with anti-reform regimes that can be won to the pro-reform side with sufficient assurances, etc. Common examples include business interests hurt by external sanctions and/or tired of security force theft and bribe seeking, as well as factions within the security forces that have been marginalized compared to peers or which are sufficiently concerned about state security to see reform as indispensable to fulfilling their mission.

External actors

Given this coalitional framing, by far the most productive role for external pro-reform actors is to exert pressure around the same reform priorities as domestic pro-reform coalitions. This creates simultaneous pressure from above and pressure below. At the same time, external players can act before and during a moment of reform opportunity by insisting on civil society and media protection; by helping to build civil society and media policy, knowledge and capacity; and by serving as conveners and security guarantors for dialogue and negotiation. They can also press at key moments for specific goals with domestic support (such as specific legal reforms or force restructuring) by offering or withholding recognition, resources, and so on.

Conversely, if external actors push solely on their own priorities or dialogue only with governments, they can be actively counterproductive to a reform agenda. External donors are easy to wait out and easy to mislead about the real threat environment, especially if they're only getting their information from official government sources. We tend to see a lot of stalling, weaponized incompetence and the like.

External actors who are perceived to be leading rather than supporting domestic efforts are also very easy to discredit. Reforms pushed by externals are seen as externally generated and can be easily attacked as 'foreign impositions' by anti-reform forces.

The hard-to-reverse changes that pro-reform forces need to push through as quickly as possible in a moment of opportunity include: restructuring of key security forces, creation of internal accountability structures, service unions, lustration and vetting (even a little bit of clear accountability amongst the top ranks can make a big difference in some cases), fundamental changes to the legal framework, and the establishment and empowerment of oversight bodies. In many success stories, we see civil society activists who already have security and defence as well as anti-corruption expertise move into formal government oversight roles and bring that expertise with them.

The necessity of moving quickly has to be balanced against the fact that participation and transparency are critical. One of the reasons that protecting the media in the pro-reform window is so key is to make sure it can perform the role of informing the public of what reforms are or aren't happening, to maintain public support and/or public pressure.

This need to move quickly, while also doing everything possible to keep public awareness and support, is important because there's pretty much always an anti-reform backlash as groups that lose from reform reorganize and push back at the same time. **Pro-reform forces generally start to splinter as they compete for political power ,and so on. Some of the backlash risks that are most**

prominent in post-conflict contexts are the danger of a security vacuum, while security forces are being vetted or retrained. This risk is exacerbated when, as is common, there are a lot of small arms floating around.

This can lead to support for hard-line but counterproductive anti-crime policies. Think Mano Dura in El Salvador. It also leaves space for organized crime to recruit and establish networks, especially if they're encouraged to do so by an outside power (such as Russia) looking to weaken the state.

If the security vacuum is larger in some regions, especially regions where trust for the government is historically low, that allows for the rise of regional strongmen or insurgent organizations, and other similar risks. For both civilians and the military, transparency and reliable media is key here. If they have reliable information sources about what the government is doing and why, the public is harder to manipulate. It's especially important to make sure that troops are getting information from other sources than their commanders and military networks.

In general, if external actors remain aware of these coalition dynamics as they develop, they can direct carrots and sticks and messaging where they most need to go, such as towards business interests and security forces who hope for concrete benefits and cooperation if they agree to terms.

The Ukrainian Context & Future Considerations

There's more work that needs to be done to look at the context of repeated crises. Often the paradigm is that something happens and that's the crisis and security sector reform will either fail or succeed in that moment. You don't get another shot for a generation.

There's less research on reform in states that experience repeated crises. It would be interesting to get more of an idea of what specifically promotes or discourages pro-reform cohesion here.

Based on crisis response that I've seen in other places, external threat might have the effect of galvanizing reform, if the messaging is right and there's enough transparency, particularly relating to how money is spent. But there's also a real concern, especially after a military victory, that reform will be discouraged, with military and other security service actors occupying a heroic position and being able to push back against necessary reforms and the downsizing that usually happens after a conflict. So, there's some need to prepare for that.

We're going to have to look very specifically at how to carefully implement vetting and lustration post-victory, how people who need to leave the security services can be gently eased out without causing more problems. There's some interesting South African analogues to think about.

This conflict could be going on for a while. There are patterns that are taking hold that are productive in the moment, ways things have to be done, transparency limitations and things like that, that are nonetheless going to have to be revised in long-term reform processes post-conflict. The thinking on how to prevent problematic practices from being completely calcified needs to start happening now. What are the changes that need to be made when the opportunity presents itself?

Again, it's preparation that we're talking about and this relates to my previous point about the potential downsides of a military that's done as impressively well as Ukraine's military. There's still going to be a need to change and maybe a resistance to change, so even though the existential threat continues, those conversations need to happen. What needs to happen to keep things running in the long term? What are the things that are getting entrenched here? How do we transition from the short to medium term? What do we mean exactly when we talk about the medium term and is there anything that needs to happen now or soon to maintain medium term functionality across a couple of different scenarios?

Polina Beliakova: 'The first step is risk assessment'

Polina Beliakova

Dartmouth College

I will provide a general overview of SSG in Ukraine in three phases: (a) before the war started in 2014, (b) from 2014 to 2022 and (c) some things that we should think about after the full-scale invasion and looking forward.

SSG in Ukraine is not a story of ultimate success or failure. It's a patchwork of successes and failures that affect each other but also develop independently at times.

Pre-2014

From its Soviet predecessors, Ukraine inherited a generally apolitical military. This means that the military is not trying to perform a coup, but it is also not a sufficient indicator of sound civilian control. A military that is not trying to overthrow the government is a very minimal requirement for democratic civilian control.

At the same time, as with many post-Soviet states, the Ukrainian Government inherited extensive corruption; conflicts between the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence; the tradition of a military-dominated Ministry of Defence; and, during the years of independence through incremental and inconsistent reforms, the lack of funding and continuing corruption, the military's expertise, sense of a mission and spirit also eroded.

Between the independence of Ukraine in 1991 and 2014 (the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine), security sector governance in Ukraine deteriorated. I am talking mainly about the military here, because that's the area of my expertise. But the democratic civilian control of security services in Ukraine is a whole separate story, and that story is also not very bright.

2014-2022

When the war started in 2014, Ukraine had a military with no clear sense of threat perception; no relevant, up-to-date expertise in managing the types of threat that Ukraine was facing, and very low social prestige for serving in the military.

The Ukrainian Government in the spring of 2014 was struggling to effectively mobilize the military and in face of this challenge, approved the use of so-called volunteer battalions – the pro-governmental militias. Very soon Kyiv understood that these militias posed a threat to democracy and civilian control, even though they helped to fill some voids in the frontline in the first months of the war.

Among some of the SSG successes is Kyiv's attempt to put these volunteer militias under civilian control. It was not an easy process, and it was not a 100% success. However, as of February 2022, Ukraine managed to develop a reliable system of territorial defence battalions within the chain of command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, effectively placing reserve forces and volunteers within the system of civilian control, with President Zelensky as the Supreme Commander in Chief, at the top of the hierarchy. So that's one of the successes.

However, other SSG challenges remain. For example, the lack of transparency in defence procurement has never been remedied, even though this problem persisted through the entire history of Ukraine

and was brought to Ukrainian attention by multiple Western partners.

Also, civilian control of the military, and specifically the relationship between the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence, remain dependent on the personalities that are in the leadership positions in the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence. Pretty recently, President Zelensky separated the roles of the Chief of General Staff and Commander in Chief, contributing to strengthening civilian control of the military, but the changes are not institutionalised yet and depend on the personal match between the Chief of the General Staff, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Minister of Defence. This system is not sustainable. It's good for now, but it's not an institutional change that really helps Ukraine in the long-term perspective.

Looking forwards: the question of corruption

Among the persistent challenges of SSG in Ukraine is, of course, the corruption that relates to the lack of transparency in defence procurement. Ukraine is now at war, and in the two years that preceded the war, the Ministry of Defence failed to effectively place the state defence order to Ukrainian arms manufacturers, which means that the country, which can produce its own arms, was not able to manage the budgets effectively. And this is an existential issue for Ukraine now.

For a long time, defence procurement and manufacturers had very close relationships and tenders were tailored to certain manufacturers, leaving other manufacturers aside. The issue is not buying weapons. It's an issue of investing funds into developing promising and reliable systems and that has not been done because of corruption. The Ministry of Defence and the General Staff must be separated from the defence manufacturing process, but this has not been done so far.

Ukraine has a law that regulates defence procurement and state defence order. However, the Ministry of Defence (as well as the Ministry of Strategic Industries) did not develop the necessary instruments to make that law work, contributing to the ineffective defence procurement. In particular, they failed to provide an exhaustive list of all defence manufacturers, as the law requires. That's exactly the contribution into a more transparent tender system that is needed. This is still in development. Looking forwards, Ukraine has to finish the reform of defence procurement and finish that work on transparency, developing an exhaustive list of weapons manufacturers and also reduce the secret portion of the state defence order.

What needs to happen now?

In terms of preparation, I have to say that Ukraine does not have the privilege of planning post-victory activities. On the other hand, that's exactly what has to be done at the moment. The first step, which is extremely important, is risk assessment. It's not what to do, but first what to avoid.

At the moment, I am not sure that among Ukrainian actors, including civil society organizations, there is a systematic outlook of what are the risks to Ukrainian SSG in case of a prolonged war and/or Ukraine's victory. I want to be very clear that I'm not saying that there is no expertise or no foresight, it is just because of the war, there is no resource to undertake a systematic effort that comprehensively covers post-war SSG risks. To conclude, the first thing that has to be done is extensive risk assessment by local actors - both governmental and civil society actors.

Radmila Šekerinska: 'Accountability, transparency and professionalism'

Radmila Šekerinska

Former Prime Minister and Defence Minister, North Macedonia

I have six key observations based on the Macedonian case and some other examples in the region, predominantly from the former Yugoslavia. The Ukrainian experience and the general trends discussed by Sarah are deeply familiar to the experiences that we have gone through with or without a crisis: the relationship within the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff; the concerns about procurement and accountability; the fact that the military is apolitical, but that doesn't mean that they cannot create a crisis, even when they don't choose to create a crisis.

Multiple transitions, multiple traps

Firstly, the multiple transitions that we are experiencing or have gone through have created multiple traps and this is very much the case with Ukraine too. Macedonia had to go through a simultaneous transition between socialism into capitalism, from an authoritarian one-party system to a multi-party system, from clientelism into full-scale corruption, from belonging to a federation into being an independent state, from war to peace and on top of it all, from a system of a – declining but controlled – status quo to a very much chaotic freedom.

All these multiple transitions have created multiple traps, especially for pro-reformers. We have made tragic mistakes, underestimating some of the threats. One of the traps was that we postponed security sector reform, especially security services like intelligence agencies and counterintelligence.

We postponed them, especially after becoming an independent country, because we underestimated their power to create problems, to remain invisible but to undermine reforms. This is why lustration and vetting should be a part of the package, but they have to be done extremely carefully with a pre-planned programme. For instance, people who do possess sensitive information and who can make weapons be readily available cannot just be cut off at short notice. This is a program that requires a lot of give and take. But I do believe it's essential not to neglect it.

Crisis-driven reforms

The second point is that reforms of the security sectors have always been crisis-driven. I have never experienced any reform which was not provoked and dictated by a crisis. The first were the Yugoslav Wars. The second, in the case of Macedonia, was the attempted assassination of our president back in 1995 - another failed reform. Then we had the interethnic conflict in 2001. This provoked probably the deepest reform of the security services.

After that reform, we discovered that our security services had been phone tapping almost 2% of the population illegally. All of this has a clear indication that we need to engage in reforms not when the time is right, but as soon as possible. Some of our early reforms were unsuccessful because the EU/NATO was not practically present in our region at that time. We didn't have the contacts, we didn't have the support, we didn't have the know-how. So, I would suggest that even with security sector reforms, you engage closely with the EU.

That said, don't ask for EU 'pre-formatted' reforms, but lead them yourselves; otherwise, they might become too technical. They can become too bureaucratic and frankly EU support drive might weaken and become inconsistent. Keep the domestic impetus and focus for reform.

Substantial, not technical

The third message is that these reforms have technical elements, but they can never be successful if you see them as a technical process. If you see them as a technical process, you will depend too much not on experts, but on the people within the services, and they will resist change. So, focus on your political goals in terms of oversight, in terms of accountability, and push a bit.

Avoiding institutional reshuffles

The fourth message is a gentle reminder. Very often, when you ask for a certain kind of reform, what you will get as a proposal is a reshuffle of institutions. I have seen so many of these, and none have worked. Attempts to place one director into another institution, to separate them, merge them in several years, each time with the promise that this reform would solve the problem, is an old trick. I have seen the same culture, the same people, almost the same behaviour, just restructured and rearranged. So be aware of this smokescreen and stick to your policy outcomes. Stick to your policy goals. Focus on how all this change will result in real life change.

Diversity is key

The fifth issue is that in diverse countries like Macedonia, which was diverse from an ethnic, linguistic, and religious standpoint, you have to work on replicating this diversity within your security structure, otherwise it will backfire. It will always be a soft spot. In the 90s, diversity was a rhetorical exercise. It wasn't until 2001 and the interethnic conflict that we really started working on creating diversity. Many people within the security sector have seen diversity as a risk to security, and I'm sure that Ukraine might also look at it this way, but you will have to find the right balance and the right people to counter the threat.

Accountability, transparency, professionalism

The sixth comment that I wanted to make is very much about accountability, transparency and professionalism. Accountability is very often mentioned whenever you talk about security services, whenever you talk about procurement, you mention transparency, but it's much easier said than done. For many politicians, the clientelist schemes that existed in communism can be very useful today, so parting from these experiences is painful and many people, even in the political realm, will oppose it. Lack of professionalism is also usually associated with this clientelism, and in our case we paid dearly. Indeed, this lack of professionalism in the security services was ultimately very deadly, both during the political crisis in 2015 but also, even recently, when we have discovered that the government has given citizenship to an individual originally from Ukraine but with Russian ties, who is blacklisted by the US. This has happened to a government that is very pro-Western and very pro-NATO. If you don't have serious professionals in the security services, it will lead to tragic mistakes.

Q&A discussion: assessing downstream risk

Does the Russian war on Ukraine offer a chance to implement a democratic, civilian-led SSR agenda, not only in Ukraine itself but across the wider region?

Sarah Detzner: I do think there's an opportunity. This is because it's become very clear that the Russian threat is not necessarily limited. But setting that aside, this is a great time for preparation - a moment of opportunity is great, but only if the pieces are in place to seize it.

And the moment of opportunity is not going to look the same in every country. Maybe we're there in Armenia, maybe we aren't. But, in some ways, it's better if you have the time now to be building civil society coalitions and a unique part of the moment where there is external threat is that you're probably going to get more support and more opportunities for dialogue with the security services, than you might otherwise have. And that's not just because of the threat, but I think a very interesting thing that's happening now, which is very important to emphasize, is that Ukraine did far better than was generally expected by people who were not following closely, but also that Russia did far worse.

It's pretty clear that some of Russian weakness in this conflict and possibly others is directly coming from failures of security sector governance and corruption. This has got to be on the minds of everyone in the region, especially every military person who is watching this happen. Now is the opportunity before the opportunity; this is the time to get draft legislation in place, to get everybody in dialogue about what reforms are priorities.

What role does civilian monitoring capacity need to play in effective SSR?

Sarah Detzner: The failure to train civilians is a deficiency we've seen in successive cases – failure to create capacity for monitoring and oversight in parliamentary structures and official civilian structures. There's often an appetite from the advising side and from the donor side to just focus on military forces. But there are consequences to that imbalance and the mistake gets made repeatedly. I hope that we can collectively change practice to focus on developing that civilian capability.

Polina Beliakova: The cooperation between civil society and the Ministry of Defence has to be institutionalized. There was an initiative of a Civilian Council within the Ministry of Defence under previous ministers of defence (S. Poltorak, A. Zahorodniuk), but that Council was dismissed by Minister of Defence, Gen. Andriy Taran. This rolled the process of reform of civilian control several years back. The presence of civil society activists within the Ministry of Defence to monitor the activities of the ministry, if re-established, would contribute to strengthening of civilian control in the future.

Could the panel say more, especially responding to Polina's remarks on defence procurement, about the corruption risks facing Ukraine? And how these might be overcome?

Sarah Detzner: This is the medium-term risk. Whether or not these corrupt networks were created intentionally, they will be weaponized. When you're in trouble, you tend to lean on what you're good at and corrupt networks is what Russia is good at. Transitioning away from corrupt networks needs to be prioritised. It would be very easy to say, OK, we're still getting the parts for weapons through the black-market channels. We have other things to worry about. But it should be a priority to shift away from this by whatever means necessary, because if the networks are deepened, they'll just be an on-going source of potential danger. This risk is only going to grow the longer the conflict goes on.

Radmila Šekerinska: We did not have the experience of Croatia and Serbia when it comes to full scale war with lots of money involved. But I think this has to be mentioned while discussing the security services. In both countries, we saw increases of organized crime that was, in practical terms, financed after the wars with money through defence procurement or lack of defence procurement. These groups had access to weapons during and after the conflicts.

In our case, streamlining defence procurement and introducing transparency in defence spending was my priority. And, the results were visible - we have become, in less than three years, the second best assessed country in Central and Eastern Europe by Transparency International. At a national level, the Ministry of Defence was assessed as the most transparent institution in the country for 3 three consecutive years. One doesn't often associate defence with transparency: usually, these are the least transparent institutions. But, for me it was clear that transparent procurements are a must if we want to increase defence spending and sustain it.

Otherwise, if you start talking to your citizens facing difficult economic situation, telling them that you need to spend 2% of GDP because of your NATO membership and that you need to hide all the relevant information, support for NATO would diminish incredibly. But if you're able to tell them the money is increasing, but explain the reasons and the procedures you are using, how it is improving the military and how accountable the government is by making all the information available to the public, NGO's, civil society and the media, you can at least fight some of the hybrid attacks that are bound to happen. If you get it right, you become more resilient and it creates more confidence in the security services.

Could Russia potential weaponize corruption in the Ukrainian military industrial complex?

Polina Beliakova: When it comes to arms manufacturing and defence procurement, its troubles are deeply rooted in Soviet legacies as well. Because the Soviet authorities did not trust people who worked in the factories, especially in the regions other than Russia, they created a cycle of defence manufacturing that intentionally spread the different manufacturers across the Soviet republics that later became independent states when the Soviet Union collapsed. There was a very low chance that the cycle of production could have evolved without dragging the tradition of corruption with it. So, if Russia had to plant an extra seed of corruption on top of what was already inherited with institutional design, it was planted into a very fertile soil that did not require any strategic planning whatsoever. If there was a force multiplier, it was inherited from the Soviet legacies of cycle of production spread across different Soviet republics. And this whole system become deeply corrupt when the states became independent.

What role do external actors (in the form of allies) and external threats (such as Russia) play in catalyzing SSR?

Polina Beliakova: It is very important that external partners (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, NATO) apply pressure in the same direction as local actors and this pressure has to be consistent. Western partners cannot appear when the problems begin, needing to get up to speed while attempting to course correct. The presence has to be consistent. The expertise in Ukrainian SSG on the side of the external partners has to be transmitted from the previous generations of advisors and experts to the next generations of Western advisors and experts, if Western partners want Ukrainian SSG reforms to be consistent.

My research specifically focusing on Ukraine shows that external threat is not enough to spark reform. Judging by the statements of then interim president, Oleksandr Turchynov, in the spring of 2014 the Ukrainian government recognized that the threat was originating in Russia. However, this external threat was manifesting in sub-conventional forms such as non-uniformed individuals of unknown origin taking over the government buildings in Eastern Ukraine. Until the Russian threat started to

manifest as a conventional external threat: the use of heavy artillery, direct presence of Russian troops on Ukrainian soil, it was not enough to galvanize the reforms. So **external threat might be a condition for reform, but alone is not sufficient.**

Radmila Šekerinska: Ultimately, we have had a very good experience. I don't mind when the reform is seen as ticking a box for the EU or NATO if it works. If it turns into a technical exercise, avoiding substance, that's where the problems ensue. But in most cases, we have had a really good experience with advice when the international community, be it USA, EU or NATO, when they're really focused. After 2001, we received really excellent advice and there was a sustained effort to support cohesion in the country and reform in the security services. It can't last forever – so, seize it while it is available and focused.

How should we take advantage of opportunities when they are presented, while also recognising that effective SSR is a long-term process?

Radmila Šekerinska: Timing is really essential. Apart from what is happening on the frontline, you usually have cohesion within society during times of conflict. You can have different political views, different extremes, but generally the country is more united during the crisis, even if it's not just war, than afterwards if you leave too long a period for reform.

For example, we had a series of protests and violence in Parliament back in 2015 and 2016, and we managed to prevail because there was a very united front of political parties who were pro-reform but also civil society activists. This was a very difficult coalition. As someone who has a very strong political party background, but also someone who has spent hours discussing with activists and civil society, I know how draining this experience can be, and sometimes you end up discussing 2 + 2 for hours. But the '4' as a result is much more stable if you go through the exercise of consultation and confidence building. This gave us as a government a much greater political capital than just the numbers and the votes. The appetite for reform among us was very high because we believed that we were one and the same.

Then it transpires your united front is not so united and the same thing happens in civil society, but especially within the political parties, you see different shades of grey. Civil society and political parties sometimes make the typical mistake of looking at the other as one entity.

So, we start this mistrust, distrusting the politicians, or we start distrusting the activists. We don't see that there are actually different groups within that subgroup. So the reforms that we have initiated immediately after the crisis were much deeper, meaningful and substantial because we have started them as soon as the crises was over.

For example, today North Macedonia has a relatively solid system of checks and balances when it comes to phone tapping, supervision of intelligence agencies, etc. But everything else that we have allowed somehow to be delayed, has stalled. Right now, the link between civil society and pro-reform parties is not so strong and sometimes you end up mistrusting each other even more. This disappointment creates a political cancer within society because the confidence in the democratic system is challenged.

We seized some of the opportunities but we also wasted a number of them. If we end up in yet another political turmoil, it will be because we have delayed some of the reforms, not because we have rushed into them.

Polina Beliakova: Reforms also take time because institutions are slow and their internal resistance to change is very high. In Ukraine, Soviet legacies and the conservative nature of the military as an

institution are impediments to reform. The interaction of these two factors, Soviet legacies and military conservatism, prevented reforms in the Ukrainian military, especially in relation to professional military education – even when the origin of the threat was clearly located as external and even when the threat clearly manifested itself on the ground.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, there has been a gradual decrease of Soviet presences in the Ukrainian military. For the first time since Ukrainian independence, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian military is a general who is not a product of Soviet education. Zaluzhnyi was not educated in Soviet military academies, but everyone before him was. Eradicating the Soviet legacies is one of the reasons why reforming professional military education is a crucial issue.

The military was most resistant to reforming the professional military education and even the external threat did not convince them to implement major reforms. The problem with this particular reform is that while Western resources were successful at increasing the immediate combat readiness of frontline troops, these trained cadre later left the military. The study of why soldiers leave the Armed Forces of Ukraine, conducted to the one of the most reputable Ukrainian foundations, Come Back Alive (Ukr: *Povernys' Zhyvym*), cited the lack of professionalism and especially the lack of professional military education as one of the key reasons. So, it's not just the education reform failing because of the resistance from within. It's a systemic issue of existential importance for the Ukrainian military right now.

The bottom line is that the resistance within institutions is real. It's present. Unfortunately, it is not mitigated by the external nature of the threat, and the slow-rolling of one reform also undermines the effectiveness of multiple directions of reforms in Ukrainian SSG.

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PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform |
@Peace_Rep_ | peacerep@ed.ac.uk

University of Edinburgh
School of Law
Old College
South Bridge
EH8 9YL

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Conflict and Civiness Research Group
LSE IDEAS
The London School of Economics
and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

lse.ac.uk/ideas

The information in this brochure can be made available in alternative formats, on request. Please contact: ideas.crp@lse.ac.uk

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