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Ukraine

Strength comes from within

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Only by developing a publicly-owned defence infrastructure, socialising critical infrastructure, and managing Ukraine's resources for the benefit of current and future generations can we hope to protect our freedom. People ought to have a stake in the country's future, and respect for human dignity must be at the core of a society that asks its members to risk their lives for it.

Unfortunately, nothing like this can be seen in Zelensky's 'victory plan', which has finally been revealed to the nation. On the contrary, the plan draws attention for its disproportionate reliance on the West. In this way a shift is quite remarkable, from earlier emotional appeals to solidarity to luring support with access to our natural resources and promising to outsource our troops for the EU's security. As far as this vision is from our dearest dreams about re-joining "the European family", this might be a sober approach, given pervasive hypocrisy in international politics. But what feels even more humiliating is being turned down almost immediately. While previously, relentless pressure—bordering on intrusiveness—achieved the unimaginable, today's shifting political environment signals that those limits have been reached.

This dependence on external actors to solve our problems is symptomatic of the chosen political course, which has taken our own people for granted and resulted in barely concealed internal fragility. "Sotsialnyi Rukh" demands a sincere dialogue with society on how we arrived here and what can realistically be expected. Militant rhetoric from the government raises expectations, but failure to act on them by uniting the entire society and mobilising all resources for defence only deepens distrust and disappointment.

After 970 days of war at the time of writing, tens of thousands dead, hundreds of thousands wounded, and millions displaced, the toll is immense. Few families remain untouched by this devastation. Earlier hopes, sparked by a successful offensive in Russia's Kursk oblast, have given way to anxiety and uncertainty with a slow retreat in the East. Russian forces threaten to capture Pokrovsk, potentially cutting off the main source of coking coal and crippling our metallurgical industry. Exhausted soldiers, often fighting in understaffed units without proper rest and recuperation, are outraged by the government's plans to allow legally buying an exemption, at least temporarily, from military service and are demanding clear service durations. Some can no longer bear it—nearly 30,000 cases of AWOL have been registered in the first six months of 2024, according to the media.

The question remains open: who will replace those on the frontlines? Aware of the conditions in the army, civilians no longer queue at draft stations but actively evade mobilisation. Reported cases of draft dodging have tripled since 2023, and polls consistently show that nearly half of respondents view this reasonable. Appeals to civic duty ring hollow when the state openly declares that it owes nothing to its citizens - with the minister of social policy Oksana Zholnovich stating that "We need to break everything that is social today and simply reformat from scratch the new social contract about social policy in our state." and the chair of the social policy stating "we are not a ministry of payment, Ukrainians should be more self-sufficient and less rely on the state". The brutality and impunity of draft officers, who press-gang men off the streets, only exacerbate the issue. Over 1,600 complaints have been filed with the Ombudsman in 2024, but the results are yet to be seen. Meanwhile, reports from the battlefield, which describe how unmotivated, untrained, and even unfit recruits, endanger the rest, make the result of increasing coercion questionable.

The broader picture suggests a deliberate choice by the ruling elites to shift the burden of resisting aggression onto ordinary people. Skyrocketing prices, meagre wages, and social austerity go hand in hand with restricted collective bargaining, increased taxes on low- and middle-income earners, and continued corruption—even in defence matters. What makes this worse is the political class's preference to disregard the chance for unprecedented unity we all

experienced once the invasion began. Instead they opt for sowing divisions by exploiting fears of traumatised society and fueling suspicion by constantly singling out new internal enemies: Russian speakers, “victims of colonial thinking”, followers of the Moscow priests, collaborators, Kremlin agents, or queer. Ukrainians on the front are pointed to the ungrateful in the rear, who in turn should blame those “comfortably” sitting abroad.

This brings us back to the President’s ‘victory plan,’ which, despite its emphasis on strength, only exposes our weaknesses. Some argue this may be Zelensky’s final ultimatum to the West—destined for rejection—before a complete turn-around toward a forced compromise with the enemy. It is not entirely without grounds, as polls suggest that more than half of the population would be willing to negotiate or freeze the conflict if Western support is withdrawn.

But what are the chances that a deal with Russia would lead to sustainable, let alone just, peace? Even assuming Putin is willing to negotiate in good faith, which is not given, such talks might be prone to failure, result in a stillborn deal, or be a temporary pause before the fighting resumes.

Recognition of the annexation of occupied territories is obviously out of the question. For Ukrainians, they remain occupied, and there is no way to cushion that reality. Leaving Ukraine without security guarantees especially when Russia keeps investing in their military strength would be an open invitation for renewed aggression. In Ukrainian society, 45% see unjust peace as a betrayal of fallen compatriots, and 49% would take the streets to protest the compromise. The only deal with a chance of being supported, by a slight margin, includes de-occupation of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, combined with NATO and EU memberships.

On the other hand, nothing short of capitulation and submission seems to fulfil the Kremlin’s objectives in this war of aggression, which was reiterated by Putin himself before the BRICS summit in Kazan. Moreover, the recently adopted three-year budget plan in Russia ramps up military spending to a record high. Therefore, the greatest mistake would be to pit diplomatic efforts against military support. Without meaningful solidarity, Ukraine and its people will fall—if not now, then later.

While there are no easy or ready-made solutions, honesty is essential for preparedness. Should a ceasefire occur, it may not last long, but every day it does must be used to strengthen our society’s resilience. Exposing our ecosystem, already weakened by years of predatory exploitation and Russian eco-terrorism, to foreign investors is not the answer. Inequality, alienation, and disenfranchisement will not bring us resilience. The invisible hand of the market—commodifying everything, plagued by short-termism and profiteering—will not make us stronger.

The root of our problems is that too often, the interest of those whose invisible work actually keeps the country running has been ignored. Hopefully, this time, we’ve learned the lesson. This is why “Sotsialnyi Rukh” publicly declares our readiness to cooperate with other forces to build a political movement that ensures the voice of the people is heard in the corridors of power. As soon as the elections are held, they may decide our destiny for years to come.

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