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UKRAINE: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

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SUMMARY

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has been in the process of international political and economic integration. The swift privatisation and economic liberalisation that has occurred within Ukraine has created stark income inequalities, and women have been particularly impoverished and politically excluded; a contrast to the policies that were implemented by the Soviet Union. Because of rising inequalities, and anger with a seemingly corrupt political system, two coloured revolutions have recently erupted in Ukraine. A drawn out war in the East of the country, the Donbass conflict, has been the result of these, as separatist's battle government forces. The further decimation of social services due to austerity measures, and the increased militarisation of society, has further entrenched women's economic and political exclusion, and this situational analysis explores the situation for Ukrainian women.

STRENGTH OF GENDER PROVISIONS

Minsk Agreement I - 2014

	0 None	1 Weakest	2	3	4	5 Strongest
Human Rights	✓					
Development	✓					
Post-Conflict Issues	✓					
Violence Against Women	✓					
Participation	✓					
General	✓					

Minsk Agreement II - 2015

	0 None	1 Weakest	2	3	4	5 Strongest
Human Rights	✓					
Development	✓					
Post-Conflict Issues	✓					
Violence Against Women	✓					
Participation	✓					
General	✓					

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: KEY CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

CONSTRAINTS

1. Widespread political corruption
2. Austerity measures reducing social services, jobs and subsidies
3. Militarisation of society

ENABLERS

1. Historically high female political representation
2. Women's involvement in military forces
3. Strong women's civil society



Women have been almost invisible during each of the Minsk Agreement talks... there are no sections in the Minsk I or II Agreements that address any issues relating to gender, or concerns of women.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Ukraine has experienced a highly unstable political environment throughout the start of the twenty-first century. The Orange Revolution began in November 2004 when the fraudulent election results of that year were announced, and popular protests lasted till the re-vote of the second round Presidential elections on 27 December 2004 (Marples and Mills 2015: 35). In the decade following the Orange Revolution, the economic situation in Ukraine has worsened (Hrycak and Rewakowicz 2009: 312-313). The country had to seek external support for its faltering economy, either from the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) - which would most likely require a 'Greece-style' austerity programme - or from Russia (Davis 2016: 167, 179). The Ukrainian government, led by President Yanukovich, looked to reject European economic support in favour of Russian assistance, and the 'Euromaidan' protest movement that swept the country in late 2013 was sparked (Davis 2016: 179). The subsequent political instability, along with armed insurgents, resulted in the creation of the self-declared republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, and the annexation of Crimea by Russia (Davis 2016: 179).

Many of the separatist forces in the Donbass region (referring to the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk) have origins in the Novorossiia movement, which sought to establish the historical 'New Russia' over the current area of Ukraine. These forces took the political opportunity presented to them by the significant weakening of the incumbent political party in the Donbass, the Party of Regions (PoR), following the Euromaidan protests (Matsuzato 2017: 175, 190). The separatist leaders moved into the political and security vacuum created by the collapse of Yanukovich's presidency and his PoR party, along with the paralysis of the provisional government in February 2014 (ICG 2016: 6).

The ongoing Donbass War has had wide-ranging ramifications for Ukraine, and disproportionately affected Ukrainian women. One of the effects of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, in the context of

the emergence of an independent Ukraine following centuries of colonisation, has been the rapidly increasing sense of nationalism in the country. Indeed, the number of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine has fallen to 26.6 per cent, and 78.7 per cent of Jewish people have also left the country, following the end of the Soviet Union (Burds 2008: 698-699). As nationalism grips Ukraine, women are becoming the subject of patriarchal identity politics, where they are seen as the embodiment of cultural and traditional values (Korac 2006: 510, 513). This has led to social discrimination such as the 'Moskalka' phenomenon, where an ethnic Ukrainian woman may be ostracised from her membership in a Ukrainian community because of suspected collaboration with Russians – whether that be economically, romantically, or otherwise (Burds 2008: 699). Finally, the outburst of nationalist sentiment has also allowed Russian President Vladimir Putin to justify annexing Crimea under the pretext of 'protecting Russians abroad' from supposed 'fascist' Ukrainians (Phillips 2014: 414). This situational analysis will consider what efforts have been made to achieve peace in this conflict, and what role (if any) women have had in these peace processes.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Since the Donbass War began, more than 10,000 Ukrainians have been killed and some 1.9 million have been forced to flee their homes and communities (Taylor and Gienger 2017), with a clear majority of those displaced being women, children and the elderly (Koriukalov 2014: 39). Peace processes between international actors, Ukraine, Russia, and the People's Republics of Luhansk (LPR) and Donetsk (DPR) have been largely unsuccessful. The Minsk I agreements of September 2014 collapsed within four months, and the Minsk II agreements of February 2015 continues to be very fragile with frequent fighting since its accord (Gast 2017). Minsk talks have resumed as of 18 October 2017, with the trilateral contact group consisting of representatives from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Russia and Ukraine.

Women have been almost invisible during each of the Minsk peace talks, with the exception of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and only 15 per cent of monitors in the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE are women (Gast 2017). Further, the trilateral contact group is heavily male dominated. Whilst the Special Monitoring Mission has employed gender advisors and established gender focal points in the field, a gender perspective must be mainstreamed in all activities of the mission and thus more women should be included.

The Ukraine National Action Plan (NAP), which was launched on 24 February 2016, commits to increasing women's participation in peacebuilding and peacekeeping, including in peace operations, military-civil administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, monitoring missions and international security organisations, and security and defence sectors (Tasks 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5) (AYC et al. 2017). However, the realisation of these goals has not yet been forthcoming, and women's organisations have found it difficult to meaningfully affect the peace process. Indeed, the stigmatisation of organisations working for dialogue and cooperation is another obstacle to women's participation in peace efforts. Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are necessary to allow civil society to play its part in constructive social change (AYC et al. 2017).

As will be discussed, one of the biggest inhibitors to women's participation in the peace process is the lack of enjoyment of socio-economic rights. If women lack the economic resources to ensure that they are not struggling to feed themselves and their families, then they will face great difficulty in being active participants in Ukraine's political life and peace efforts (AYC et al. 2017).

There are no sections in the Minsk I or II agreements that address any issues relating to gender, or concerns of women – there is no specific mention of gender or women. Rather, this document appears to be purely a ceasefire agreement, without any application of a gender-inclusive framework, and instead focuses on the conduct of the patriarchal military structures (Minsk Agreement 2014).

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Historically, the share of women in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic reached 30 per cent (in 1985, 157 women were elected to the Ukrainian parliament) (UWF 2011). However, since independence, the number of women participating at the highest level in Ukrainian politics has dwindled significantly. Women now have 52 of 423 seats in the Verkhovna Rada, representing 12.3 per cent (IPUD 2017), and currently in the Cabinet only 3 of 24 Ministers are women.

Despite affirmative actions taken to introduce the 30 per cent gender quotas in electoral processes, these norms can be ignored in practice, as there are no mandated sanctions for non-compliance (The World Bank 2016: 10). As such, women's political empowerment is rated at the 0.098 level in the Global Gender Gap Index, where a score of 1 represents full equality with men, ranking

Ukraine 107th of 144 countries. The Index considers the ratio of women with seats in parliament and in the ministry to men, and the ratio of the number of years with a female head of state versus that of a male candidate (GGG 2016). Women are, however, better represented in local government in Ukraine. Women comprise 12 per cent of regional councillors, 23 per cent of district councillors, 28 per cent of city councillors, and 50 per cent of village councillors (UNOHCHR 2014). Indeed, women also comprise 76.8 per cent of all public servants; however, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, with only 13.5 per cent of women among the higher decision-making positions (UNW 2014). There are a myriad of socio-economic factors that may explain this lack of equal political participation, many of which will be considered below. Two major reasons for this lack of participation have been found through interviews in-country. The first is that many Ukrainians appear to not associate women with political life, and 64 per cent of people interviewed in a study agreed that family duties (obligated to women) do not allow women time to run for political positions (NDI 2016). Secondly, all interviewees in another study singled out the predatory presence of the predominantly male oligarchy as the most significant obstacle to a more inclusive political system (WILPF 2014).

The ongoing conflict in the Donbass region has had devastating consequences for the socio-political-economic progression of women across Ukraine, and for women who have been more immediately involved in the war. There are approximately 500 women actively serving in combat roles in the zone of hostilities for the Ukrainian National Guard, approximately 0.023 per cent of all combatants (Grytsenko, Kvit and Martsenyuk 2016) - which is a lower spectrum of participation as compared to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and partner nations (Wittwer 2017). However, when women are injured during combat duties, they are often not entitled to the same health benefits enjoyed by their male colleagues under similar circumstances. Widespread gender-based violence (GBV) has also been reported in the Donbass region, committed by both separatist and Ukrainian forces. Illegal detention sites have been suggested to be one of the more prevalent sites of GBV in and around the conflict zone, where there is a high prevalence of torture and GBV against women detained in these facilities (JPD 2017).

Conservative Ukrainian governments have arguably pushed women back to their 'purely womanly mission' in the home as a wife and a mother.

Many women have been involved in unregulated, 'off-the-books' pursuits of gaining extra money in a context of widespread poverty.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Following the fall of communism, in the early 2000s nationalist and conservative Ukrainian governments arguably pushed women back to their 'purely womanly mission' (Phillips 2005: 258), in the home as a wife and a mother (Hrycak 2005: 69). The descaling of the Soviet state and the rapid decline in light-manufacturing enterprises meant that women were disproportionately left unemployed (Hrycak 2001: 147). Indeed, between 1990 and 1999, official employment declined by about one third overall (Williams and Round 2008: 336). National gender mechanisms have been significantly weakened (UNECE 2014: 11) and women's political representation drastically declined to just 3 per cent of women in the Ukrainian national legislature in the first election after the end of communism (Hrycak 2005: 74). Recently, this has slightly improved to 12.3 per cent after the 2014 elections, but ultimately political participation remains poor.

International actors (governments, the United Nations, and financial institutions) promoted the dismantling of the social safety net in Ukraine, under the pretence of instilling 'initiative' in these 'newly-liberated' citizens (Phillips 2005: 257). Instead, the privatisation of state-owned assets was mostly acquired by the oligarchic elite or foreign businesses with criminal links (Yurchenko 2012: 138). The new capitalist economy imposed a gender order over Ukrainian society. The aggressive, patriarchal masculinity that operated in the market, secured private property, and explored liberal opportunities, was celebrated (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2012: 56); whilst women had to accept the burdens of the destruction of the welfare system, increased costs of social services, and the commercialisation of education, and were confined to their traditional roles as a housewife, as envisioned by Perestroika (Zhurzenko 2001: 37).

This transition to a capitalist market-based economy has increased the inequality divide. By 2012, 15.2 per cent of people were living in absolute poverty, and 31.7 per cent in relative poverty; whilst at the same time, the number of millionaires and billionaires in Ukraine dramatically increased, with the top 100 richest people in the country possessing USD 83.07 billion (Yurchenko 2012: 125).

The acceptance of austerity policies instituted by the IMF and EU in exchange for loans has resulted in further cuts in government spending towards human development and social policies in Ukraine (The World Bank 2016: 10). The IMF has recently approved a USD 17.5 billion bailout program for Ukraine, in exchange for the adoption of economic reforms and tackling corruption (RadioFreeEurope 2017), which includes the cancellation of fuel subsidies, and to reduce spending on areas such as health, education and social well-being. These decentralisation reforms may negatively impact women in two key respects; firstly, as women and their families tend to be the primary beneficiaries of pro-social spending, and, secondly, because women tend to be employed in the sectors where job cuts have taken place (Cleary 2016: 14).

Indeed, 165,000 civil service jobs were cut in Ukraine during 2014-2015 in accordance with IMF demands, with further downsizing planned. As women represent more than 75 per cent of the civil service, in non-managerial positions, they are disproportionately affected by these job losses. Around this same period, approximately 900 schools were closed, budgetary responsibility for funding education, healthcare and science were transferred to poorly funded local government, and childcare assistance before the age of three was abolished. These reforms are relatively more damaging to women, as compared to men, in Ukraine.

Recent rounds of economic restructuring have seen gas subsidies removed (Interfax-Ukraine 2017), the closure of 'small schools,' lowering the limit on the number of hospital beds per ten thousand residents to 60 from 80, and downsized hospital staff (Poroshenko 2016). Dealt with in turn, the IMF requested that energy prices for Ukraine be in-sync with world market prices, leading to higher prices for Ukrainian households. Energy consumption has thus decreased by 30 per cent, and heating bills are often five to six times higher than in 2011 (AYC et al. 2017). The policy of cutting jobs in health, education and social services disproportionately affects women in Ukraine, who, pre-conflict, constituted up to 80 per cent of the total number of employees. Compared to 2011, approximately 3,500 schools have been closed in Ukraine, and USD 4 billion has been cut from educational spending in the same period (AYC et al. 2017).

To address the shrinking of opportunities to participate in the formal economy for the entire citizenry, a thriving underground market has bloomed. Over 90 per cent of households in Ukraine use income sources outside of the formal sphere (Williams and Round 2008: 338). Many women have been closely involved in this type of unregulated, 'off-the-books' pursuit of gaining extra money in a context of widespread poverty. Indeed, a type of trade reportedly popular is that of the 'shuttle trade', a semi-legal cross-border trade that plays a significant part in the informal economy of Ukraine.

Women situated in Ukraine travel across borders to neighbouring countries where cheap goods are bought, and then transported to be sold in one of the local Ukrainian markets (Taraban 2002: 124).

Since the institution of the reforms discussed above, unemployment among young women in the formal economy has grown to 18.7 per cent (Magdyuk 2013: 9), and when they are employed, women tend to earn only 66 per cent of the salary of men in equal positions (GGG 2016). Evidently, there is a lack of a gender framework throughout the design and implementation of these reforms, and with no reference to gender equality (CEDAW 2017). Funding has been drastically cut to gender equality programmes, and regional budgets for these programmes have been cut in the measure of 25-50 per cent on average between 2008 and 2010, with further reductions ongoing (Koriukalov 2014).

As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, women are bearing a disproportionate burden of the negative effects flowing from Ukrainian economic reform. This is linked to the patriarchal social structures prevalent in Ukrainian society, and especially to the corrupt oligarch class. Rather than pragmatically targeting tax evasion and taxation policies, which would earn the government over USD 13 billion a year if handled effectively (Rudenko 2017), economic reforms and austerity measures instituted by the government at the insistence of the IMF and similar institutions have focused on pensions, agriculture, education, health and social services. To enable women to fully participate in Ukrainian society as the country rebuilds following the eventual end of the Donbass War, women must be given equal opportunities for socio-economic participation.

WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Since independence, the number of registered organisations devoted to women's issues in Ukraine has increased considerably, reaching more than 1200 by 2001 (Hrycak 2007: 211). Apparently, there is a proclivity for women to be involved in non-governmental activism in Ukraine, as it is seen as an extension of the care work associated with traditional gender roles (Hrycak 2007).

Presently, Ukrainian civil society more broadly is said to be behaving in a manner that is typical in the context of conflict, where many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are providing basic public services in the absence of government services. This has meant that only approximately four per cent of NGOs are able to have any focus on issues of governance and public policy-making (EU 2014). Indeed, Ukraine continually fails to meaningfully incorporate its civil society into legislation and policy creation (Cleary 2016: 17).

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Monash Gender, Peace & Security is a group of policy and community engaged scholars whose research is focused in the field of gender, peace and security. We seek to use our research to inform scholarly debate, policy development and implementation, public understanding about the gendered politics of armed conflict and the search for peace.

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