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Introduction to the Special Issue

Civil Society in Ukraine: Building on Euromaidan Legacy[1]

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Preface

The idea of this Special Issue appeared in early 2014, when the heat of the fire on Kyiv's Independence Square had not fully cooled down and when many civic activists and newborn volunteers had turned their ceaseless energy to yet another fire first in Crimea and then in Eastern Ukraine. The events that seemingly put the state of Ukraine on the brink of its very existence were evolving too fast, but civil society's response to them was no less prompt and adaptive. Volunteers and activists were trying on new roles each day as they were helping those escaping persecution, repression and hostilities, equipping and maintaining those who fought with weapons or joining their ranks, developing reform agenda and drafting legislative proposals. What seemed astounding back then, and still does today, was how those thousands of volunteers and millions of "ordinary citizens" who mobilized to support new civic initiatives took over the functions of the weak and nearly collapsed state eroded by corruption, nepotism, the neglect of its citizens and of the country's national interests. Challenging a post-Soviet monster disguised behind the mask of electoral democracy and market economy, citizens were bringing in a new social contract based on trust and solidarity on which a new state could be built. The speed of events and the scale of civil society engagement precluded any long-term comprehensive analysis, yet researchers' zeal to reflect upon what looked as a tectonic move in Ukraine's political and social development took over. At first, our idea was to co-author an article examining civil society's role in a post-Euromaidan Ukraine, but soon enough the task became too big. The initial

1 In the title of this Special Issue and introduction article, as well as throughout the contributions, we speak of "Euromaidan" to refer to the popular protests that took place in Ukraine in November 2013—February 2014. We use this trope as the most recognizable to the reader and for consistency across the articles only. We are aware that the term "Euromaidan" narrows down the understanding of the events to only one narrative. It is not our intention to automatically or collectively sign up to it.

idea thus evolved into producing an edited volume with different authors looking into their respective fields of civil society in Ukraine in order to grasp at least a small portion of change. We are grateful to many researchers in Ukraine and abroad who responded to our call for papers in May 2016 and who contributed their ideas to this Special Issue. Some of these ideas eventually turned into articles and we would like to give special thanks to those colleagues who bore with us through rounds of revisions till the very end of this journey. Their articles made this Special Issue happen. We are also grateful to the *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* for hosting this Special Issue and for supporting our initiative from the early stages through review and editing to the publication process. We would like to thank *UACES — the Academic Association for Contemporary European Studies*, *UESA — the Ukrainian European Studies Association* and the *Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in European Studies at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy* for their financial and logistical support in organizing the Final Conference of this project, which took place at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy on November 21, 2017, the fourth anniversary of the Euromaidan. We are also enormously grateful to all the participants of the Conference for their remarks, comments and questions. Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to the *Kyiv office of Baker McKenzie*, which has provided financial support to the publication of this Issue.

Introduction

The role of civil society in democratization — by performing "watchdog" functions over the government, promoting political participation, providing civic education and building trust among citizens — has been acknowledged and studied by scholars around the world. Within this ample scholarship, studies on the role of civil society in the democratization of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and, more narrowly, Ukraine, represent a separate strand. Claims about the weakness and, hence, impotence of civil society in Eastern Europe form a red line in this scholarship, to be addressed in detail below.

In Ukraine's case, the puzzle of a "weak" civil society has been challenged by the reality of the "three Maidans" or "three Revolutions": the Revolution on the Granite in 1990, the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Euromaidan, also referred to as the Revolution of Dignity, in 2013–2014. All of these were instances of civil society mobilization. However, the aftermaths of the Revolution on the Granite and the Orange Revolution demonstrated that, while Ukrainians proved to have the capacity to gather and protest when no one within the country or abroad expected them to, "the democratic *movements* rather appear[ed] to have been democratic *moments*"[2] (emphasis added), with corrupt regimes reinstating themselves shortly after. Thus, a number of scholars questioned Ukrainian civil society's ability "to finish a revolution"[3] beyond

2 Olga Onuch and Jerzy Onuch, *Revolutionary Moments: Protest, Politics and Art* (Warsaw; Kyiv: Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NaUKMA Press, 2011).

3 Orysia Lutsevych, *How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, Chatham House, Briefing Paper (January 2013), accessed October 17, 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0113bp_lutsevych.pdf; Nadia Diuk, "Finding Ukraine," *Journal of Democracy* 25.3 (2014).

gathering on squares, proclaiming manifestos and even overthrowing dictators in the absence of an agenda on what to do next.

The case of the Euromaidan is distinct from the previous two uprisings in a number of ways.[4] Arguably, one of its most prominent and conspicuous features was its "civic-ness" and the emergence of a new, value-based civil society in its own right. It is thus suggested that we understand the Euromaidan "not as a physical space but above all as values"—values of democracy, dignity (hence its other name: the Revolution of Dignity), political rights and freedoms, as well as the growing awareness of individual civic responsibility.[5] Moreover, scholars have emphasized the Euromaidan's crucial role in Ukrainian nation-building based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious cosmopolitanism and pluralism.[6] Others have also pointed at more controversial consequences of the events, such as further undermining of the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence[7] and the creation of a schism in society, with some societal groups viewing the Euromaidan and the post-Euromaidan developments "as another stage of their deprivation."[8]

Four years after the events of 2013–2014, the legacy of the Euromaidan is still to be researched and assessed. It is true that the environment in which this legacy exists and evolves is unparalleled to any other period of Ukraine's modern history: state-building and democratization in Ukraine occur alongside an armed conflict triggered by Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbas. It is also true that "[the] chain of events and political developments" after the success of the Euromaidan "[is] still transforming the country."[9]

A number of scholarly works have appeared in an attempt to assess the Euromaidan and, partially, its aftermath.[10] While some of them engage in explaining Ukraine's political transformation, the events leading up to the Euromaidan protests and Ukraine's foreign policy

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4 Taras Kuzio, "The Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives," *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 2 (2016); Serhii Kvit, "The Ideology of the Euromaidan," S*ocial, Health and Communication Studies Journal* 1.1 (2014).

5 Viktor Stepanenko, "Ukraine's Revolution as De-Institutionalization of the Post-Soviet Order," in *Ukraine after the Euromaidan: Challenges and Hopes*, ed. Viktor Stepanenko and Yarolsav Pylynskyi (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 29–46, 43.

6 Olga Onuch, "Who Were the Protesters?" *Journal of Democracy* 25.3 (2014); Kvit, "The Ideology of the Euromaidan."

7 Mikhail Minakov, *Corrupting Civil Society in post-Euromaidan Ukraine?* Carnegie Moscow Centre, April 11, 2015, http://carnegie.ru/commentary/59749.

8 Volodymyr Kulyk, "Ukrainian Nationalism Since the Outbreak of Euromaidan," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2014).

9 Dariya Orlova, "EuroMaidan: Mediated Protests, Rituals and Nation-in-the-Making," in *Media Events*, ed. Bianca Mitu et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 207–29.

10 Olga Bertelsen, ed. *Revolution and War in Contemporary Ukraine: The Challenge of Change* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2016): 317–52; David R. Marples, Frederick V. Mills, eds. *Ukraine's Euromaidan. Analyses of a Civil Revolution* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2015); Mikhail Minakov, *A Decisive Turn: Risks for Ukrainian Democracy after the Euromaidan*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 3, 2016; Viktor Stepanenko and Yarolsav Pylynskyi, eds. *Ukraine after the Euromaidan: Challenges and Hopes* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).

balancing between "the East" and "the West," few examine the evolution of civil society and its changing role in state-building and conflict transformation in the years since.[11] This Special Issue addresses this gap. Importantly, while the majority of early assessments mushroomed soon after the events, this Special Issue benefits from a larger timeframe and broader context, which may allow for critical reflections on the existing scholarship and useful generalizations. The timing of this collective investigation into the legacy of the Euromaidan is critical: the latest world monitor by CIVICUS reports a global trend towards restricting political and civic space and places Ukraine in the "obstructed" category.[12] The legislative initiatives seeking to limit civil society space and attacks against journalists and persecution of some major civil society organizations in Ukraine in the months preceding the publication of this Special Issue illustrates the negative trend and raises further concerns about the sustainability of the Euromaidan legacy.[13]

Civil Society in Ukraine: Weak or Strong?

One of the oldest debates in the literature on civil society in CEE, including Ukraine, centers on the weakness/strength of civil society of a *post-communist type*. A majority of (Western) researchers argue that post-communist civil societies are weak because levels of participation in civil society organizations or levels of concern with issues of policy-making and governance across post-communist countries remain low in comparison to the countries of Western Europe and North America.[14] What is more, there is no clear difference in the levels of participation

11 Kateryna Pishchikova and Olesia Ogryzko, *Civic Awakening: The Impact of Euromaidan on Ukraine's Politics and Society*, FRIDE: Working Paper, no. 124 (July 2014), accessed October 17, 2017, http://fride.org/descarga/WP_124_Civic_awakening.pdf; Kseniia Gatskova and Maxim Gatskov, "Third Sector in Ukraine: Civic Engagement Before and After the 'Euromaidan,'" *Voluntas* 27 (2016); Natalia Shapovalova, "*Ukraine: Civil Volunteerism and the Legacy of Euromaidan," in Global Civic Activism in Flux, ed. Richard Youngs, 47–52* (*Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017*).

12 The monitor operates with 5 categories: closed, repressed, obstructed, narrowed and open. For an interactive world map, visit "Monitor Tracking Civic Space", CIVICUS, accessed December 2, 2017, https://monitor.civicus.org/.

13 On 10 July 2017, the President of Ukraine submitted two draft laws to the Parliament (no. 6674 and no. 6675) proposing amendments to the Tax Code of Ukraine and other legislative acts, both purportedly aimed at "enhancing the transparency of funding of public organizations and of the use of international technical assistance" that introduce additional financial disclosure requirements for civil society organizations, their staff and donors. In September-October 2017, criminal investigations were launched into the activities of two charitable organizations, "The All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS" and "The Patients of Ukraine," which are widely seen as a form of punishment of NGOs that fight against corruption and for transparency in public procurement.

14 Marc Morje Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Claire Wallace, Florian Pichler and Christian Haerpfer, "Changing Patterns of Civil Society in Europe and America 1995–2005: Is Eastern Europe Different?" *East European Politics and Societies* 26.1 (2012); Lucan Way, "Civil Society and Democratization," *Journal of Democracy* 25.3 (2014).

between Eastern European countries that have joined the EU and those that have stayed out.[15] According to Marc Howard, such weakness results from the legacy of mistrust in communist state-controlled organizations, the persistence of informal friendship and family networks and citizens' disappointment with political and economic transitions.[16] Another side of this argument looks at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a form of civil society organization that in post-communist countries is mostly supported by foreign donors. The scholarship is critical of Western assistance programs that "leave much of society untouched"[17] and have "overwhelmed grassroots initiatives, turned democracy into a project and civil society into NGOs,"[18] as well as of the democratic impact of NGOs, who are seen disconnected from wider society,[19] while citizens still rely on informal networks for service provision, a Soviet legacy that forms an obstacle to associational participation.[20]

The argument about the weakness of post-communist civil societies draws on the conceptualization of civil society that views it as "the realm of organizations, groups, and associations that are formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens,"[21] and measures the strength of civil society through organizational membership. In this regard, a broader conceptualization of civil society — looking beyond formally established organizations and inclusive of social movements, non-registered civic groups, local, small scale and online activism as a form of collective but also individual behavior — seems to reflect better the nature of civil societies in post-communist countries, as well as the changing nature of civil society in the 21st century more generally. Large-scale protests in many post-communist countries do bring down authoritarian rulers (Ukraine), end government plans to adopt restrictive legislation (Poland), or break the image of a wide public approval of governments' policies (Russia, Belarus, Armenia). Olga Onuch's research on mass mobilization highlights an important role that social movement organizations played not only in the facilitation of revolutionary moments in Ukraine, but also in the continuity of mobilization frames and institutions since the 1980s and 1990s to the 2004 "Orange Revolution" and then the Euromaidan.[22] Svitlana Krasynka and Eric Martin, who study informal civic groups that emerged spontaneously and "wielded the most power" during the Euromaidan protests, find that such

15 Wallace, Pichler and Haerpfer, "Changing Patterns," 16.

16 Marc Morje Howard, "The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 13.1 (2002).

17 Lutsevych, *How to Finish a Revolution*, 17.

18 Armine Ishkanian, *Democracy Building and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Armenia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 156.

19 Sarah Hendersen, "Selling Civil Society: Western Aid and the Nongovernmental Organization Sector in Russia," *Comparative Politics Studies* 35.2 (2002).

20 Huseyn Aliyev, *Post-Communist Civil Society and the Soviet Legacy: Challenges of Democratisation and Reform in the Caucasus* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Victor Stepanenko, "Civil Society in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Civic Ethos in the Framework of Corrupted Sociality?" *East European Politics and Societies* 20.4 (2006).

21 Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*, 34–35.

22 Olga Onuch, *Mapping Mass Mobilization: Understanding Revolutionary Moments in Argentina and Ukraine* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

groups, although not officially registered, became increasingly formalized over time in terms of developing structures of governance, leadership, specialization, internal rules and procedures.[23] The scholars argue that "the apparent informality was a tactic, intentional or not," in the given circumstances, and "not an indication of weakness," and call researchers to assess the state of civil society by accomplishments of its actors rather than by organizational forms that they adopt.[24] The less visible and attracting media coverage forms of day-to-day civic activism in post-communist countries, such as urban grassroots movements ranging from neighborhood self-help communities to groups protecting architectural heritage, to activists lobbying for urban space for bicycling, to grassroots initiatives for sustainable development, further challenge the thesis on the weakness of respective civil societies.[25]

The authors in this Special Issue further challenge the thesis about the weakness of civil society in Ukraine by revealing its ability to adapt quickly to new challenges, to organize themselves in new forms more adequate to perform their new functions and to increase their independence both in terms of funding sources and agendas. **Susann Worschech** examines key characteristics of post-Euromaidan civil society and finds that, while historically being indeed characterized by high mobilization and low institutionalization, civil society in Ukraine has adjusted to new demands and challenges and has managed to build and broaden trust networks to a formerly unknown extent. Her article shows that civil society groups have been increasingly relying on grassroots support and domestic sources of funding. They also serve as a linkage to the political sphere and have strengthened the advocacy part of their work. Worschech demonstrates the continuity of civil society in Ukraine by showing that many of the groups that emerged during and after the Euromaidan have taken roots in the existing organizations and individual activists. Similarly, **Tatiana Kyselova** shows that many civil society organizations that have engaged in dialogue facilitation and reconciliation after the Euromaidan have grown out of the professional mediation centers that existed previously and worked on business, judiciary or social issues. In their study of EU perceptions and images among Ukrainian think tanks and think tankers, **Vera Axyonova** and **Diano Zubko** sketch out the Ukrainian think tank community before and after the Euromaidan and argue that it has become progressively more professionalized and independent in its agenda.

Various contributions to this Special Issue demonstrate that civil society after the Euromaidan has adopted new forms of organization and taken up new functions, such as democratic socialization and social capital building. This challenges more traditional forms of civil society, like NGOs, to adopt new practices and (re)-connect with citizens. Arguably, Ukraine's civil society reinvents itself. As Oksana Udovyk put it, "Ukraine displays a unique mix

23 Svitlana Krasynska and Eric Martin, "The Formality of Informal Civil Society: Ukraine's EuroMaidan," *Voluntas* 28 (2017).

24 Krasynska and Martin, "The Formality of Informal Civil Society," 447.

25 Kerstin Jacobsson, ed., *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2015); Oksana Udovyk, "Beyond Conflict and Weak Civil Society; Stories from Ukraine: Cases of Grassroots Initiatives for Sustainable Development," *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 4.2 (2017).

of enthusiasm, creativity, conflict trauma, radicalism, and disappointment with the state. It is possible to describe this society in many different ways, but not as weak."[26]

Civil Society in Ukraine: Civil, Uncivil or Both?

Whereas many scholars have argued that the argument about the weakness of post-communist civil societies does not hold based on the too narrow conception of organizational forms and civic behavior,[27] there is yet another twist to the debate on the weakness vs. strength of civil society.[28] The conceptualization adopted by Viktor Stepanenko views civil society as a multitude of social interactions and places emphasis on "civil" as a representation of culture of civility (meaning norms and values adopted by a society). As such, it is more encompassing and accommodating of the organizational forms and expressions of civic activism observed in post-communist countries. More so, it allows revisiting the argument on the weakness of civil society on different ontological grounds. One can argue that civil society in Ukraine and elsewhere in CEE is still weak; however, it is weak not due to the low levels of organizational membership, but due to an uneven spread of the culture of civility and the rise of "uncivil" values among many organized groups and citizens' associations.

The Euromaidan legacy brings to light the issue of the use of violence by civil society. The resort to violence is seemingly at odds with the normative conceptualizations of civil society as a *civilized* society. Though only a small share of Euromaidan protesters resorted to violence against police forces, they were largely tolerated by the peaceful majority. The use of violence did not split the protesters; to the contrary, it solidified the protests and produced a new ethos. Burning tires and throwing Molotov cocktails were amongst the symbols of the protests. As Yurii Andrukhovych put it: while the heroes of the Orange Revolution were lawyers, the heroes of the Euromaidan were combatants.[29] Research shows that radical far-right groups were the main collective agent engaging in physical violence, although scholars tend to disagree as to what role and weight they had in protests.[30] The activists of the Anti-Maidan (a movement against the Euromaidan) also resorted to violence in Kyiv and Eastern and Southern cities of Ukraine.

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26 Udovyk, "Beyond Conflict," 206.

27 Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, "The Legacies of 1989: Myths and Realities of Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 25.1 (2014); Grzegorz Ekiert and Roberto Foa, *Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: A Preliminary Assessment*, Carlo Alberto Notebooks No. 198, Collegio Carlo Alberto, 2011.

28 Pishchikova and Ogryzko, *Civic Awakening*.

29 Kateryna Avramchuk, "Yurii Andrukhovych: Tsia vlada sylna svoieiu tupistiu, tomu shliakh perehovoriv ne diievyi [Yurii Andrukovych: This Government is Strong in its Stupidity, That's Why Negotiations are not an Effective Way Out]," *Insider*, February 17, 2014, http://www.theinsider.ua/art/yurii-andrukhovich-tsya-vlada-silna-svoyeyu-tupistyu-i-tomu-shlyakh-peregovoriv-ne-diyevii/.

30 See Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Ukraine's Radical Right," *Journal of Democracy* 25.3 (2014); Vyacheslav Likhachev, "The 'Right Sector' and Others: The Behavior and Role of Radical Nationalists in the Ukrainian Political Crisis of late 2013—Early 2014," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48 (2015); Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Far Right Participation in the Ukrainian Maidan Protests: An Attempt of Systematic Estimation," *European Politics and Society* 17.4 (2016).

Although voluntary battalions have often been presented as a post-Euromaidan civil society phenomenon in Ukraine,[31] their "civility" is questionable, given that some (members) of these battalions have a record of using hate speech, expressing zero tolerance towards minority groups, perpetrating serious human rights violations and war crimes in the East and legitimizing violence as a means of political struggle.[32]

As Lucan Way put it, "not all civil society is good for democracy."[33] Explaining the failure of the Oslo Agreements to bring peace in the Middle East, Uri Ben-Eliezer uses the dichotomy of "civil" and "uncivil" society that has its roots in the philosophy of the Enlightenment.[34] Following Scottish philosopher Adam Fergusson, uncivil society is described as the "savage," the "primitive," the "rude," the "aggressive," or the "fanatic" other of civil society.[35] The Israeli sociologist argues that the growing influence of the militaristic nationalist and religious activism of settlers and their supporters and the weakness of the peace movement in Israel are the reasons why Israel withdrew its support from the Oslo Agreements and failed to achieve peace with the Palestinians.[36]

With regard to the latter, it should be mentioned that the Euromaidan, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and hybrid conflict in Eastern Ukraine, has also consolidated radical nationalist and far-right groups in Ukraine that call for ethnic and religious intolerance and engage in violent attacks against those who they see as enemies of the "traditional order" or Ukraine's statehood, including leftist groups, feminists, LGBT community, different ethnic communities and refugees.[37] The overall rise of nationalist, xenophobic and neo-Nazi movements

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31 Viktor Stepanenko, *Hromadianske suspilstvo: dyskursy ta praktyky* [*Civil Society: Discourses and Practices*] (Kyiv: Instytut Sotsiolohii NAN Ukraiiny, 2015)

32 Rosaria Puglisi, "Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine," *IAI Working Paper* (Rome: Instituto Affari Internazionale, 2015); Andreas Umland, "Ukrainskyi dobrovolchi bataliony i polk 'Azov' [Ukrainian Voluntary Battalions and the 'Azov' Regiment]," *Krytyka* 19.11–12: (2016); Tetyana Malyarenko and David J. Galbreath, "Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine: Beyond Integration and Abolition," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16.1 (2016).

33 Way, "Civil Society and Democratization," 41.

34 Uri Ben-Eliezer, "The Civil Society, the Uncivil Society, and the Difficulty Israel Has Making Peace with the Palestinians," *Journal of Civil Society* 11.2 (2015).

35 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

36 Ben-Eliezer, "The Civil Society," 183.

37 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 February to 15 May 2017, accessed October 22, 2017, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/UAReport18th_EN.pdf; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2017, accessed October 22, 2017, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/UAReport19th_EN.pdf; "V Odesse pravaia organizatsiia prizvala k etnicheskim chistkam [A Right-Wing Organization in Odesa Called for Ethnic Cleansing]," *Dumskaya*, July 27, 2017, http://dumskaya.net/news/v-odesse-pravaya-organizatciya-prizvala-k-etnich-075136///; "'Takoi rasizm': afrikanskii student rasskazal o napadenii boitsov 'Azova' v Mariupole ['Sort of Racism': An African Student Told about an Attack by 'Azov' Fighters in Mariupol]," *Novosti Donbassa,* April 28, 2017, http://novosti.dn.ua/news/269675-

is not unique to Ukraine and seems to be a broader trend affecting the CEE countries.[38] Surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017 show that a high percentage of Ukrainians are in favor of limiting the rights of certain groups such as drug addicts, Roma, individuals with different political views, and the LGBT community,[39] as well as of continuing the restriction on the right to a pension for Ukrainian citizens residing on the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions outside of government control.[40] A mediatized scandal around the presentation of Larysa Denysenko's children's book *Maia i yii mamy* (Maya and her mothers) at the Lviv Book Fair in September 2017 exemplifies the polarization of society with regard to what constitutes societal values and the need to protect them. While some societal groups sent death threats to the author or sympathized with those threats, others bought up printed and yet-to-be-printed copies of the book or downloaded its free online version.[41] In her contribution to this Special Issue, **Maryna Shevtsova** shows how such fragmentation and polarization of Ukrainian civil society and society at large have affected strategies of civil society groups who advocate for the rights of minority groups in Ukraine. She demonstrates that, while LGBT groups chose to "lay low" during the Euromaidan protests in order to avoid confrontation with the right-wing segment of the protesters and so avoid undermining the general cause, they did adopt more confident and visible strategies of political engagement and activism in the post-Euromaidan period, which resulted in small gains and incremental policy change in the country.

In the context of an ongoing armed conflict and the weakness of state structures in Ukraine, nationalist, radical and violent groups contribute to the deepening of political divisions and create obstacles for lasting peace solutions.[42] Research on violence in and by civil society organizations, its causes and effects is largely lacking in the case of Ukraine, but also more broadly in the studies

takoy-rasyzm-afrykanskyy-student-rasskazal-o-napadenyy-boycov-azova-v-maryupole. It is fair to mention that the appetite for nationalist political forces in the Parliament was low after the Euromaidan: in Ukraine's parliamentary elections, the right wing "All-Ukrainian Union 'Svoboda'" party did not manage to pass the 5% threshold, while post-Euromaidan election newcomer "Right Sector" gained less than 2% of the vote.

38 Michael Meyer et al., "Patterns in Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: A Synthesis of 16 Country Reports and an Expert Survey," in *Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Peter Vandor et al. (Vienna: ERSTE Foundation, 2017), 16–17.

39 Iryna Bekeshkina, Tetiana Pechonchyk and Volodymyr Yavorskiy, *What Ukrainians Know and Think of Human Rights: Nation-wide Research* (Kyiv, 2017): 72, accessed October 17, 2017, http://www.ua.undp.org/content/dam/ukraine/docs/DG/Ombudsman%27s%20project/HumanRightsEnBig.pdf.

40 The Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, *Public Opinion about Non-controlled Donbas: What has Changed*, July 19, 2017, http://dif.org.ua/article/public-opinion-about-uncontrolled-donbass-what-has-changed.

41 See "Children's Book Featuring Lesbian Parents Faces Threats," *Hromadske.ua*, September 18, 2017, https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/childrens-book-featuring-lesbian-parents-face-threats; "Ukraine Far-Right Accused of 'Witch Hunt' over Children's Book," *BBC News from Elsewhere*, September 15, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-41282060.

42 Malyarenko and Galbreath, "Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16.1 (2016).

of civil society.[43] In her contribution to this Special Issue, **Tatiana Kyselova** examines mediation and dialogue facilitation in Ukraine as alternatives to a corrupt system of justice, the culture of patronage and violence as a means of conflict resolution. She notes that, in the context of the current conflict, wider civil society in Ukraine remains divided between discourses of peace and reconciliation, on the one hand, and patriotism and the fight against Russian aggression, on the other hand. Occasional clashes between the two reveal a potentially destructive trend that needs urgent attention by researchers and policy-makers. She also argues the uniqueness of Ukraine's crisis compared to other ongoing armed conflicts, as Ukraine has domestic expertise on mediation and conflict resolution. The subject of dialogue and reconciliation is further examined in the contribution to this Special Issue by **Ganna Bazilo** and **Giselle Bosse**. Having studied and compared bottom-up and top-down narratives of the conflict in Ukraine, they find that the two differ substantially. Whereas the top-down narratives of the conflict by states and international intergovernmental organizations tend to reconfirm the status quo or the (neo-) liberal economic approach to peace, the bottom-up narratives by local civil society organizations (CSOs) identify the lack of understanding between people as a key determinant affecting the conflict and emphasize the unity among communities, the deconstruction of negative images of the "other" and the rebuilding of empathy as the leading goals of dialogue and reconciliation.

The armed conflict in Ukraine is gradually "routinized" through media information, images, everyday practices and language, which leads to the "normalization" of an otherwise *ab*-normal situation of violence, death, destruction and loss and, as Daniel Bar-Tal and his colleagues argued, to the perpetuation of the conflict.[44] Since war narratives dominate among ruling elites and civil society in Ukraine, one can question the impact wielded by the groups calling for peacemaking through dialogue and reconciliation. Nevertheless, the activism of such groups and the voices they try to make heard serve as evidence that there are agents working to preserve "civility" in Ukraine's civil society. The contributions to this Special Issue point to the importance of not overlooking the dichotomy of civil/uncivil, alongside the dichotomy of state/(civil) society, in the studies of civil society and democratization.

State-Society Relations: Weak State, Strong Society?

Another line of argumentation found in the literature is about state-society relations: strong/weak states vs. strong/weak societies. Accordingly, a strong state is a legitimate state that can rely on soft power and not merely an effective state that can impose its rules by force relying on hard power; in turn, a strong society is one that can resist pressure from above (government) and outside (external intervention).[45] In this regard, the state of Ukraine has arguably failed

43 Simon Stacey and Megan Meyer, "Civil Society and Violence: A Research Agenda," *Journal of Civil Society* 1.2 (2005).

44 Daniel Bar-Tal, Guy Abutbul-Selinger and Amiram Raviv, "The Culture of Conflict and Its Routinisation," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology*, ed. Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Catarina Kinnvall, Tereza Capelos and Henk Dekker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 369–87.

45 Richard Falk, "Framing an Inquiry," in *Weak States, Strong Societies*, ed. Amin Saikal (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 9–21.

on two accounts, legitimacy and effectiveness, which constituted the domestic backdrop of Russia's blitzkrieg occupation of Crimea and the armed conflict in Donbas. However, as **Kateryna Zarembo** argues in her contribution to this Special Issue, a strong civil society can also undermine state capacity. Her study into the effects of volunteer participation in defense sector reform in Ukraine shows that volunteer organizations contributed to both strengthening defense state capacities and weakening them. The volunteer movement filled the crucial gap of basic provision and procurement for the army when the state was too weak, and it stepped away when the state regained its ability to perform its functions. However, weakening effects were also observed: by providing services more efficiently than the state, volunteer organizations induced the military to rely on them rather than demand of the state to change its practices.

Civil society organizations and initiatives in Ukraine have more legitimacy than any of the state institutions[46] and thus take human resources away from the state. At the same time, as Laura Cleary put it, new volunteer initiatives, such as those helping the army and providing social services to the displaced and conflict-affected population, lead to the "hybridization" of civil society because, in Ukraine, these civil society groups do not perform a watchdog function (holding government to account) but instead do the job for the state.[47]

Based on her empirical research of the state-civil society relationship in Bangladesh and the Philippines, Jasmin Lorsh argues that civil societies mirror the deficits of their states.[48] Similar to a state that lacks autonomy from alternative power centers, national civil society actors are also affiliated to different types of power centers, including political parties, religious organizations or insurgent groups. She finds that, in the context of weak states, in which alternative power centers inside and outside the state structure enhance their social control and political influence through patronage, corruption and violence, national civil society actors also participate in patronage and corruption networks and sometimes apply violence. Overall, Lorsh argues that

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46 In a survey conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in December 2016, "volunteers" and "non-governmental organizations" (with 53.5% and 37% support rate) gave way only to "church" (56.7%) and the Ukrainian armed forces (53.1%). In turn, the President, the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine hit bottom, with 13.7%, 9.5% and 5.3% support rate, respectively. Only the Russian mass-media has a lower score (2.4%). See Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, "Trust to Social Institutions," Press Release by Stanislaw Zlenko, February 1, 2017, http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=678&page=1. A survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in October 2017 shows that "volunteer organizations" enjoy the highest level of support (66.7% of respondents), above "church" (64.4%), the Ukrainian armed forces (57.3%) and other defense and emergency actors, followed by "civic organizations" (48%). Razumkov Centre, "Stavlennia hromadian do suspilnykh instytutsii, elektoralni orientatsii [Citizens' Attitudes towards Social Institutions and Electoral Preferences]," October 23, 2017, http://razumkov.org.ua/napryamki/sotsiolohichni-doslidzhennia/stavlennia-hromadian-ukrainy-do-suspilnykh-instytutiv-elektoralni-oriientatsii-2.

47 Laura Cleary, "Half Measures and Incomplete Reforms: The Breeding Ground for a Hybrid Civil Society in Ukraine," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16.1 (2016): 20.

48 Jasmin Lorch, *Civil Society and Mirror Images of Weak States Bangladesh and the Philippines* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

"state weakness leads to the emergence of an ambiguous civil society that can be both boon and bane for democracy."[49]

Two articles in this Special Issue contribute to this debate in two distinct ways. In a study of regional governors' approaches to fostering inclusive political institutions in post-Euromaidan Donbas, **Valentyna Romanova** examines how appointing a civil society activist who had assisted the Ukrainian army during the security operation in Donbas to a position of regional executive in Luhansk *oblast* has affected regional governors' approaches to state capacity (as control over the contact line) and power distribution (as holding democratic elections). She finds that this move caused variation in the approaches towards control over the contact line, but not towards holding democratic elections. Paradoxically, civil society inclusion in the regional power centers aimed to strengthen state *effectiveness* in the specific context of a conflict-affected region by empowering law enforcement institutions from within rather than by strengthening state *legitimacy* through promoting citizens' representation in political institutions, which is a more traditional function of civil society. In turn, the contribution by **Halyna Budivska** and **Dariya Orlova** examines the balancing between professionalism and activism in Ukrainian journalism post-Euromaidan. The authors expose and conceptualize the difficulty for Ukrainian journalists to choose and stay within the limits of one's role — either as a (professional) journalist or as a (civic or political) activist — in the context of the Euromaidan and later in the face of an armed conflict. They conclude that such journalists' activism further washes out the weak professional standards in a country where media are instrumentalized by their owners and a tradition of censorship exists.

The articles in this Special Issue demonstrate that the question of what role civil society *should* play with regard to state in Ukraine remains debatable. One can argue that the blurring of roles and the diffusing of powers between state and its watchdogs in a liberal tradition, such as civil society and independent media, seem to weaken both the state *and* its watchdogs and ultimately may undermine the process of democratic state-building.

Contribution of the Special Issue to the Debate

This Special Issue is among the first efforts to collectively investigate the legacy of the Euromaidan in conflict-torn Ukraine in the domain of civil society. The contributions to *this Special Issue identify, describe, conceptualize and explain various developments in Ukraine's civil society by looking at specific and under-studied sectors and by tracing the situation before, during and after the Euromaidan. In doing this, the Special Issue brings to spotlight* (*brings to the spotlight — or — spotlights*) *new themes, new forms, new challenges and new opportunities with regard to civil society.*

A number of articles in this Special Issue speak of new themes, or new areas in which civil society chipped in, such as support to the army and defense reform, humanitarian assistance to the displaced population, regional governance and peacemaking. It also places existing themes in a new context: for example, LGBT activism, which is usually a subject of studies of minority rights, and journalism, which is generally a preserve of media studies, are framed and analyzed in this Special Issue as instances of broader tendencies of civil society development. While Ukrainian civil society has been known for its weak institutionalization and organization as compared to

49 Lorch, *Civil Society and Mirror Images*, 232.

Western civil societies, grassroots initiatives, donating and volunteering appear to be new and important forms of civil society for Ukraine born out of Euromaidan values. The articles in this Special Issue also show how civil society in Ukraine struggles to institutionalize and routinize these newly emerged forms, practices and behaviors in the context of the demobilization of civil society after the Euromaidan and the "normalization" of the conflict. The volume also points to challenges faced by professionals (be they journalists, IT-specialists or mediators) in becoming activated citizens or civic activists. While organized civil society has been enriched by its professional knowledge and skills, civic activism may go at odds with the professional roles of individuals concerned.

Fragmentation and polarization emerge as key challenges to Ukraine's civil society. Polarization of civil society by values is not a phenomenon unique to Ukraine, nor is it a new phenomenon for Ukraine itself.[50] However, the history of state-society confrontation and the situation of armed conflict might make the edges sharper and the stakes higher. On a different note, striking a balance between the functions of watching the state versus building it and of strengthening the state versus subverting it emerge as new challenges for Ukraine's civil society as it is becoming stronger and more organized. Furthermore, elements of civil society in Ukraine act without the state or despite the state, which differs from the idea of helping the state developed in the literature and adds yet another form of civil society's substitution for the state to be examined.[51]

Finally, this Special issue addresses new opportunities for Ukraine's civil society, including the development of a new civic culture, "going into politics," healing trauma and building bridges, and constructing a new narrative for Ukraine's future.

What is Left Behind? Venues for Further Research

A number of important empirical developments are *addressed only in passing or are left outside the scope of this Special Issue altogether*, primarily if not exclusively due to its limited volume. First of all, the rise of "uncivil" civil society in Ukraine after the Euromaidan—most importantly, the well-organized and radical nationalist and far-right groups that openly call for intolerance—is acknowledged in some contributions (including this Introduction and the article by Maryna Shevtsova), but is not the subject of a separate study and so merits further investigation.

Similarly, while the strength of civil society vis-à-vis the state in general terms (article by Susann Worschech) or the impact of civil society actors on reforms in specific sectors (defense sector reform in the article by Kateryna Zarembo or mediation and dialogue facilitation in the article by Tatiana Kyselova) are addressed, a *systematic* study of the impact of civil society on reforms in post-Euromaidan Ukraine across and within various policy areas is lacking. In fact, it deserves a designated Special Issue.

Furthermore, all contributions to this Special Issue testify to the continuous growth of civil society in Ukraine and identify various positive developments and tendencies (alongside

50 Ivan Gomza and Nadiia Koval, "The Winter of Our Discontent: Emotions and Contentious Politics in Ukraine during Euromaidan," *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 1 (2015).

51 Udovyk, "Beyond Conflict," *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 4.2 (2017): 204.

the worrisome ones). However, the drivers and the sources of this growth, the old and the new enabling factors have escaped the authors' attention so far. It does not suffice to pronounce the decisive role of the armed conflict: the next step should be unpacking further, and systematically, its mobilizing as well as de-mobilizing, enabling as well as disabling effects on different components of Ukraine's civil society.

Finally, we as guest editors purposefully solicited contributions on the role of social media and cultural and religious civil society actors in Ukraine, aware of their growing and arguably central importance during and after the Euromaidan. Unfortunately, the efforts were without success, and so the readers' interest in these dimensions of Ukraine's civil society is not to be satisfied by this Special Issue.

Structure of the Special Issue

This Special Issue consists of this Introduction and eight original articles.

The article by **Susann Worschech** (European University Viadrina) opens this Special Issue with an *investigation into the key characteristics of post-Euromaidan civil society in Ukraine and the extent to which Ukrainian civil society contributes to the country's democratization*. While volunteer work, donations and civic activism have increased to an unprecedented level in the context of the humanitarian crisis and armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, it remains unclear whether and how this post-Euromaidan civil society contributes to Ukraine's democratization. Following a historical analysis of the evolution of Ukraine's civil society, characterized by high mobilization and low institutionalization, the article examines new issues and formations of civil society through two case studies: humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons and civil support to the military. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative changes reveals that, since the Euromaidan, civil society in Ukraine has adjusted to new demands and issues and managed to build and broaden trust networks in a formerly unknown dimension. The Tocquevillean function of civil society — i. e., democratic socialization and building social capital — appears to be the dominant *modus* of civil society in Ukraine, while the function of civil society as a watchdog of democratic rule appears rather weak and seems to have receded into the background in the face of Ukraine's crisis.

The Special Issue proceeds with an article by **Kateryna Zarembo** (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), which examines *the role of civil society in defense reform in post-Euromaidan Ukraine*. While the role of volunteers in sustaining the Ukrainian army against the backdrop of the Russian aggression since 2014 has been widely acknowledged, the effect of the volunteer initiatives on state defense capacity in *longer-term* has not been studied so far. Looking for elements of substitution for the state, the article analyses whether volunteer participation has led to the institutional strengthening of Ukrainian defense capacity or, vice versa, to its weakening. Embedded in the scholarship on the state-civil society relationship in fragile states, the author examines the effect of the volunteers' efforts on the reform of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. The article draws on open-source materials, public and face-to-face interviews and examines two case studies: (i) the evolution of the largest volunteer organizations in Ukraine that have been engaged in provision and procurement for the Ukrainian army, and (ii) the so-called "Volunteer Force" reform project at the Ministry of Defense, which engaged civilians with

volunteering experience in order to improve the work of the Ministry. The analysis reveals that the volunteers actually contributed to both strengthening the state and weakening it (in particular, by substituting or outperforming the state in certain procedures). The article concludes that, while the volunteer participation failed to bring about systemic reform, it did provide powerful democratic oversight over the state's key defense institution.

The discussion in the Special Issue continues with *a comparative analysis of regional governors' approaches to fostering inclusive political institutions in post-Euromaidan Donbas*, written by **Valentyna Romanova** (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy). Inspired by Acemoglu's and Robinson's book "Why Nations Fail," the author examines how appointing a civil society activist who had assisted the Ukrainian army during the security operation in Donbas to a position of regional executive in Luhansk *oblast* has affected regional governors' approaches to key conditions of inclusive political institutions: state capacity and power distribution. Romanova operationalizes state capacity as control over the contact line in the armed conflict in Donbas, and power distribution as holding democratic elections. Relying on a "Political elites in Ukrainian regions" dataset, hosted by Hokkaido University and Tokyo University (Japan), the author compares the approaches of three regional executives. The findings reveal that appointing a civil society activist to the position of a regional executive in post-Euromaidan Luhansk oblast has affected regional governors' approach towards control over the contact line, but not towards holding democratic elections. The study contributes to the literature on inclusive political institutions by analyzing new empirical data in line with the conceptual framework of Acemoglu and Robinson.

Ganna Bazilo (independent researcher in European Studies) and **Giselle Bosse** (Maastricht University & College of Europe) explore *the role of civil society in fostering dialogue and reconciliation in Eastern Ukraine*. Research on sub-state actors as legitimate agents in peace building in Eastern Ukraine is scarce. Drawing on Roger MacGinty's concept of "everyday peace," the authors move away from state-centric scholarship on the conflict in Ukraine and examine the local narratives of CSOs engaged in dialogue and reconciliation activities. Specifically, the article analyzes seven local Ukrainian CSOs and their narratives of the origins of the conflict, the factors affecting it and conflict solution strategies. The authors draw on semi-structured interviews with local CSOs by following the logic of an ascriptive, bottom-up-oriented research technique. The findings are additionally compared with the main understandings of the conflict and conflict resolution, as articulated by the Ukrainian government and international intergovernmental organizations. The analysis demonstrates that, having identified the lack of understanding between people as a key determinant affecting the conflict, local CSOs have strongly emphasized unity among communities, the deconstruction of negative images of the "other" and the rebuilding of empathy as the leading goals of their dialogue and reconciliation activities. In contrast, the narratives of key state and international actors reveal a top-down approach to conflict resolution, focused on fostering dialogue between the governments of Ukraine and Russia and Ukraine's economic recovery and reform. The article demonstrates that whereas the top-down narratives of the conflict by states and international organizations tend to reconfirm the status quo of the conflict or the (neo-) liberal economic approach to peace, bottom-up local CSOs promote the politics of

"re-humanizing the other," which constitute a quintessential process in achieving sustainable peace in Eastern Ukraine.

Tatiana Kyselova (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) takes a closer look at *"professional peacemaking" by mediators and facilitators before and after the Euromaidan*. Her article departs from a statement that mediators and dialogue facilitators should be treated as separate actors that drive peacebuilding processes in Ukraine and constitute an integral part of civil society by any definition. Drawing on empirical data from four focus groups and 63 in-depth interviews, the author argues that, in contrast to most violent conflicts in the world, the Ukrainian context is distinguished by the presence of a self-organized, self-aware and skilled professional community of local mediators and dialogue facilitators. Therefore, the experience of civil society involvement in peacebuilding from developing countries is not directly applicable to Ukraine and should be adapted to fit the context. A historical overview reveals that, ideologically, Ukrainian mediators share similar ideas about peace, reconciliation and dispute resolution with their counterparts in other parts of the world. They were quite successful in establishing their professional identity, developing a market for training in mediation and uniting themselves into a national umbrella association. The armed conflict has amplified socio-political uncertainties in Ukraine and complicated mediation reforms, but at the same time has provided opportunities for Ukrainian mediators to connect to wider civil society through a "social transformation" ideology. Compared to mediators, dialogue facilitators in Ukraine present as a rather young community that has to establish itself and respond to the challenges of the crisis simultaneously. Professional "peacemakers", mediators and dialogue facilitators are the primary carriers of peace and reconciliation ideas among Ukrainian civil society. However, wider civil society remains divided between discourses of peace and reconciliation, on the one hand, and patriotism and the fight against Russian aggression, on the other hand, with tensions between the two communities occasionally becoming apparent.

The Special Issue continues with an article on *the balancing between professionalism and activism in Ukrainian journalism post-Euromaidan*, co-authored by **Halyna Budivska** and **Dariya Orlova** (both at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy). Activism of journalists has emerged as one of the major features of the post-Euromaidan media landscape in Ukraine, but remains understudied. Drawing on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 Ukrainian journalists representing different types of media and backgrounds, the authors argue that Ukrainian journalism has been both affecting and affected by the changes and challenges in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Informed by the concepts of "journalism culture" and "journalism professionalism," the article explores perceptions of journalists regarding activism, boundaries of professionalism and their experience dealing with the activism-professionalism dilemma. The findings reveal that interventionism has emerged as a distinctive feature of journalism culture following the Euromaidan protests. The activism of journalists developed in response to the situation of an utmost emergency against the backdrop of unprecedented violence towards protesters and of the threat of authoritarianism, and was later reinforced by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In response to those challenges, journalists turned to an activist stance, which resulted in blurring the boundaries of journalistic professionalism. The study exposes a lack of consensus among Ukrainian journalists concerning professional standards and their relevance for present-day Ukraine: while journalists largely share the view that the primary role

of journalism is to provide information, their interpretations of professional standards and tasks differ significantly. This has eventually led to fragmentation and polarization among journalists, which signals ongoing transformations in journalism culture and a crisis of professional identity at large.

The issue of civic activism is further explored in this Special Issue in an article by **Maryna Shevtsova** (Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation) *on the growing visibility of LGBT groups in the Ukrainian public sphere post-Euromaidan*. Drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation and analysis of (social) media, this article explores whether and how Ukrainian LGBT civil society organizations have reshaped their political strategies in the aftermath of the Euromaidan. The findings demonstrate that, during the Euromaidan events, LGBT activists in Ukraine made a strategic decision to keep their numerous and active presence in the protest camp invisible, which helped them avoid conflict with the right-wing radicals, but also left the hopes of the LGBT community for reforms on sexual minorities' rights unfulfilled. The disillusionment with low support from the new government triggered a wave of LGBT activism with new political strategies. Supported by the incentives coming from European Union (EU) institutions combined with a pro-Western government coming to power, increased LGBT activism resulted in positive changes for LGBT rights in Ukraine. More concretely, LGBT groups used EU human rights requirements as an argument and a starting point to lobby for their political interests and to build new coalitions. Having employed strategies of political activism such as media appearances, increased visibility during political events, transnational networking and alliances with pro-European politicians, civil society LGBT organizations in Ukraine managed to move on to "higher politics."

The Special Issue concludes with an article on *perceptions* (*or images*) *of the EU and its initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, among Ukrainian think tanks* (and think tankers as elite opinion-makers), co-authored by **Vera Axyonova** (Justus Liebig University Giessen) and **Diana Zubko** (United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine). While EU engagement in Ukraine has attracted considerable scholarly attention, studies focusing on EU perceptions in general and EU perceptions among non-governmental actors in particular are rare. This article maps discursive frames used by leading think tank representatives working in the field of foreign and security policy analysis or performing the functions of watchdogs in sectors such as democratization, public administration reform, and economic liberalization. To do this, the authors employ content analysis of policy-related papers published by the organizations and complementary expert interviews with representatives of the Ukrainian think tank community. The findings demonstrate that Ukrainian think tanks generally maintain a very positive image of the EU in the post-Euromaidan period. The EU's role in promoting and sustaining reforms is not questioned, but is rather seen as naturally given, especially in spheres such as countering corruption. Ukrainian think tankers and civil society leaders publicly appeal to the EU when national decision-making agents fail to comply with long-awaited commitments. The firm position of EU officials in reaction to such appeals supports the EU's image as a transformative power. Yet, as a perceived counterpole to Russia, the EU is called upon to act more vigorously in resolving the conflict and putting pressure on Moscow and hence repeatedly becomes a target of criticism for its overly cautious and reserved approach.

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