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The “Invisible Battalion”: Women in ATO Military Operations in Ukraine¹

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Abstract

The study bears a metaphorical title — “The Invisible Battalion” — to reflect the finding that women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and in volunteer battalions in the ongoing conflict in the Donbas are not given equal treatment to their male colleagues; their contributions are rarely recognized. The theoretical background of this article brings us to the sociology of the military, gender in organizations, and feminist perspectives of women’s participation in the armed forces. Fieldwork to study women’s participation in the ATO (summer-autumn 2015) was conducted using 42 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women (aged 20–47) who are, or were in the ATO.

Key Words: Ukraine, Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), the Donbas, women, armed forces, female soldiers.

¹ The sociological study *“Invisible Battalion”: Women’s Participation in Military Operations in the ATO* (Martsenyuk, Tamara, Ganna Grytsenko, and Anna Kvit. *“Invisible Battalion”: Women’s Participation in ATO Military Operations (Sociological Research)*. Kyiv: UWF, 2016), inspired and organized by Maria Berlinska, volunteer and Head of the Center for Air Reconnaissance. The research was made possible due to the informational and financial support provided by the ICF “Ukrainian Women’s Fund” and the UN Women’s office in Kyiv.

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Introduction

Recent events in Ukraine connected with the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014 and later armed conflict in the Eastern part of the country brought changes into women's lives and their roles both in society and their families. On the one hand, the threat of violence makes women more vulnerable towards the socio-economic situation. For example, women are the majority among IDPs (internally displaced persons) from Eastern Ukraine responsible for children, the elderly, and disabled relatives. On the other hand, during these turbulent events Ukrainian women managed to challenge traditional gender roles (as carers of others and victims of conflict) and reclaim visibility, recognition, and respect as revolutionaries and volunteers.

The Euromaidan protests in Ukraine started on the night of 21 November 2013 with public protests in Independence Square in Kyiv when President Viktor Yanukovych announced a decision to turn Ukraine away from the European Union, and continued for about three months (even after the Yanukovych regime had fallen). Women actively participated in all form of activities in the protest space of the Maidan. Besides cooking, cleaning, and entertaining, women were fighting on barricades, negotiating, participating in peacekeeping, providing medical support, maintaining information support, participating in legislative work and logistics, and providing education and huge organizational support for protesters.²

When the protests turned violent, women were excluded from much of the protest zone activities.³ As a reply to this exclusion, women organized both military and non-military Women's *sotnias* (or hundreds). Women made efforts to make their input into the Euromaidan more visible (especially compared to the Orange Revolution, where in memory politics "ordinary" women are almost absent as active "makers" of revolution).

Later, when the so called Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) started women joined the front lines of the Donbas war as volunteers, journalists, medical staff, and military personnel.⁴ But female fighters as well as women in the Ukrainian army in general face gender discrimination, recognition, and visibility problems.

"Women at War" is not a new topic in Ukrainian Studies across various disciplines; and yet, the topic is usually dominated by historical analyses of the 20th century (i.e., women's

2 Tamara Martsenyuk, "Gender and Revolution in Ukraine: Women's Participation in Euromaidan Protests of 2013–2014," *Perspectives on Europe* 44.2 (2014): 19.

3 Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk, "Mothers and Daughters of the Maidan: Gender, Repertoires of Violence, and the Division of Labour in Ukrainian Protests," *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal* 1.1 (2014): 95.

4 Anti-Terrorist Operation zone in the Donbas is a term often used by the media and government of Ukraine to identify territory where the war in Donbas takes place. From the beginning of March 2014, protests by pro-Russian and anti-government groups took place in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine. Later these demonstrations escalated into an armed conflict between the forces of the self-declared so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics ("DPR" and "LPR" respectively), and the Ukrainian government.

participation and role in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, OUN-UPA). There is a gap in the academic research on Ukrainian women in the Armed Forces in post-Soviet Ukraine in general, and the post-Maidan period in particular. That is why the main aim of this article is to find out the specifics of women’s participation in the military operations in the ATO zone, revealing both possible achievements and problems of women’s integration into the military. The “Invisible Battalion” project caused changes in gender politics in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which are also analyzed in this article. The changes themselves are not analyzed in this text due to the lack of space, though the knowledge-building aim in studying this issue definitely precedes and defines the normative-building one.

Women and the Military: Background Information

In most societies, the dominant tendency was that, with the exception of war heroines, women took part in combat only in exceptional circumstances.⁵ But visible changes have happened in the second part of the 20th — beginning of the 21st centuries.

Women’s entry into the armed forces widened with the decline of the draft system and the tendency to rely on voluntary-based army forces.⁶ For example, a change in and expansion of women’s roles in the U. S. Army began with the end of the draft and the introduction of the All-Volunteer Army in 1973.⁷ The percentage of women in the army increased from approximately 2% to around 15%.⁸ At the same time, the institutionalization of gender politics in the armed forces occurred. For example, the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives is one of the oldest in the NATO structure and was formally recognized by NATO’s Military Committee in July 1976.⁹ In 1961 senior female officers in NATO began to organize conferences on an ad hoc basis to discuss the status, organization, conditions of employment, and career possibilities for women in the armed forces of NATO member nations.

In 2000 only six NATO countries had equal enlistment opportunities for women and men, whereas in 2013 all NATO members offered this opportunity, although certain positions in combat, submarine and tank units remain closed for women in several NATO countries. According to Marriët Schuurman — NATO’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security in the Office of the Secretary General: “Equal participation and applying a gender

5 Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

6 Giuseppe Caforio ed., *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006), 284.

7 Beverly C. Harris, Zita M. Simutis, and Melissa M. Gantz, *Women in the US Army. An Annotated Bibliography, No. ARI-SR-48* (U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science ALEXANDRIA VA, 2002), 1.

8 Harris et al., *Women in the US Army*, 1.

9 “NATO News: 40th Anniversary of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives,” May 31, 2016, accessed September 25, 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_131710.htm.

lens to today's security challenges" is one of the "founding principles that NATO is meant to safeguard and promote."¹⁰

In military sociology, discussions on women's participation in the armed forces are based on the opportunities for women to be professional soldiers. The main dilemma in discussing gender integration is the question of what a modern army should be like. Should it be a professionally closed group, or must it also respond to social changes in society, and, in particular, to the changing role of women in society?

American scholar Mady Segal singles out three groups of factors that promote women's integration into the army: changes in the armed forces, changes in the social structure of society, and changes in culture.¹¹ The researcher understands changes in the armed forces as the changing concept of national security, military technology, the organizational structure of the army, purpose of the armed forces, and military recruitment policy. A change in the social structure lies in the fact that women have actively entered the labor market and the public sphere in recent decades. Mady Segal defines cultural factors as changing cultural values in relation to the role of women in Western societies and the popularity of the liberal principle of equal rights and opportunities.

The concept of women's participation in the military theoretically evolves from the field of gender in organizations and feminist (political science) studies.¹² According to different feminist approaches, there are two major opinions towards women's integration into the armed forces. Liberal feminists claim that women's involvement in military service is an important part of equal rights and, ultimately, leads to obtaining full citizenship in their countries; radical feminists see women's service as a reification of martial citizenship and cooperation with hierarchal and sexist institutions.¹³

Moreover, not all women, who are in the military fight for equal rights and opportunities with men. As Nancy Goldman wrote in her 1973 article, among those women who volunteer for military service, the personal goal is not the achievement of "complete equality," but rather the attainment of a wider range of assignments.¹⁴

The Methodology of Empirical Study

The empirical part of the study, which concerns the actual study of the women's situation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine fighting in the ATO, consists of two parts: desk and field studies. The desk study includes a review of previous professional studies and available media

10 Marriët Schuurman, "NATO and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Time to Bring It Home," *Connections* 14.3 (2015): 6.

11 Mady Wechsler Segal, "Women's Military Roles Cross-Nationality: Past? Present? And Future," *Gender & Society* 9.6 (1995): 760.

12 Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 19–20.

13 Orna Sasson-Levy, "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in 'Masculine' Roles," *Sociological Inquiry* 73.3 (2003): 440.

14 Nancy Goldman, "The Changing Role of Women in the Armed Forces," *American Journal of Sociology* 78.4 (1973): 892.

information on the issue; also, formal requests for appropriate statistical information were sent to government bodies and their results were analyzed. The field study part of the research was inspired by Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich's journalistic work *War Does Not Have a Woman's Face* dealing with the role of women in the Soviet Army during World War II.¹⁵

The field study was done with the usage of qualitative sociological methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews with women who participated in the ATO; interviews with male and female experts in military and/or gender equality spheres; content analysis of publications in Ukrainian media. Each of these forms a separate section in the final publication of the research. In this article, only results of interviews with female soldiers and with gender experts are presented, due to the lack of place, and as the most current and relevant part of the study. Following the theoretical framework proposed by Segal, this study was aimed at finding issues where changes in the armed forces and in culture are either necessary to be developed or are already currently being developed.¹⁶

The research was conducted in the summer and autumn of 2015. 42 women in military service at the forefront of the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone in Ukraine, and one woman activist providing self-imposed unpaid supply work for the army gave in-depth semi-structured interviews on all aspects of women's service.¹⁷ We used the "snowball sampling" technique to recruit the respondents, who were 20 to 47 years of age. The questions were grouped into three units:

- 1) the legal aspect of participating in the ATO;
- 2) living conditions of service; and
- 3) behavioral and psychological aspects of their stay at the front.

The interview guide included topics on motivation for service, on legal possibilities and supplies, on the attitude towards them from male colleagues, on the perspectives of the development of female service, and also on the respondents' approach to other women.

Women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

In her article Natalia Dubchak wrote that traditionally, the Armed Forces of Ukraine were the most conservative social institution on the issue of women in the military whereas currently, almost 10% of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are comprised of women.¹⁸ At the same time, representation of women in defense has been increasing, which is consistent with global development trends. However, the growing number of female soldiers, especially contract ones, is not associated with the prestige of the service, but rather with the reluctance of men to hold

15 Svetlana Alexievich, *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso* [*War Does Not Have a Woman's Face*] (Moscow: Vremia, 1985).

16 Segal, "Women's Military Roles Cross-Nationality," 757–75.

17 Interviews were organized and taken by the project coordinator Maria Berlinska.

18 Natalia Dubchak, "Zhinky u Zbroinykh Sylakh Ukrainy: Problemy gendernoi polityky [Women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: Towards the Problem of Gender Politics]," *Stratehichni priorytety* 9.4 (2008): 187–88.

low-paid positions. In fact, women mostly have so-called “feminized” professions in nursing, finances, logistics, and communications.

In early October 2015, the head of the Communications and Press Agency of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Oksana Havryliuk, reported at a briefing in Kyiv¹⁹ that 938 women had participated in the ATO. As of early October 2015 about 14,500 female soldiers and 30,500 employees of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were in the service. Almost 2,000 are officers, with 35 women holding management positions in the Ministry of Defense, General Staff, and various corps of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In the summer of 2015 the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine indicated that the National Guard of Ukraine consists of about 14,000 people, including 21 women (doctors, nurses). In 2014–2015, about 22,000 National Guard of Ukraine troops, including 500 women, were in the zone of hostilities.²⁰

According to a report on discrimination and gender inequality in Ukraine, there is evidence of employment discrimination against women, particularly in the armed forces.²¹ The number of positions that women can occupy in the Ukrainian army is low. In addition, there is evidence of sexist remarks by military commanders.

Gender Politics in Ukraine in General and in the Armed Forces in Particular

The issue of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukrainian society is governed by both general and special legislation. Discrimination on the basis of gender is prohibited both by the Constitution of Ukraine and the Law of Ukraine “On Principles on the Prevention and the Combating of Discrimination in Ukraine” (2012). Ukraine also has specific legislation designed to promote gender equality — the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men” (2005).

Ukrainian legislation (such as the Code of Labor Laws of Ukraine), in its effort to become gender specific still tries to protect women, family, and children, thus perpetuating traditional gender roles.

De jure gender equality is supported by national institutional mechanisms and legislation. International and national NGOs monitor the results of state and regional programs, and propose issues for improvement. At the same time, *de facto*, it can be argued that despite different legislative attempts not much has been implemented in terms of tangible policies. Unarguably, there is a lack of accountability by the government for meeting these legislative initiatives.

The Ukrainian labor market is characterized by a high rate of female participation and regulation that is relatively gender neutral, apart from some protective regulation for women

19 “Maizhe tysiacha ukrainok vzialy uchast v ATO [Almost One Thousand of Ukrainian Women have Taken Part in the ATO],” *UNIAN*, October 9, 2015, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.unian.ua/war/1147650-mayje-tisyacha-jinok-viyskovoslujbovtiv-vzyali-uchast-v-ato.html>.

20 Martsenyuk et al., “*Invisible Battalion*”: *Women’s Participation in ATO Military Operations*, 14.

21 *In the Crosscurrents: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Ukraine*, The Equal Rights Trust Country Report Series: 5, London, August 2015, 53.

workers in mines and other segments of heavy industry.²² According to the Labor Code of Ukraine, women may not be employed for hard labor or dangerous jobs and they may not be involved in lifting and moving items whose weight exceeds specially established limits. Indeed, over 500 professions are prohibited by law for women in Ukraine today. Women don't have the right to work in or have one of the professions that are included in the "List of Heavy Jobs and Work in Harmful/Dangerous Conditions" approved by the Ministry of Health in 1993. Also, women may not be involved in work at night, except for the sectors and types of work with the maximum night hours for women approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. These paternalist regulations also do not allow for the official employment of women in a majority of professions in the military sector.²³

The gender policy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is a part of overall gender policy and the function of military administrative bodies, which regulates the processes of social interaction between military men and women in the army, and the entrenchment and development of their social status and the working relations between them, taking into account military cultural traditions and stereotypes.²⁴

Natalia Dubchak, an expert with 18 years of experience with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, describes some of the mechanisms of gender policy implementation in the armed forces. In particular, in 2010, as a volunteer, she was Counselor to the Minister of Defense on Gender Issues. Natalia Dubchak also occupied a special position, which was introduced by a Decision of the Minister of Defense in 2008. Her position was that of the Gender Policy Officer. But this position lasted for only two years. A deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and co-chairman of the Inter-Fractional Equal Opportunities Caucus, Maria Ionova, said that the problem of improving women's status in the military is a part of a broader issue — the poor representation of women in the decision-making process. In the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) women constitute only 12% of all 450 deputies.

The issue of women's integration into the security and defense sector lies within a broader framework of the women's peace and security agenda promoted by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women's Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), and subsequent resolutions since 2000. The resolution addresses the important role of women in conflict resolution, prevention, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. The document calls for the integration of women into the security and defense sector and their involvement in peace processes, as women's integration into the military is not only a matter of gender equality, but also an issue of security at country and global levels. A *Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325* reveals that women's

22 *Women and Men on the Ukrainian Labor Market: A Comparative Study of Ukraine and the EU* (Kyiv: VAitE Company, 2011), 14.

23 For more information see 2.4.2. "Prohibition of Certain Military Occupations for Women," in Martsenyuk et al., *"Invisible Battalion": Women's Participation in ATO Military Operations*, 16–18.

24 "Informatsiino-dovidkovyi material shchodo hendernoi polityky u Zbroinykh Sylakh Ukrainy [Informational Material on Gender Policy in the Armed Forces of Ukraine]." E-document provided by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.

integration into the security and defense sector has positive implications for the professional qualities of the army, discipline, and civil-military cooperation.²⁵ In particular,

the presence of women in the military at the field level, particularly in leadership, encourages other women and girls to participate and lead; [...] Women peacekeepers broaden the range of skills and capacities among all categories of personnel, enhance the operational effectiveness of all tasks, and improve the mission's image, accessibility and credibility vis-à-vis the local population; [...] Female military officers are in great demand for mixed staff protection teams and investigation teams looking into incidents involving female victims or witnesses. They drive strong civil-military coordination, and together with civilian and police counterparts, can more effectively reach out to and interact with civilians; [...] Commanders have noted that female military officers have a special comparative advantage in house and body searches, interaction with survivors of gender-based violence, work in women's prisons and the screening of women in disarmament and demobilization sites; [...] Not a single female peacekeeper has ever been accused of sexual exploitation and abuse on mission.²⁶

The Armed Forces of Ukraine have developed a gender policy that meets the national gender policy and provides for efficient gender mainstreaming in military life support to create guarantees of equal rights for all persons, regardless of their sex. However, there is a problem of resistance to the existing mechanisms and realistic implementation of the declared policy of equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Voices of Women Fighting in the ATO

As this is the first research on this topic, we tried to get a general overview, aiming to discover more specific issues to develop in our future studies. But the most relevant and important for us was the issue of the possibility to serve, since the research was initiated by women in the military, to see whether the problems they face themselves are common or uncommon, and to provide thorough evidence to use in further anti-discrimination campaigns. We considered an overview of these issues to exactly reflect the changes in the armed forces and the changes in culture proposed by Segal's theoretical approach. Here the method of in-depth interviews was used as the closest to the particular problem — we let the respondents themselves say what

25 U. N. Women, "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2015)," accessed September 25, 2016, <http://wps.unwomen.org/~media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>.

26 U. N. Women, "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace."

they wanted to say and name the most important problems and points to be changed (and changing already).²⁷

Since primarily men are mobilized for the ATO, and women must have a military profession (military occupational specialty, as it is termed) to be mobilized, the respondents (40 of 42) mainly came to the front voluntarily, and at a moment when the system was not ready for female service. The grounds for this state of things are not studied in-depth in this research, but we can mention the gender stereotypes in the labor division — service and care work is generally prestigious and paid less, and associated with women, while men are expected to do something heroic in the war. This labor division is reflected in a number of legal documents related not only to the Ministry of Defense, but to the Ministry of Social Policy and the Ministry of Health Care as well. A detailed explanation of this issue is provided in the desk part of the study.²⁸

Our empirical results show that women are mostly not employed in official positions, since the legal base allows few military positions for women. Around 40% of the respondents (17 of 42) managed to get a formal position, and subsequently, to receive appropriate benefits, including the legal status of a combat participant. In fact, actually 15 of 42 of our respondents hold purely combat positions; others are medical (19 of 42) or supportive. Some women combine various responsibilities at the same time.

Most are in service work, which is in line with the traditions of the gender division of labor. Lists of assigned military occupational specialties are gender-separated and strongly tied to positions. Thus, a woman cannot be employed in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a marksman or a drone operator, but she can be a cook or a bathhouse employee. Her position in the paperwork is not always consistent with her actual occupation. For example, one of the respondents indicated that she was an accountant in the paperwork, but actually served as a rocket operator. This leads to the situation where she cannot have legal combatant status and access to the following list of privileges provided by the Law of Ukraine “On the status of war veterans, guarantees of their social protection”: free sanitarium treatment, a 75% discount on utility service payments, and so on. Women’s official wages are lower according to their official positions (a large number of our respondents have no position at all, and receive no wages), and extra compensation for wounds or special operations participation is not available to them, since officially they do not participate in combat.

What benefits are you talking about, if there is no information I was there. Well, maybe it’s somewhere, but not in the right places (female respondent No. 8).

The respondents have totally different motivations for voluntary participation in the war — from fully private to generally civilian. We can cite an example of personal motivation, where one of the female respondents went to the combat zone after her female friend did so. Some respondents go to the combat zone following their husbands, one followed her adult son. Another respondent dreamed of serving in the army when she was a little girl. As for civilian motivation, in several cases a woman started to interact with the army first as a

27 See Segal, “Women’s Military Roles Cross-Nationality.”

28 See Section 2.4.2. “Prohibition of Certain Military Occupations for Women,” in Martsenyuk et al., *“Invisible Battalion”: Women’s Participation in ATO Military Operations*, 16–18.

volunteer, supplying troops with necessary supplies, then proceeded to directly participate in the hostilities. In some interviews, this motivation is stated directly:

The duty of every citizen is to defend the territorial integrity of the state (female respondent No. 23).

It is my duty. There is no other way (female respondent No. 38).

The legal invisibility of women leads to infrastructural invisibility. Women in military service are generally not supplied with uniforms, footwear, female hygiene products, and so on. They have to buy these with their own money or accept supplies from activists, but no one among our respondents told us that they were supplied officially.

People like me need custom tailoring. First, I'm a woman, second, my figure is not standard. I need an individual approach (female respondent No. 13).

I have enough of everything, but the state did not provide help (female respondent No. 25).

There is nothing for women in the army. I have the impression that there are no women in the army (female respondent No. 36).

Separate accommodation for women is also currently unavailable, and is organized by the combatants themselves. Gender-sensitive health care is not provided, though our respondents did not complain about health care in general, since many of them are front-line physicians or paramedics.

As for gynecology, it's not there, it should be. Otherwise, what can paramedics do with gynecology? (female respondent No. 5)

I would like to have better provisions of medicine, including drugs, which are specific for women. A lot of women have cystitis (female respondent No. 17).

When we were in Shchastia, there was a hospital, a clinic, where they can see women for some special cases. But of course, if we were somewhere in the field, with a standard hospital, I'm not sure a problem could be resolved, if needed... (female respondent No. 19).

One of the respondents even told us that she established a comprehensive medical service unit in her military unit. However, the army medical service can seldom provide specific gynecological support, so our respondents could only rely on the imperfect national medical system, if possible in proximity to the military unit's location.

Speaking about the psychological aspects of female service, we can confirm the assumptions of previous researchers that the war emphasizes stereotypes about gender roles. Men perceive war as a serious, male business, while women are perceived as unworthy of participating in it. They are believed to be there only to serve men. But reality confronts stereotypes, and our respondents do reject that position. As for attitudes of male colleagues, our respondents stated that they face a stereotypical attitude, protective and underestimating, having to prove that they can serve equally to men.

Men hate to be led by a woman. But they obey an appointed head of a group, whether woman or man (female respondent No. 13).

I often heard: "You are a woman, stay at home and cook some borscht." I hated it, but it was motivating. Every time I heard that, I proved that I was capable, that my place was not in the kitchen (female respondent No. 14).

Well, there were some narcissistic peacocks, who believed that "a woman has no place in the war, too weak of a creature." After that, I proved to them that those weak creatures are head and shoulders above them (female respondent No. 28).

They do not realize that they think and feel stereotypically. So, they try to push you into the kitchen, burden you with some allegedly women's stuff, which is really neither men's nor women's. They are not used to the fact that women do all the work with them. These are largely stereotypes (female respondent No. 30).

Nevertheless, most of them say that men change their attitude to a more egalitarian one with time. The research collective finds some optimism in this fact and believes it to have a positive impact on combating gender discrimination, though not yet measurable.

When asked about the prospects and strategic vision of the Ukrainian army, respondents generally claimed that they would like to see gender equality in it, probably, similar to Israel's Defense Forces, where, as they believe, parity and justice have already been achieved. One of our respondents even expressed her wish to become the Minister of Defense, as she believes that she has the vision to implement reforms.

To summarize, we can say that Ukrainian women in combat participating in the ATO are strongly motivated to serve and to fight the discrimination they face during their service.

Male Soldiers' Opinions towards Women in the Military

The research also included 9 interviews with male soldiers, who we asked to evaluate the possibilities for women to serve, and, in comparison — questions on their legal possibilities to serve. As expected, men had no obstacles to serve in desired positions and easily received combat status and so on. Moreover, they showed little awareness about the troubles women face.

Men mostly agree that women may face problems with service in the army, but consider it necessary for the women themselves to combat them, since they say that they personally have never seen any cases of discrimination. At times they express stereotypes themselves: for example, one respondent believes that military women are privileged, and another respondent considers female physiology to be better suited for document checking.²⁹

When this article was being written, we already knew that a large number of positions were opened to women as a result of a public campaign started after the research's presentation.³⁰ This is not as yet applicable to all branches of the Armed Forces (paratrooper forces are still officially all-male), and discrimination in access to military education, not studied yet but expressed in informal talks with stakeholders, limits possibilities for women to hold officer positions.

29 Martsenyuk et al., *"Invisible Battalion": Women's Participation in ATO Military Operations*, 38.

30 "Hranatometnykom chy komandyrom BMP teper mozhe buty i zhinka [A Woman Can Now be a Grenade Launcher or APC Commander]," *Ministerstvo oborony Ukrainy*, July 15, 2016, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2016/07/15/granatometnikom-chi-komandirom-bmp-teper-mozhe-buti-i-zhinka—/>.

Changes Following the “Invisible Battalion” Project

The changes and the political results of the project, being very important, require some separate analysis, and we only list them here so as not to mix political and analytical aims and approaches. But we can see that changes in the Armed Forces of Ukraine are taking place. Ukraine has adopted the National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women’s Peace and Security in February, 2016. The country signed the resolution in 2000 but proliferation of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 urged the government to undertake measures to protect women from negative consequences of the conflict and to promote their participation in the peace process one and a half decade after the resolution was signed. The National Action Plan (NAP) on Women’s Peace and Security (WPS) serves as a legal commitment of the state to implement recommendation of UNSCR 1325 and provides a framework for national and local government, civil society, and international organizations activity within the WPS agenda in Ukraine.

Two goals of Ukraine’s NAP on WPS targeted women in the military directly. The National Action Plan aims to 1) increase the participation of women in peacebuilding; improve the infrastructure and legal environment for women’s participation in international peacekeeping operations, for their service in administrative and combat positions in the Armed Forces and other national security and defense institutions; conduct an assessment of gendered aspects of conflict prevention and resolution and promote the women’s role in peacebuilding, peacekeeping and negotiation processes in the media; and 2) provide assistance and rehabilitation to the population affected by the conflict, including rehabilitation and reintegration of female ex-combatants and their families, social and medical assistance to the victims of GBV.

9 ministries are responsible for the implementation of the NAP on WPS, among which the Ministry of Defense (MoD) demonstrates considerable achievements in the implementation of the NAP on WPS compared to others. MoD has developed an internal plan on the NAP on WPS implementation and established a working group for the coordination of activities on the women’s peace and security agenda. The Ministry of Defense has also appointed an internal gender focal point and hired an external gender expert, who works closely with Ministry representatives in different structures.

Over the less than 1 year since NAP adoption, MoD has extended the list of military positions available for women, conducted an assessment of women’s infrastructural needs in the Armed Forces, introduced gender-sensitivity training for military personnel in the zone of the Anti-Terrorist Operation, developed a new code of conduct for military personnel, which will have special provisions on gender-based violence and will allow for administrative and criminal liability for its violation, and plans to revise the curriculum of military education institutions.

However, there is still room for improvement. Decree 292, issued in June 2016, opened 63 staff positions for private, sergeant, and sergeant-major positions to women undergoing military service under contract.³¹ Among them are combat positions: bomb aimer, assistant to bomb aimer, and senior bomb aimer, commander of a military machine, driver and senior driver,

31 Decree No. 292 “On Amendments to the Interim List of Staff Positions for Privates, Sergeants, Sergeants-Major and Female Military Service Personnel and About the Tariff List of Service Personnel

gunner, scout, including special forces units, shooter, sniper, and others. Not only horizontal but also vertical empowerment of women in the Armed Forces exists, as women have been granted access to positions such as senior driver and driver, bomb aimer and senior bomb aimer, trainer, and senior trainer.

Regardless of the recent changes, the total number of recently opened for women positions in the Armed Forces numbers only 63. Thus, since June 2016, the total number of staff positions allowed for women in private, sergeant, and sergeant-major positions in the Armed Forces has increased to 290. Two-thirds of all military positions remain inaccessible for women in Ukraine. Moreover, no amendments to regulations on the positions available for women officers have been made. The list of available officer positions for women is limited, and experts claim that policy here is not more liberal than for the enlisted positions open to women. No official statistics on the (re)appointment of female military personnel to combat positions allowed for by Decree 292 are as yet available.

Today Ukraine is open to the integration of international experience in the defense and security sector and takes a stand on NATO membership. Over the past 2 years the country has adopted four important decrees: The 2020 Sustainable Development Strategy,³² The National Security Strategy,³³ the Concept on the Development of the Defense and Security Sector of Ukraine,³⁴ and the National Defense Bulletin.³⁵ The overall reform of the security and defense sector is oriented towards the harmonization of the security and defense standards and principles with NATO and EU membership standards. For example, the National Security Strategy of 2015 claims the state's priority is

to achieve the full compatibility of the security and defense sector of Ukraine with those of NATO member states, which should ensure the future possibility for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance for Ukraine...³⁶

It foresees changes to the education system, military and special training for defense sector agencies, the maximization of the compatibility of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with the armed forces of NATO members by introducing NATO standards, the strengthening of military

in the Above-mentioned Positions," accessed September 27, 2016, <http://zakono.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0880-16>.

32 "Sustainable Development Strategy 'Ukraine 2020,'" accessed September 25, 2016, <http://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5/2015>.

33 "National Security Strategy," May 6, 2015, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/287/2015>.

34 "Concept on the Development of the Defense and Security Sector of Ukraine," March 14, 2016, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/922016-19832>.

35 Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the National Defense Bulletin," May 20, 2016, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/2402016-20137>.

36 "National Security Strategy," May 6, 2015, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/287/2015>.

discipline, and other interventions that imply changes favorable for women's integration into the defense and security sector.

Given Ukraine's commitments to the WPS agenda, its declared intentions to reform the defense and security system a chance exists for more inclusive and favorable conditions for women in the national defense and security system in the near future.

Conclusions

The issue of ensuring gender equality in Ukrainian society is governed by both general (Constitution of Ukraine) and special legislation (Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men"). However, though equal rights and opportunities for women and men are supported at the declarative level, they are not always enforced in practice.

Security Council Resolution No. 1325 (2000) emphasizes the importance of a changing vision of the women's role not only as victims of conflict, but as participants of conflict resolution and peacekeeping on an equal basis with men. Ukraine ratified this document and is supposed to respect its major expectations regarding women's integration into the Armed Forces.

The phenomenon of vertical and horizontal gender segregation is inherent in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as it is in the general labor market. The number of women in the military has gradually increased following global trends of nation development.

Women in the ATO express strong hope for gender equality and are establishing it by facing and breaking stereotypes themselves. Most of their problems come from the archaic vision of female service in Ukrainian government bodies, but the situation is changing for the better. These include legal and infrastructural problems, which mean suppression of their right to hold combat and officer positions, to obtain appropriate payment and privileges, and to have appropriate conditions to serve. The stereotypes and unequal attitude from male combatants is also currently a problem.

The "Invisible Battalion" project is continuing its activities and searching for new possibilities to provide women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine with equal rights and opportunities together with men.

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Appendix

Information about Respondents cited in the article³⁷

Respondent No. 5: 23 years old; voluntarily; second-level medic responsible for first aid point.

Respondent No. 8: 28 years old; voluntarily; paramedic.

Respondent No. 13: 33 years old; voluntarily; paramedic, team leader.

Respondent No. 14: 47 years old; voluntarily; medic, team leader.

Respondent No. 17: 42 years old; voluntarily; sanitary instructor.

Respondent No. 19: 34 years old; voluntarily; medic.

Respondent No. 23: 30 years old; voluntarily; paramedic.

Respondent No. 25: 22 years old; voluntarily; paramedic.

Respondent No. 27: 22 years old; voluntarily; patrol, assault company, police officer.

Respondent No. 28: 25 years old; voluntarily; medic / evacuation.

Respondent No. 30: 28 years old; voluntarily; paramedic.

Respondent No. 36: 37 years old; voluntarily; reconnaissance platoon sergeant.

Respondent No. 38: age unknown; voluntarily; tactical medicine, private, delivery, interface.

³⁷ Full list of respondents see: Martsenyuk et al., *"Invisible Battalion": Women's Participation in ATO Military Operations*.