Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 25.02.2022 www.osw.waw.pl

How Ukraine's society and regions are facing the Russian aggression

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The pace and scale of Russia's combat operations came as a shock to the people of Ukraine. However, apart from fears for their own safety, public attitudes have been dominated by outrage at the aggressor and solidarity with the Ukrainian army. Although the citizens are not showing serious signs of mass panic and are following local government recommendations, there has been compulsive stockpiling, resulting in a shortage of fuel at gas stations and some essential goods in shops, as well as queues at ATMs. Also, since the morning of 24 February there has been heavy traffic on the westward roads: some people, including the inhabitants of Kyiv – out of fear of a siege – have moved or evacuated their families to the west of the country, and some abroad – mainly to Poland, but also to other neighbouring EU states and Moldova. The Ukrainian media estimate the number of displaced people at 100,000 at least, and those who have left the country altogether at several tens of thousands (30,000 people have entered Poland from Ukraine in the last 24 hours). Anticipating people's reactions, the authorities have for several days been calling for all the country's political and social forces to unify in the face of aggression, and to use only proven, official sources of information.

Commentary

- Despite the shock for the inhabitants, especially of eastern Ukraine, which the rapid military invasion of Russia turned out to be, the Ukrainian public has displayed an increase in patriotic attitudes and a commitment to supporting the army in various ways (financial, material, medical) and to actively participating in the combat. Record payments to foundations supporting the army have been recorded; organisations and volunteer groups in individual regions of the country are conducting fundraising and in-kind aid to this end. The business community has also become involved, making large donations and declaring a readiness to pay a certain amount of money from each transaction for the army's needs. Public figures, celebrities and clergy – in some cases even members of the Moscow Patriarchate – have called on the people to support the army and the state. As a gesture of protest against the invasion, many Ukrainian citizens who had previously used the Russian language in everyday speech are switching to the use of Ukrainian.
- The citizens are actively engaging in cooperation with the military and the state authorities in the field of security. They have been reporting in large numbers to the regional units of the Territorial Defence of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (the Ministry of

Defence has significantly simplified the procedure for joining). Special brigades made up of veterans of armed conflicts are being called up to patrol the city streets. Residents are also responding to the appeals of the security services and the police for vigilance and support for the army's activities; these include covering up the fluorescent markings painted on the ground by Russian troops to aid with aviation, and reporting on suspicious people and situations (over a thousand reports have been recorded in the Lviv oblast in the last 24 hours). High school students in the Lviv oblast are attending shooting courses. The population is also participating in first aid courses, organised among others by the Red Cross; and queues of volunteers are forming at blood donation centres to give blood for the wounded.

- Cities in the west of Ukraine are preparing to deal with the refugee crisis by declaring their readiness to accept the inhabitants of regions threatened by military actions. On the eve of the invasion, Lviv had become the most popular destination; the demand for apartments to rent has increased sharply, as have their prices. Some foreign diplomatic staff have also moved their operations there. A coordination centre has been established in the city to locate displaced persons and collect humanitarian aid. The city of Chernivtsi has pledged to accept up to 14,000 people for whom dormitories, schools & sports facilities, and a hotline are being prepared. Some cities in Podolia (Khmielnytsyky, Kamianets-Podilskiy and Shepetivka) have taken similar steps. They have received the first groups from the areas affected by the fighting, prepared rooms for them, and are beginning to make lists of available accommodation, etc. At the same time local authorities have been making crisis preparations: they are creating maps of critical infrastructure (such as water intakes that can be used if the municipal water supply is shut off), opening backup emergency telephone lines, and so on. A crisis meeting of mayors from western Ukrainian cities has been called for next week.
- The government's appeal for unification, to avoid panic and to use only proven sources of information has been supported by Ukraine's leading oligarch-run media groups (1+1, belonging to Ihor Kolomoyskiy; StarLightMedia, Viktor Pinchuk; Media Group Ukraine, Rinat Akhmetov; and Inter Media Group, Dmytro Firtash). In a joint statement, it was announced that during the period of martial law, all TV stations will broadcast in free-to-air mode and will cease broadcasting advertising, and all information will be duplicated on their YouTube channels and on social networks.
- These visible moves by the regional authorities, business, media and society of Ukraine testify to high morale, society's consolidation around the political and military leadership, and a determination to support the state in the fight against the enemy. However, the mood may change – as well as the attitude towards leaving the country – if the Russians take over the main cities, including the capital, and if local humanitarian disasters arise related to lack of electricity, food or access to cash. At the same time, the aggression is accelerating the process of breaking the social ties between the two countries and shaping a new Ukrainian identity which has been ongoing since 2014. Attitudes of hostility towards Russia are growing and strengthening among the people, and this seems to be an irreversible process, regardless of what happens in the immediate future.