Evolving Political Ideas and Organizational Practices of Ukraine's 'Activist' Organizations, 2013-2019

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ABSTRACT

The events of Euromaidan and the subsequent processes of political development under the conditions of the undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war and the related political crisis were accompanied by the significant development of informal and semi-formal political groups and organizations, collectively known as "activists". Nevertheless, despite the empirically proven and intensive participation of these groups in both street and formal politics of Ukraine, it seems that the ideological and political nature of these organizations and the depth of their involvement in political processes in modern Ukrainian society and politics remain unclear. That is why this article aims to clarify these two aspects of a particular issue, based on the need for theoretical and empirical research of "activists" as not only a mediatic but also a political entity. The article traces the structure of relations of activist groups (organizations) singled out as a subject of research with other formal and informal political actors (public authorities, political parties, law enforcement agencies, churches and religious organizations, etc.) is traced. The study took a step toward determining the ideological and political specifics of the "activist" field of informal political life of Ukrainian society in the years from Euromaidan to the election of President of Ukraine V. Zelensky and described the extent and degree of integration of "activist" groups in Ukraine's political system in the circumstance of a social crisis.

KEYWORDS: Political activism, Ukraine, Euromaidan, Political crisis

Introduction. The concept of political activism belongs to the basic / fundamental elements of modern political science, because the issue of political participation was singled out by the founders of modern political science (for example, H. McClosky) as one of the key aspects of political research [1]One of the most general definitions of political participation by the American researcher J. Nagel points to the diversity and integrity of the phenomenon of participation as part of the functioning of politics as a system as participation encompasses actions by which ordinary members of any political system influence the results of its activities [2]Political participation as such can take place within both formal political institutions and informal and semi-formal social groups (networks), which usually (though not always) see themselves as antagonists of the formalized system of society's political life. The importance of political activism as a phenomenon in this context lies in its ability to direct the activities of the political system, including primarily "grassroots" ones, towards influencing the activities of state power and the functioning of related political institutions toward realizing one or another, more or less conscious political interest [3].

As per M. Diani's classical definition, a social movement represents "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" [4], p.1]. This definition allows one to point to two main characteristics of activist movements and organizations, i.e., (1) their focus on conflicting political interaction with other political actors; and (2) a close connection with the collective identity that forms the basis for relative organizational cohesion even in the absence of clearly defined organizational structures and hierarchies [5].That is why activist movements and organizations often appear as network structures – including those that go beyond the political boundaries of the nation-states in which they once originated – or tend to form network links with other activist organizations. movements that share a certain collective identity. Due to this factor, one can talk about the formation of a set of formal and informal associations and associations of organizations and movements, which often position themselves as a "civil society" at an international scale, which may go beyond the regulatory competence of the modern nation state or even the latter's community [6] Hence an inquiry into ideological and practical-political aspects of activist movements and organizations of socio-political orientation should take into account both the measurement of their informal, network nature, which allows to involve potentially large number of participants, and the importance of their resource and ideological mobilization, which logically requires recognition of the importance of an organized core of activists (as well as associated with the latest "donors" of the relevant resource base of activist movements) [[7], [8]]At the same time, the fundamentally networked nature of activist movements allows the latter to enter into both competitive and cooperative relations with other actors in the political system and related political and social institutions. Based on this, specific case studies of activist movements and groups operating in Ukraine under the influence of the Euromaidan and the Russian-Ukrainian war, which became the main impetus for the formation of their collective political identity (including in terms of defining the circle of their allies and opponents among other political actors – both mass and elitist), are considered in subsequent sections through the prism of the conceptual perspective presented in this Introduction.

Literature Review. Boundaries of the concept of "political activism" are narrower compared to the phenomenon of political participation in general: the very distinction between these two concepts in everyday political discourse indicates that their semantic fields are not identical [9]. On the one hand, political activism differs from such forms of political participation as electoral behavior in that it involves the constant involvement of relevant individuals in the activities of political movements with which they identify [[8], [9], [10]]. On the other hand, political activism, like participation in the electoral process, aims to articulate and realize the interests of social groups with which its participants identify. That is why the fields of political activism and electoral participation, despite their qualitative differences, may intersect. For example, the American researcher D.R. Fischer, based on data on the participation of politically engaged American youth in the activities of the so-called "social movements" in the run-up to and during the Obama election campaign in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, points out that general activist movements such as Organizing for America have relatively organically shifted from a social movement format to a component of the Democratic Party's electoral machine, which, according to the author, points out that "the lines between activism and electoral politics have lost their clarity in recent years" [11], p.131]. This example shows that activist organizations (even those that identify themselves as social movements) may well be intertwined with the activities of political parties and structurally similar organizations aimed at encouraging electoral forms of political participation. [11]

It seems that in the context of Ukraine a similar trend has emerged since the early 2000s, in the context of the events of Maidan in 2004, when non-partisan NGOs (in particular, the Civic Campaign Pora (literally, "It's time!") began to participate in political processes, the focus of which was the confrontation over the results of the second round of the 2004 presidential election [12] Similar to the Kmara youth organization in Georgia on the eve of and during the Rose Revolution of 2003) [12], the model of political activism proposed by Pora proved to be relatively short-lived in terms of its political relevance, so since 2005 there has been a decline and gradual degradation of the network structure of this organization. In this case, Pora as a relatively massive, albeit decentralized social movement proved to be a kind of "school of personnel" for a number of political parties in Ukraine in the late 2000s-2010s: for example, the movement included such well-known politicians as V. Kaskiv and V. Vyatrovych, whose diversity of political positions can be further considered as a reflection of the fundamental diffusion of the political ideology of Pora as a movement as a whole [13]. Nevertheless, the example of "Pora" inspired the further development of political activism in Ukraine, which was manifested in the spread in the early 2010s of the ideas of leaderless network public activism with clear protest intentions (see next sections).

A review of general trends in the development of activist movements and organizations that are politicized indicates that the latter tend to combine a non-partisan organizational form with close cooperation with "formalized" political forces and are easily subject to appropriate ideology. At the same time, the question arises as to the very criteria for defining and forms of activity of activist movements and organizations, which are discussed in this section. Turning to the achievements of modern Western political science, one can identify two main methodological approaches to addressing the above issues: (1) an approach based on the theory of contentious politics (C. Tilly, S. Tarrow [[14], [15]), and (2)

a perspective based on the theory of resource mobilization (J. D. McCarthy, M. N. Zald) [[16], [17]]. On the one hand, S. Tarrow emphasizes the informal organizational structures of activist movements, which is due to their nature as a form of articulation of the "collective challenge", and the antagonists and goals of the latter can be both political elites as a whole and other activist movements of opposite ideological and political orientation, or public authorities in the narrow sense of the word [14]. Thus, activist movements (social movements, in the terminology adopted by S. Tarrow) can be seen as based on certain network structures and relevant practices of collective action forms of contentious politics, which may challenge other political actors. It follows that the main criteria for classifying a movement or organization as activist are, first of all (1) their ability to conduct collective political activity (struggle) on the basis of network structures; (2) and their ability to challenge / compete with other political actors while remaining the aforementioned network movements [15].

On the other hand, such an approach, despite its influence in terms of conceptualizing activist / social movements and their role in political participation structures, seems too general, as such a definition blurs the conceptual boundary between movement as a network of political action and movement as an organizational core. More productive in this context seems to be the approach proposed by J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald, according to which one can trace a clear line between the social movement as based on the principle of voluntary participation of a group supported by individuals to achieve certain changes in society [16], and a social movement organization, which is characterized as a complex, or formal, organization that identifies its goals with the guidelines of a particular social movement or counter-movement and seeks to achieve those goals [17] . The corresponding dichotomy allows one to comprehend the situation in which the activities of the informal network movement are accompanied and, in many cases, directed by a certain organizational core of political activists acting as a more organized and hierarchical network within the network. Thus, such a dual organization allows to conduct and organize effective resource mobilization (both in terms of personnel of protest movements, and in terms of accumulation and distribution of financial resources, as well as relevant machinery and equipment). Therefore, the key tasks of social movements, from this point of view, are the above forms of resource mobilization, as well as - which is of strategic importance – actually mobilizing new supporters, neutralizing or reformatting of mass and elite public opinion in their favor, and achieving appropriate changes in view of their political goals. That is why in the context of this section the concept of activist organization / movement is in fact identical to the concept of the social movement organization put forward by McCarthy and Zald, which, however, does not prevent the effective use of contentious politics theory when considering practical aspects of participation by activist movements in the processes of collective political struggle.

Methodology. This article has adopted a case study-based methodology in political science [18]with a particular focus on the evolution of ideological and practical orientations of Ukraine's "activist" organizations in the course of the political struggle taking place in Ukrainian politics between 2013 (the beginning of the Euromaidan movement) and 2019 (the coming to power of Volodymyr Zelensky as the country's president). The research process has more specifically considered the scope of the respective organizations' / movements' changing perspectives on the ideological and political orientations

that had initially brought them into the political struggle, while shedding light on the interrelationship between the respective "activist" organizations and other salient actors of Ukrainian politics at the aforementioned stage of political process. The study allowed to generalize and specify the ideological and political evolution of "activists" as an important, albeit not formalized category of participants in political processes in Ukraine in the context of the social crisis. At the same time, the study of the main political practices of "activist" organizations contributes to the expanded characterization of the nature of relations between them and other actors in the political field of Ukraine, as defined above. This, in turn, will raise the question of the uniqueness or typicality of "activist" organizations in Ukraine as a political entity that claims to express the political interests of civil society in a situation of political crisis.

Results. Turning to the issue of collective political identity as the basis of the ability of an activist movement to act as a subject of the political process, it should be noted that the crystallization of the common political identity of Ukrainian "activism" as a movement contributed to the combination of events in Euromaidan mass protest movement aimed at counteracting the foreign and later domestic political acts of the political regime of Viktor Yanukovych and his allies, which, according to protesters and their leaders, distanced Ukraine from the status of a future subject of European politics and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which manifested itself in the annexation by the Russian Federation of the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as in the ascendancy of the separatist movement in the Donbass and the East and South of Ukraine in general [[19], [20]]. If the events of Euromaidan led to the legitimization of the idea of mass protest against the actions of public authorities that could impinge upon civil rights and / or contradict the European and Euro-Atlantic geopolitical course of Ukraine, the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war added a state-patriotic component to the ideological and political dimension of Euromaidan-affiliated movements and groups - including those who were previously skeptical of the political regime of the modern Ukrainian state as such (for example, parts of the "new left" who took part in the Euromaidan protests, and later - the volunteer movements [20].

In contrast to the period of the "Orange Revolution" of 2004, Euromaidan was marked by a much higher level of decentralization and internal contradictions of the protest movement, many participants of which were skeptical and even negative about the official opposition to Viktor Yanukovych, represented by the leaders of the three main so-called Maidan parties, i.e., Arseniy Yatsenyuk (Batkivshchyna), Vitaliy Klychko (UDAR), and Oleh Tyagnybok (All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda), perceiving them as an opportunistic element that would be ready to arrive at a compromise with the current government at any moment. From a discursive point of view, an important place in the early stages of Euromaidan events (late November 2013 - early January 2014) was occupied by the rhetorical distinction between "peaceful activists" and "provocateurs", which was largely used by opposition party leaders as an argument in promoting their own agenda. negotiations (involving international mediators) and pressure on the current government using non-violent protest mechanisms (street closures, etc.) [[20], 21]. Within this interpretation of the Euromaidan strategy, the so-called "provocateurs" (mostly members or associates of pro-nationalist activist groups) were seen as a destructive element that was explicitly or implicitly controlled by law enforcement agencies to discredit

the protest and prepare to disperse the Euromaidan [21]. At this stage in the development of Euromaidan as a movement, however, supporters of the "nonviolent" tendency predominated, which included primarily party activists of the three above-mentioned opposition parties (with some exceptions in the form of the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda, although its supporters and non-party right-wing nationalist groups affiliated with this party, such as C14, also refrained from participating too actively in "provocative" actions until January 2014), as well as members of non-violent socio-political activist associations such as the Foundation for Regional Initiatives (FRI), the Avtomaidan movement, the Public Sector of Euromaidan, Euromaidan SOS, etc. [[21], [22]]. At the same time, Maidan Self-Defense Detachments (in Ukrainian, *sotni*) began forming on November 30, having been announced as such on December 1 (under the leadership of Andriy Parubiy) [[22] [23]]. Nevertheless, one of the main tasks of the Self-Defense at that time was to resist possible "provocations" in order to preserve the non-violent nature of Euromaidan. The key political demands of Euromaidan as a movement at that time mainly concerned the return to the previous European integration policy, the punishment of law enforcement officers who committed arbitrary violence against Euromaidan participants (in particular, on the night of November 30 on Independence Square and on December 1 on Bankova Street), as well as the voluntary resignation of Viktor Yanukovych and / or the government of Mykola Azarov in general [[21], [22], [23]].

The balance between "peaceful protesters" and "provocateurs" would change dramatically in favor of the latter after the adoption by the majority of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of so-called "dictatorial laws" (January 16, 2014), which led to mass clashes on Mykhailo Hrushevsky Street (the seat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine) after the Euromaidan rally on January 19, and the deaths of activists Serhiy Nihoyan and Mikhail Zhyznevsky (January 22). It was this sequence of events that raised the prestige of the right-wing nationalist activists who had previously been labelled as "provocateurs" and consolidated them into the Right Sector movement [[20], [22], [23]]. The specificity of the latter was the combination of the network structure (including on the basis of amalgamation of previously existing right-wing nationalist groups with preservation of their organizational autonomy in certain issues) with the principle of leadership, represented in person by one of the historical nationalist leaders Dmytro Yarosh, whose organizational communiqué began to attract more and more attention of the Ukrainian and international media [[22], [23]].

The latter factor, as well as the presence of other elements of the formalized organizational hierarchy (for example, unified headquarters and regional coordinators accountable to the latter), gave the Right Sector an opportunity to more successfully mobilize human, informational, and economic (financial) resources, enabling greater involvement of participants and sympathizers of the movement in the deployment of the Euromaidan movement at the regional level (i.e. outside Kyiv), to which the "Right Sector" began to add a more confrontational character (in particular, in the context of greater readiness for such actions as seizure of office buildings and the destruction of the USSR era, etc.) [[22] [23]]. Based on the statistics provided by V. Ishchenko [20], it can be concluded that the level of involvement of activists of Svoboda, the Right Sector, and other nationalist groups in the Euromaidan protest movement was positively correlated with the relative readiness of other protesters to take more radical

action in the context of the gradual demoralization of the political regime of Viktor Yanukovych and his defenders from the ranks of Interior Ministry fighters and anti-Maidan participants as a counter-movement against Euromaidan, and contributed to the victory of Euromaidan as already revolutionary (i.e. one that recognizes the possibility of radical political transformation), as opposed to mere reform-oriented activist movement.

On the other hand, the Russian-Ukrainian war paradoxically contributed to the growing importance of "liberal" ideological and political elements in the general ideological matrix of the post-Maidan "activist" environment, which was accompanied by the growing importance of patriotic guidelines within its collective identity. Against this background, the popularity of right-wing nationalist ideas in society is gradually declining, which was a direct manifestation of the electoral failures of Svoboda and the Right Sector in the early parliamentary elections of 2014 [22]. One of the main factors in this process seems to be rhetorically 'fascist' interpretation of the nature of Putin's political regime in the Russian Federation as an opponent of Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea and the start of hostilities in Donbas, which could not help but reflect the perception of right-wing nationalist ideas in the Ukrainian political space as potential carriers of ideological confusion in terms of national identity. Together with the need to counter the official and unofficial propaganda of the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian state, which focused on the 'fascist' nature of the 'Kyiv junta', this put the Ukrainian right-wing nationalist movement in a rather contradictory position. The only practical solution for its representatives was to participate in the organization of a general patriotic volunteer movement, and some of the leading combat units of the latter were actually organized by activists of nationalist organizations (for example, the Azov battalion (later regiment) was created by former members of the Patriot of Ukraine far-right group, while activists of the Right Sector would set up the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps [24]

Although such activities re-legitimized activist organizations and pro-nationalist groups in the eyes of the mass pro-Maidan community, it limited their ability to mobilize new members and use their own political and other resources beyond purely military activities. A possible exception to this trend is the Azov Movement and the National Corps political party based on it, although, as in the case of the Right Sector, this activist movement associated with the Azov regiment failed to convert its street presence in any significant electoral success [24]. In general, as of 2019, right-wing nationalist activist movements proved to be relatively isolated precisely because of the 'military' profile they had chosen to project (partly for ideological reasons, partly pragmatically) with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Attempts to break out of this isolation by conducting joint activist activities with liberal activist organizations opposed to the then-President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko (in particular, the New Forces Movement) in 2017-2019 [25] did not yield the desired result, so at the time of election of Volodymyr Zelensky to the presidency and the beginning of a new stage of Ukraine's political development, the future of the right-wing nationalist activist environment in the Ukrainian political system remained uncertain.

At the same time, just as right-wing nationalist groups, liberal "activists" have also shown a tendency to resort to attempts at party organization, which have also proved questionable in their practical results. The political projects of the Democratic Alliance and the New Forces Movement, which presented

themselves as political parties representing and advancing the socio-political movement initiated by Euromaidan and were in strong opposition to the Poroshenko administration, could be clear examples in this regard. The specificity of the Democratic Alliance as a socio-political force (founded in 2010) lied in its emphasis on the network principle of the organization, as the party itself was created on the basis of reformatting the all-Ukrainian youth public organization Christian Democratic Youth of Ukraine founded in 1994 [25]Accordingly, the 'team' of the Democratic Alliance structurally and functionally consisted of four related organizations, namely, the party with this name, the Youth of the DemAlliance youth organization, the DemAlliance of Women women's NGO, and the DemAlliance Help NGO [25]Such an organizational structure aimed to ensure close ties between the party and the wider community of civil society activists, however, from an electoral point of view, the Democratic Alliance failed to become an effective political party, as evidenced by its low performance in the 2014-2015 local elections [25], as well as the fact that the party has not been able to nominate its own candidates in the national elections during this period of political development, instead cooperating with a number of traditional parties. During Poroshenko's presidency, the party relied on the promotion of "anti-corruption" discourse, which gradually became, along with the general liberal-patriotic rhetoric, an important element of its political identity [25]After Zelensky's victory in the 2019 presidential election, some members of the Democratic Alliance (in particular, G. Yanchenko and A. Krasnosilska) joined the Ukrainian president's inner circle, and later took leading positions within the Servant of the People ruling party [25]Accordingly, the case study of the Democratic Alliance shows the weakness of the liberal-patriotic "activist" environment in terms of forming and promoting their own electoral-patriotic projects, but also - the ability of its members to use the resources of their political network to enter the traditional political parties and promoting one's own political discourse within the latter.

For its part, the New Forces Movement, founded by former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili (who became Ukraine's citizen in 2014) shortly after the latter's resignation as head of the Odessa regional state administration in November 2016 and registered in February 2017, has been marked by an anti-corruption stance since its inception (including in the context of the supply and equipment of the Armed Forces and volunteers), as well as by the emphasis on the need for radical liberal reform and modernization of the main social systems of Ukraine [26]In December 2017 to February 2018, the party took the most active part in organizing and holding mass protests in the center of Kyiv, aimed at the resignation of the government of Volodymyr Groysman and the impeachment of President Poroshenko (symbolically called "Marches for Impeachment") [26] In this sense, the strategy of Saakashvili and his supporters can be seen as an attempt to appropriate the socio-political energy associated with the symbolic heritage of Euromaidan, and to reproduce this fundamental event of the new Ukrainian political identity in a new context and on its own terms. A sign thereof can also be considered the attempts of the New Forces Movement to create a broad network of an "activist" coalition against Poroshenko, which would repeat the configuration of the liberal-nationalist union during the Euromaidan [26]. However, the narrowness of mostly "anti-corruption" demands of protesters and organizers of mass rallies (in particular, regarding introduction of open ballot elections and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Court of Ukraine [26]) did not allow the New Forces Movement

to achieve the expected success. Shortly after Saakashvili's deportation from Ukraine to Poland (February 12, 2018), the Marches for Impeachment lost their momentum, and the activities of the New Forces Movement were gradually curtailed. In general, the relevant case study indicates that the attempts of liberal "activists" inspired by the success of Euromaidan to repeat its success in order to come to power at the national level had the same connection with political reality as the hopes of many right-wing nationalist "activists" for a 'revolution' in the form of the 'Third Maidan' .

Discussion. In conclusion, it should be noted that a review of the evolution of ideological principles and political practices of both key sectors of the "activist" environment of Ukraine - right-wing nationalist and liberal-patriotic ones - suggests that the ideological and political postulates of the latter have undergone significant convergence. and later the "anti-corruption" discourse as the basis for a common understanding around certain common foundations of political identity. This is radically different from the tendencies towards political polarization between activist movements of qualitatively different ideological orientation, which are now common in the practice of socio-political movements in the United States and other Western countries (see previous section). Accordingly, such an observation allows us to conceptualize the common experience of Euromaidan and the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as the common rejection of the traditional political elite of post-Soviet Ukraine (including the one that came to power as a result of Euromaidan) as a basis for de facto allied relations and opportunities for appropriation of certain ideological theses from one sector of the "activist" environment of Ukraine to another.

At the same time, it seems that the differences in the original political traditions of the respective sectors of "activists" largely determined the attraction of "activist" groups of right-wing nationalism to (often performative) political violence, as opposed to the predominant focus of liberal-patriotic groups on symbolic campaigns and volunteer activities. Still, the diversity of ideological and political forms and political practices characteristic of the "activist" field of the political system of Ukraine requires further in-depth analysis in order to further clarify and / or summarize the relevant results of this study.

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