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Between freedom and lawlessness

PGMs and state relations: An analysis of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions

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Abstract

The volunteer battalions that emerged in Ukraine in the post-Maidan period, have been accentuated as a case of strong pro-government militias (PGMs) with capabilities to evolve into state parallel formations. However, with the incorporation of most remaining volunteer battalions into the regular security forces, a new phase has developed. This thesis seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the relations between states and PGMs, applied to the case of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions. More specifically, it asks if and how strong PGMs can represent a threat to the state, and if their incorporation into the regular state structures, can contribute to more or less stability. Based on a critical review of the existing PGM literature, and Max Weber's ideal of state monopoly on legitimate violence, it puts forward the claim that the volunteer battalions did represent a threat to the state's legitimacy and effective execution of power in the early period of the conflict, due to their loose control and independent power base. It argues that the potential risks today are less imminent and more veiled; leaving unanswered questions about the effectiveness of the government's incorporation strategy, as well as the nature of the ties between former volunteer battalions and certain civil organizations. The thesis calls for more research on the topic, which can contribute to insights into scenarios that may materialize when the armed conflict moves towards an end, and the interests of the state and the former PGMs, potentially cease to overlap.

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A part of me will always linger in Ukraine.

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1. Introduction

Relevance of the study

The popular image of the volunteer battalions in Ukraine is often of brave and passionate citizens stepping up to defend their nation, freedom and democracy when it unexpectedly came under attack. Or sometimes the complete opposite; right-wing extremists committing war crimes and infringing upon the state. In 2013 and 2014, events in Ukraine moved rapidly from peaceful protests on the Maidan to violent confrontations between protesters and the security forces, to a Russian annexation of Crimea and eventually to hostilities and the breakaway of two so-called "people republics" in the east. It was a time when thousands of citizens mobilised to support their nation, with activities like fundraising, distribution of food and equipment, and some with active participation in the operations against the separatists. Whereas few challenge the significance of the initial efforts by the volunteer battalions when the regular forces were neither ready, nor equipped to counter the revolts in the east, it is nonetheless well recognized that the popular mobilisation also led to challenges in terms of organization, accountability and democratic control, with those tasks normally deemed a prerogative of the state.

The reality is unsurprisingly more complex than the two dichotomies presented above. Although still somewhat shrouded in emotions and myth, the strong public image has started to crack as more information has become available (Bulakh, Senkiv &Teperik, 2017). International organizations, media and scholars have started to examine more closely the relations between the volunteer battalions and the state. There have been accusations of war crimes, instances of violent clashes with the regular forces, commanders turning to politics and vigilante groups marching on the streets. Not to mention when in 2017, activist groups including volunteer veterans, seemingly managed to turn an illegal trade blockade into official policy (Kostanyan & Remizov, 2017). While the volunteer battalions lessened some immediate challenges for the government, they may simultaneously have created new ones.

Paramilitary groups or militias are a common feature in most conflicts (Aliyev,

2016). Their presence in the Ukrainian conflict is thus not surprising. Although the role of militias is a common theme in warfare studies, the role of sub-state and non-state actors in the conflict in the Donbass were, for a period, mostly overlooked. According to German and Karagiannis (2016) most academic focus on the Ukrainian conflict had been on its geopolitical implications. Jentzsch, Kalycas and Shubiger (2015) claim that studies generally have tended to disregard the proliferation of armed actors that emerge during armed conflicts to fight on behalf of the state and/or against the rebels, a category comprising the Ukrainian volunteer battalions; and Aliyev (2016) suggests that the "war on terror" generally drew attention away from research on armed non-state actors. However, more recently a renewed academic interest in militias has been seen, especially those aligned with a state's regular forces, and what Carey and Mitchell (2015) describe as "not-entirely state" and "not-entirely private" (p. 4). The latter due to the many questions and controversies surrounding these entities. Albeit still a less studied phenomenon, the volunteer battalions have recently been accentuated as an illustrating case of a somewhat new category of strong pro-government militias, with capabilities to evolve into state parallel structures.

Although the conflict in eastern Ukraine is mostly overlooked by western media today, it is still ongoing, and on the political agenda in institutions like the EU, NATO and UN. Western governments are in fact the main financiers of the military reforms in Ukraine (Akimenko, 2018). While the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is monitoring a less than respected ceasefire agreement, discussions are held in the UN Security Council on whether a peacekeeping mission can be a new way forward. The integration and control of the former volunteer battalions are factors monitored when discussing Ukraine's NATO accession. But as Aliyev (2016) highlights; if there remain armed groups with the capacity to become an independent threat to the country's security and democracy, the ambitions and investments may all be in vain.

In this study, insights drawn from the extensive literature on militias and the role of the state in consolidating the means of violence, are supplemented with an analysis of empirical findings primarily from existing written sources on the volunteer battalions in Ukraine. The thesis discusses if and how strong pro-

government militias (PGMs) may pose a threat to the state, depending on their relative strength compared to the regular security forces and the government itself. It looks into the different strategies a state may apply when faced with the presence of PGMs, including incorporation into the regular forces. The core purpose of the study, is to explore the topic from different theoretical perspectives and to add some nuances to a discussion still much influenced by a lack of empirical research. More importantly, it seeks to accentuate some points that can trigger interest for further in-depth studies of the topic.

Research questions

The general outcome of the thesis will be to present answers to the following main research question:

To what extent and how can strong pro-government militias represent a threat to the state, and how and why can their incorporation into the regular security forces contribute to more or less stability?

The research question is thus twofold. The first section is partly descriptive and partly exploratory as it based on prior research on the field, looks into the presumption that strong PGMs can pose a threat to the state. On the backdrop of the state's organization of its legitimate means of violence, it addresses issues like control, different interest between the state and PGMs, and discrepancies in the level of trust from the general population. The second part, takes the findings from the previous section as its starting point. It opens a more theoretical discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating PGMs into the regular security apparatus, and explores if the strategy can counterbalance the potentially destabilizing effects of the PGM presence. To allow a logical structure and to fully answer the research questions above, the study is built up around four supplementary sub-questions, based on the Ukrainian context:

1) What were the reasons behind the emergence of the volunteer battalions in Ukraine?
2) What functions did the volunteer battalions fill from a state perspective? And why did they fill them?

3) How can strong pro-government militias like the volunteer battalions represent a threat to the state's legitimacy and effective execution of power?

4) To what extent and how did the integration of the volunteer battalions into the state structures contribute to more or less stability?

As can be derived from the third question, the potential threat posed by strong PGMs is focused mainly on the legitimacy of the state or the government, as well as its ability to effectively execute legitimate power, be it on the battlefield or in state institutions. They are both essential features of a strong and stable state (Wulf, 2007).

Clarification of concepts

By regular security forces I refer to the security forces fully funded, administered and controlled by the state. This includes both military and police units, meaning both external and internal security actors, all accountable to the government.

When a state is faced with threats inside or outside its territory, some states will supplement its regular security forces with auxiliary forces such as paramilitary groups or militias (Bohmelt & Clayton, 2017). While some scholars do not differentiate between militias and paramilitary groups (e.g. Aliyev, 2016) or suggest that to do so, is not useful to indicate a group's properties (e.g. Staniland, 2015), I follow Bohmelt and Clayton (2017) and draw a distinction between paramilitaries and militias, and especially PGMs. Paramilitary units are understood as "militarized security units, which are trained and organized under the central government to support or replace the regular" forces (p. 198). While the term militia generally can include both rebel/separatist groups as well as armed groups loosely connected to the government, this study focuses on PGMs.

Jentzch et al. (2015) define PGMs as: "armed groups that operate alongside state security forces or independently of the state, aiming to shield local populations from rebel demands or depredations and seeking to acquire its loyalty or collaboration" (p. 756). Carey and Mitchell (2015) define them more broadly as: "armed groups linked to the government and separate from the regular forces" (p. 4), but limits the term to groups operating in a civil war- or counterinsurgency

context. In this study, PGMs are defined as armed groups linked to the government, and with a level of organization, but still existing outside the regular security apparatus (Carey, Mitchell & Lowe, 2013). They are thus not necessarily linked to a local population, nor are their operations limited to armed conflict or counterinsurgency campaigns, although in most instances the latter will be the case.

The main distinction between paramilitary groups and PGMs therefore lies in the level of embeddedness in the regular state structures. PGMs have the loosest connection and consequently have a higher level of autonomy. The two categories correspond somewhat to Carey and Mitchell's (2017) terms *semi-official PGMs*, which has formalized links to the government, but still exist separate from the regular forces, and *informal militias,* where no formalized links to the government exist. Nevertheless, with the vast attempts to classify non-state armed groups, it is perhaps the fluid nature of the relations between PGMs and the state and/or population, that needs to be stressed the most.

Amongst the examples of PGMs that Carey and Mitchell (2015) list, are the armed groups of Ukrainian citizens that formed in 2014 to participate in the suppression of the separatist offensive in eastern Ukraine; the vernacularly termed volunteer battalions. While the expression might seem straightforward to those familiar with the Ukrainian conflict, it is actually challenging to define. This partly stems from the fact that the term often seems to be used either without knowing or defining exactly what it comprises. Some appear to include all volunteer efforts that were mobilised during the 2013/2014 events in Ukraine, including the groups on the Maidan, and those mobilized into the newly established state security structures, while others implicitly refer to more well-known and controversial groups, like for example the Aidar, Azov and Donbas battalions.

Due to its complexity, I have devoted chapter 3.2 to elaborate on the background of the volunteer battalions. I will therefore refer to them here simply as armed groups of citizens that arose partly as a continuation from the protests at the Maidan, but more substantially in association with the armed hostilities that broke

out in eastern Ukraine in 2014. As most volunteer battalions during 2015 had been integrated into the state security apparatus, it may be problematic to define them as PGMs. This will however be an integral part of the analysis.

I use the term separatists for the armed formations fighting against the Ukrainian forces in the east, and "Donetsk/Luhansk People's Republic" (DPR/LPR) for the Ukrainian areas not under control by the government in Kyiv. The terms are meant to be neutral, and the quotation marks stress the non-recognized status of the two "republics".

Delimitations

While the research question is general the case is geographically limited to the Ukrainian context. The initial idea was a comparative study, but limitations in time and scope led it to be a single case study. This was also partly done due to the scope of the topic, touching upon a range of perspectives within state-building, civic society participation and conflict studies, each deserving a study of its own. The analysis is placed on a macro level, leaving out the micro and mostly also the meso-level. Consequently, motivations for the individual volunteer soldiers and the volunteer battalions as distinct entities, are not part of the study. This also excludes the important subject of demobilization and the status of the volunteer fighters as veterans.

The study is not an analysis of the causes of the conflict, nor does it take a stance in terms of the degree of international actor's involvement in the conflict. It excludes purely corporate groups or criminal gangs, and will not consider the topic of the far-right generally, except when directly relevant for the current discussion.

Research design & methodology

When choosing a methodological approach one must consider not only the aims of the study and the questions to be answered, but also one's own preconditions and resources as a researcher. The methodological design will largely influence what can be discovered through the enquiries (Halvorsen, 2008). Considering the aim of this study; to achieve a better understanding of PGMs and the volunteer battalions, and generally their relation to the state, a qualitative approach seemed natural. It was not the extent or the distribution of a phenomenon, but rather its

content and significance (Fangen, 2004). It is mainly based upon a deductive method as it started out with a general postulation that strong PGMs can represent a possible threat to the state, that it sought to apply to the context of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions. It is thus carried out as a case study, where the volunteer battalions represent the unit of analysis.

The study is mainly carried out as a literature study; collecting, consolidating and analysing already existing material. The first section looks into the literature on militias and state monopoly on violence, to examine different approaches to the presence of non-state armed actors in societies. In the second part, it shifts focus to the Ukrainian context where the conceptual framework is applied to the case of the volunteer battalions. The data consists primarily of secondary data, collected through bibliography and online research. The sources are compiled from existing academic research on the subject of PGMs generally and the volunteer battalions specifically, as well as journalistic material and online resources such as blogs and official information. Additionally, a few open-ended interviews or discussions with persons having insights on the field of study, were carried out.

The reliability and validity of the results is partly founded upon a critical selection and review of sources, data and information, as well as transparency and consistency in the interpretations of the data. Research and academic papers are generally reliable sources as they follow requirements for objectivity. However, it is evident also in academic studies that the standpoint of the author, geographically, politically and academically, can affect the perspectives highlighted. The use of sources such as online newspapers and blogs, offers far larger challenges, especially in a landscape with an active conflict. As Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) have pointed out, there is a lack of reliable information available about the volunteer battalions due to the sensitivity and politicized nature of the issue. Although more academic research has started to emerge, this is still the case. In this respect, it has been an advantage to have had a level of insight and understanding of the Ukrainian context from more than a year of field work for an international organization in the conflict zone. This has also given access to knowledgeable persons around me to guide the way. These are factors

which constitute a counterweight to some of the pitfalls of doing research in an ongoing conflict.

As all studies, this too entails its limitations. Ukraine is a country in conflict and the topic carries emotional weight. It can thus be challenging to analyse and understand fully all events at this point in time. The situation gets even more blurred by the influence of information warfare from all sides in the conflict, and Bulakh et al. (2017) stresses that the volunteer battalions in particular have been a target for disinformation campaigns. Limited language skills are clearly the one factor that has put most restraints on access to data. Whereas this on one side may have sorted out some propaganda narratives, it has clearly restricted the insights, especially into official documents. The data consequently consists primarily of English language material.

The scope of the thesis as well as time constraints and ethical considerations, limited the amount of field work to a minimum. Bound by a contract of employment with no distinction between the official and the private on certain matters, led me in the end to exclude interviews with informants holding first-hand knowledge, for instance, from the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)-zone[1]. The decision was partly also based on research ethical considerations as it could have been challenging to separate between information accessed professionally and as a researcher. This thesis is therefore not associated in any way with my professional role, apart from being an inspiration for the topic.

The fieldwork that was carried out, consisted of open-ended interviews or discussions with persons with insights relevant to the field of research. These were either of journalistic or academic background. Totally, four such discussions were carried out, three in Ukraine and one in Norway. With such a limited number, the intention was never to collect primary data from a representative sample of informants, but rather to supplement the open-source data, to gain ideas

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[1] Since April 2014 the official operation in the east has been known as the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO). With the passing of the "Donbas reintegration law" earlier this year, the ATO came to its completion and was replaced by the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) on 30 April. The command was placed under the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) instead of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), and leaves all Donetsk and Luhansk oblast security and law enforcement agencies subordinated to UAF command. The reintegration law is controversial, amongst other for officially defining the separatist-held areas for "temporarily occupied territories" and declaring Russia as an "aggressor country" (Donbas Reintegration Law, 2018).

and perspectives, as well as to discuss the validity of some of the arguments already formulated.

A case study will always be sensitive to case selection. Bryman (2012) for example asks: "[h]ow can a single case possibly be representative so that it might yield findings that can be applied more generally to other cases?" (p. 69). As with a lot of qualitative research, it is merely possible to say something about what has been studied. It is however possible that it *can* be transferred to other cases and settings. Although the volunteer battalions necessarily are qualitatively different from other PGMs, it is likely that it can say *something* about PGMs also in other contexts.

Against this backdrop, it should be underlined that it is necessary to carry out field research and qualitative interviews with actors directly involved, on multiple levels, in order to gain insights passed the surface level. Even for this limited study it would have added value to conduct qualitative interviews, especially with volunteer soldiers and actors on the political level. The self-imposed restrictions discussed above, have consequently led to a mainly theoretical approach with some losses in complexity and nuances. The ambition is however, that the findings in this thesis can highlight some critical aspects that can prompt further research into this still largely unexplored and analytically very interesting topic.

Outline of the study

Chapter 2 serves as an introduction to the topic. It provides the reader with a basic contextual understanding of the 2013/14 events in Ukraine and the emergence of the volunteer battalions. In chapter 3, the Weberian ideal of state monopoly on legitimate violence is outlined, and an introduction to some established ideas within the militia literature is introduced; both serving as theoretical framework for the pursuing analysis. From chapter 4, the thesis moves to its analytical and empirical part. Chapter 4 and 5 both seek to explore the underlying causes of why the battalions emerged and sustained. The latter has a wider scope as it focuses on the functions the volunteer battalions filled once they had emerged. Chapter 6 discusses the relation between the state and strong PGMs and explores how multiple agents of violence potentially can pose a threat, if they are insufficiently controlled or have a power-base parallel to that of the state. Chapter 7 looks into

the strategy of incorporating PGMs into the state's regular security forces, to analyse whether the strategy can counterbalance the potential destabilizing effects of the previous chapter's findings. Finally, a summary of the analysis is presented, as well as suggestions for further research.

2. From peaceful protests to armed conflict

This chapter gives a brief introduction to the main political events that took place in Ukraine in 2013/2014, starting with the protests at the Maidan, while also explaining how the volunteer battalions to some extent grew out of these developments. It aims to provide a simplified overview of a complex set of events and a minimal contextual understanding for the further analysis.

A brief account of the Maidan

21 November 2013 protesters began to emerge in Ukraine's capital Kyiv on the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* or the Independence Square. The spark of the protests was the sudden move from the government led by president Victor Yanukovich, to suspend the signing of the EU Association Agreement, and the protest was initially limited to reversing this decision (Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2015). The events marked the beginning of what is often referred to as the EuroMaidan or the Revolution of Dignity; the social movement that ended the rule of president Yanukovich and his political supporters, and as events developed, saw the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the ongoing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine (Finkel, 2016).

When special forces violently tried to clear the Maidan camp on 30 November, the protest switched pace and scope, and turned into a demonstration against the government and its authoritarian and corrupt rule, with demands for the president to resign. From this point on, mass demonstrations took place on the Maidan every Sunday. Several instances of violent clashes between the protesters and the security forces followed, and barricades started to be erected around the Maidan. Buildings like the City Hall and the Trade Union buildings were seized by the protesters, and similar protests appeared in many other locations across Ukraine (Krasynska & Martin, 2016; Kvit, 2014).

The crux of the drama took place from 19 to 21 February 2014. In the meantime, the Parliament had passed, and later revoked, controversial laws that restricted freedom of assembly and association, Prime Minister Azarov had been dismissed and further violent crackdowns and confrontations had taken place between the security forces and the protesters. On the19 February, the Security Services of Ukraine (SBU) announced an anti-terrorist operation, giving police authorization to use live ammunition against protesters, and president Yanukovych announced that the armed forces would be deployed if a state of emergency was declared (Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2015). The number of casualties during these days, often referred to as the "Heavenly Hundred", are not clear, but most numbers of those killed range from 70 to 100 people. The numbers also include personnel from the security forces (Ash et al., 2017; Finkel, 2016; Krasynska & Martin, 2016; Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2015).

After the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland, and a Russian emissary arrived in Kyiv to negotiate between the political opposition and the government, an agreement was reached. Several demands of the protesters were met, but the government's use of force against its citizens had gone too far, and the Maidan protesters rejected the deal (Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2015; Krasynska & Martin, 2016). During an address a protester grabbed the microphone and announced that if the president did not resign by 10:00 the next day, weapons would be used (Siebold & Zinets, 2014).

The following day, president Yanukovych was gone, as well as parts of his government. The president had left for Kharkov in the morning hours of 22 February and subsequently continued to Russia. The parliament followed up with a vote to remove the president, and Rada speaker Oleksandr Turchinov was named acting president. An interim government was appointed until early elections to be held in May (Finkel, 2016; Flikke, 2015; Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2016). It can be validly argued that the impeachment act was a coup d'état since the members of Parliament did not follow impeachment procedures and did not obtain a majority of ¾ that the Constitution demanded for a valid decision. Whereas western politicians and media mostly applauded the actions, Russia saw it as encouragement from the West to topple a democratically elected president, in

order to insert a pro-western government (FN-Sambandet, n.d.).

On 27 February soldiers without patches and insignia occupied a number of strategic facilities in Simferopol, Crimea, including the parliament building. The parliament voted the same day to appoint a new prime minister and to hold a referendum on the status of Crimea. The Russian Federation later admitted that Russian military personnel had been amongst the "little green men" (ICC, 2016), and when it was declared in mid-March that Russia had annexed Crimea, one of the "justifications" was to protect the ethnic Russian population. The appointment of the interim government in Kyiv and some of the laws it rapidly passed, had triggered anti-Maidan protests elsewhere in Ukraine. Especially a law that denoted Russian as the second official language, had sparked controversies (Kuhn von Burgsdorff, 2015). A referendum was held on the peninsula where allegedly almost all participants voted for Crimea to join Russia. With few exceptions, the legality of the referendum and its results are not internationally recognized, and in 2016 the International Criminal Court (ICC) defined the situation as an illegal occupation (ICC, 2016).

Protests and riots also took place in the Donbass region in eastern Ukraine where protesters in the beginning of April, had started to take control over government buildings. On 7 April, a group of separatists declared the establishment of the "DPR" and April 27 the "LPR" followed suit (Finkel, 2016). On 13 April, interim president Turchynov responded to the events and announced the ATO, with the aim to restore law and order in the areas no longer under control by Kyiv (Flikke, 2015; Maliarenko & Galbreath, 2016).

In September 2014, a cease fire agreement was signed by representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the two separatist parties. Yet, the cease fire did not hold and a new agreement was signed in February 2015, also without significant effects. The armed violence has continued and the OSCE which is mandated to monitor the conflict and the adherence to the cease fire agreements, is reporting daily violations (Flikke, 2015; OSCE, n.d.). OHCHR (2015) reported in 2015 that in the period from April 2014 to 15 November 2015, almost 30 000 casualties were recorded, including soldiers and civilians, in the conflict area in eastern Ukraine,

including more than 9 000 killed and more than 20 000 injured (p. 2). Numbers from late 2017 estimate the number of Internally Displaced to around 800 000[2] (IDMC, 2017). Additionally, a high number have fled to neighbouring countries. In December 2015, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, admitted that Russian personnel had been involved in the Donbass, but underlined that it was not regular Russian army (Walker, 2016).

Popular mobilisation: the volunteer battalions

The rise of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions is more complex than it may appear at first glance. Citizens spontaneously mobilising to protect their country is a large part of the story, but not the full story, as the interim government also tried to control and channel the civic resources. A comment from defence analyst Yuriy Butusov (as cited in Puglisi, 2015b), reflects this multifariousness: "(…) the war is conducted by a people's army, where the majority of individuals are either volunteers or patriots of Ukraine, and this also includes professional military staff" (p. 2).

Although most volunteer battalions were formed in April and May 2014 when the separatists in the east were about to take control of the eastern provinces (Karagiannis, 2016), they nevertheless have a strong link to the events at the Maidan. As the peaceful protests developed into violent clashes with the security forces, the protesters organized self-defence groups with the aim to defend themselves against the authorities. A third stage in the protests started 16 January with the passing of the controversial laws, when the protests assumed a more paramilitary resemblance. Many protesters put on protective equipment like simple helmets and bulletproof vests, and started to carry homemade weapons like bats, molotov cocktails and stones (Kvit, 2014). Inspired by the Cossack tradition, they organized themselves into *sotnyas* or *hundreds* (Goralska, 2015; Puglisi, 2015b).

One of the many organizations that sprung out of the Maidan was *the Maidan's Self-Defence*, established in February 2014 as an "all-Ukrainian, non-partisan social movement aimed at defending Ukraine's sovereignty and unity, guarding its

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[2] Many organizations still operate with higher numbers of IDPs, but it is getting more recognized that a substantial number is a reflection of the necessity of being registered as an IDP in order to receive pensions and social services after the government suspended these entitlements for those living in areas controlled by the separatists.

European choice, protecting the rights and liberties of its citizens" (Puglisi, 2015b, p. 9). It consisted of 39 *sotnyas* with a total of 12 000 individuals. As of January 2014, according to numbers from the Ministry of Interior, more than 3 000 civic formations with the purpose of protecting public order, had been established (Puglisi, 2015b).

There are different approaches to categorize the volunteer battalions. Karagiannis (2016, 5) for instance, categorizes based on formation: those organized by local authorities; battalions organized by private citizens; special police patrol battalions; and battalions affiliated with far-right parties. Kopytin and Kiriienko (2016) also classify after formation, but slightly differently: groups created by political parties; groups created on the initiative of citizens, or which emerged around social activists; and territorial defence battalions created by the state or local government. Most common is perhaps to separate based on current status: territorial defence battalions under the Ministry of Defence, the Reserve battalions of the National Guard and the Special-purpose battalions, both under the Ministry of Interior; and the Right Sector Volunteer Corps not part of any official structure (Bulakh et al., 2017; Klein, 2015).

This demonstrates the diversity in their formation, as well as the conversion of the original volunteer battalions, all contributing to a complex and somewhat blurred picture of their development. The main reason for this is the rapid development of the events in Ukraine at the time. Bulakh et al. (2017) points out that no proper investigation of the key military operations have been carried out so far, leading to disputed accounts of events. There has also been a high level of propaganda aimed at the volunteer units, in addition to an inconsistent policy from the government.

The government called up the military reserves and resumed the national draft to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) (Bugriy, 2014), but also early on tried to channel the volunteer efforts that arose after the Maidan. It was, for example, decided to reinstate the National Guard of Ukraine[3], and volunteers were encouraged to join both by the government and by the Maidan Self-Defence (Goralska, 2015). The link to the Maidan is evident from the account of a

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[3] The National Guard was first created in Ukraine in 1991, but was dissolved in 2000 (Goralska, 2015).

journalist's early visit to one of the training camps for the newly re-established institution:

> Nikolai (...) was the commander of the 19th Sotnya, and most of his comrades from Maidan are now training alongside him at an Interior Ministry training camp (…), learning how to dig foxholes and clean sniper rifles. He said the group includes economists, lawyers and teachers, ranging from 20 to 40 years old. (Eckel, 2014)

The National Guard was formed originally to back up the police and the army; to perform protective and auxiliary functions like manning block posts (Goralska, 2015). The units were found to be present in the ATO-zone from an early stage and became involved in combat tasks performed by those more well trained and better equipped (Goralska, 2015). At least three of the volunteer and reservist battalions that were established, were later transformed into special purpose regiments under the National Guard, including the Azov battalion (Puglisi, 2015b).

The government also utilised the system of Territorial Defence Battalions (TDBs) in which local civilians can be mobilised by their oblast (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016). The TDBs were subordinated to the Ministry of Defence and are now part of the UAF. They were not meant to participate in battles, but rather to provide protection for infrastructure, carry out military police tasks and man check points (Bulakh et al., 2017), but they too got involved in combat-like tasks by the frontline (Goralska, 2015). Whereas some of these battalions consisted of completely self-motivated and self-organized volunteers, others included an element of conscription (Bulakh et al., 2017).

The third move was to establish special-purpose police battalions as part of the regional police, introduced by a decision of the Minister of Interior (Bulakh et al., 2017; Klein, 2015). These battalions were appointed to serve as protection and maintain order in the ATO-zone, but also perform similar tasks when rotating out of the ATO-zone (Goralska, 2015).

The process may in hindsight seem orderly organized, which was not the case as thousands of individuals joined militia groups. A fourth way of establishing a unit

was according to Likhachev (2016) simply to start fighting without any legal status, as for example the Right Sector did when they set up the Volunteer Corps. There are also claims that several independent battalions were formed with the help of Ukrainian oligarchs and businessmen (Karagiannis, 2016; Urchick, 2017). This is reflected in the diverging numbers that can be found on volunteer battalions. According to Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) only nine of the 37 battalions under the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of Interior, were recruited voluntarily (p. 120). These nine either grew out of the Maidan or were created under the patronage of oligarchs. Puglisi (2015b) argues that 32 TDBs had been established by the summer 2014, out of which ten were volunteer units (p. 11). And Interior Minister Arsen Avakov (as cited in Shynkarenko, 2014), announced in June 2014 that 30 volunteer battalions had been formed (para. 12).

As volunteers were mobilised into armed formations, the government simultaneously tried to establish control over the militias. In April 2014, the parliament issued legislation ordering the Ministry of Interior to "immediately disarm illegal armed groups", stating that only those incorporated into the state-run forces could legally carry arms. Interim president Turchynov declared that groups not under the UAF, National Guard or the police were saboteurs (Engelhart, 2014). In November 2014, president Poroshenko proposed to disband the volunteer units and incorporate them into the UAF (Bulakh et al., 2017), and in March 2015, the head of the SBU offered legal status to those subordinating to National Guard or UAF control (Peterson, 2015a). By the end of 2015, all major volunteer battalions, with the exception of the Right Sector, were either dissolved or formally incorporated into the regular security structure (Bulakh et al., 2017, Goralska, 2015).

The challenges in tracing these developments are most likely an image of how it came about. It is probably also a reflection of the lack of consistency in the use of the term itself. While this chapter may not have made that a lot clearer, it will hopefully have accentuated some of its complexity. Used further, I refer with volunteer battalions to the armed groups of citizens which arose in the immediate post-Maidan context where members were not primarily mobilised by conscription.

3. Theoretical framework

The following chapter gives an outline of the theoretical framework that the further analysis is founded upon. The concept of the modern state is largely based on the idea of a sovereign state with the legitimate means of violence controlled by the government (Wulf, 2007). As the presence of non-state armed actors seemingly represents a break with this ideal, the first section starts by presenting the classical Weberian thought of the state monopoly on violence, as well as a more post-modern perspective on this ideal. The next section, outlines some commonly accepted causes for why these non-state armed formations still are present today, as well as a selection of theoretical approaches on the categorization of PGMs.

State monopoly on the legitimate use of violence

While the Westphalian arrangements are said to enable states to monopolize the means of violence within their territories, it was the German sociologist Max Weber (1918) who famously defined the state as a "human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (p. 1). Since then, Weber's ideal has become one of the most influential elements in international relations scholarship on how the structure of the international system has evolved, especially within the realism school of thought. At its core is the notion that only the state can be the source of the right to use or threaten to use physical violence against its residents or external threats; if it is to be legitimate. As Wulf (2007) highlights, it follows that the right to use force *can* be attributed to other actors if the state permits it.

In order to employ this use of force, the state depends on legitimacy according to Weber, either traditional, charismatic or legal-rational. Traditional legitimacy is based on traditions and heritage; charismatic on the charm and charisma of a leader; and legal-rational on a system of rules that are applied in accordance with known principles, where the administers of the rules are appointed or elected by legal procedures (Østerud, 2008). According to Wulf (2007) though, this has today been narrowed down to one type of legitimacy, namely the rule of law and democratic control, that is, the legal-rational. The remaining alternatives have been discredited by the western norms and the liberal values, leaving the authority

to exercise legitimate force in modern states to rest exclusively on "the legality of the authority belonging to a democratically elected political leadership" (p. 8).

Due to its close association with democracy, the idea of the monopolistic use of force is often visualised as an evolutionary process developing gradually from the Middle Ages, or even the Antique, as when North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) describe how the successful sovereign states in Europe consolidated violence in armies and navies, while simultaneously disarming the rest of the population. Singer (2003) similarly describes a development where private armies got replaced by conscripted armies. As a consequence of Weber's influence on state-building theory, states without a clear monopoly on the use of force, for example, with presence of armed actors such as militias, are deemed as weak of fragile, or in severe cases, even as failed states. They have not yet reached the "ideal" of the Weberian state.

In recent years, the classical Weberian thought has come under increased criticism by scholars, accusing it of being biased and too western dominated. Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert (2016) for instance, see the established approach to his ideal as a conceptual template to define what institutions and governance *should* look like in an ideal world. Moreover, it is according to them, based on a universalist logic founded upon the way western, state institutions have developed, used as a template for the rest of the world. They argue that Weber's concepts need to be viewed in the light of his historical context and the situation of the German nation in the early twentieth century. Kayaoglu (2010) expresses the same idea; western states produce norms, principles, and institutions of international society, and non-western states lack these until they are socialized into them.

Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert (2016) therefore argue against a narrow institutional understanding of Weber, where the state is understood mainly through its government and institutions. Their claim is that the approach limits the legitimacy of the state to a consequence of the performance of its institutions. They instead promote a relational approach to state building where the focus is on how authority and legitimate claims to control are being negotiated and used by

different actors. The presence of non-state armed actors will thus not necessarily equate to a weak state.

The feasibility of the Weberian ideas is in fact also being challenged on the ground, and Wulf (2007) stresses that even modern western states do not always meet the criteria of the Weberian model in which only the agents of the state exercise legitimate violence. For instance, there has recently been seen an upsurge in the use of private security and military actors (see e.g. Trotter and Fredriksen, 2017) both by international organizations and states. A recent trend, both in developed and developing countries, is the privatization of violence (Wulf, 2007). Furthermore, between 1981 and 2008 Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2012) have identified the presence of 332 PGMs; not a minor phenomenon.

It is nevertheless well recognized that delegation of state security tasks entails a certain risk. To delegate security tasks can pose a threat to the state because "security providers always have the capacity to threaten those they allegedly should be protecting" (Steppetuat, Andersen & Møller, 2007, p. 11). Additionally, militias and PGMs are often linked to extreme violence and indifference to the international law (Carey, Mitchell & Lowe, 2012). Leaving aside the commercial actors, it needs to be explored why PGMs still arise and thrive in 2018, whether as strategic creations of the state or as a product of weak state institutions.

States and pro-government militias

The presence of non-state armed groups may represent a contradiction to the classical idea of the state monopoly on violence. As seen above, the elimination of private armies has become a central part of the Weberian concept (Wulf, 2007). PGMs are nevertheless a phenomenon with deep historical roots and is as present today as ever (Aliyev, 2016; Bohmelt & Clayton, 2017). The use of irregular forces against insurgents has, for instance, been a common element in most colonial wars, and more recently they have been a factor in conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Colombia and Nigeria. The use of local militias also forms part of many counterinsurgency strategies (Carey & Michell, 2015). Today the al-Hashed al-Sha'bi in Iraq and the Yemeni Popular Committees in Yemen are examples of PGMs, as well as a few remaining volunteer battalions in Ukraine.

The presence of auxiliary forces is not confined to certain countries or areas of the world, as they have been actively used, for example, by the United States during the so-called Banana Wars in Latin America and in Iraq, by Spain and Turkey, and in British counterinsurgencies in Malaya and Northern Ireland. PGMs are present across conflict and regime types, although most common in semi-democracies (Aliyev, 2016; Carey, Colaressi & Mitchell, 2015).

One approach to PGMs is seeing them more as an outcome of processes that the governments have little influence over. Their presence is then often linked to the label of failed or weak states, where political institutions are deemed too weak to prevent them from emerging or to control them properly (Carey & Mitchell, 2015). This is often in line with the *disorder model*, where factors like riots, demonstrations or civil war are seen to increase the probability of the presence of PGMs (Carey et al., 2015). If this is the case, the formation may have taken place through a *bottom-up* approach where PGMs along with warlords, rebels and criminal gangs occur more or less spontaneously, outside of the state's control. Another perspective sees a *top-down* approach where traditional military and police functions intentionally are outsourced by the state, for instance, to paramilitaries or PGMs (Wulf, 2007). This is a more rational-strategic model.

In general, and ideally, a country's security force is structured as a result of its government's considerations to address security needs. While the regular army typically are shaped by threats at the international level, it is predominantly domestic challenges that determine if and how militias are formed (Bohmelt & Clayton, 2017). There may be factors that make the government unable to supress groups like PGMs, or factors that make the delegation of certain security tasks seem like a good option. However, taking into account the classical connection between the monopoly on violence and the state, the question arises why governments either establish or allow militias to fight for or with them.

The rise of PGMs is usually associated with the development of the international human rights discourse. Human rights' adherence is often linked to goods like trade, economic aid and international assistance, especially important for

developing countries (Aliyev, 2016). According to Carey et al. (2015) this will particularly be the case when aid is received from democratic countries or institutions. Severe violations of the international laws can also lead to legal sanctions in tribunals like the ICC. Moreover, it has an effect on how a country is perceived by the international community, as well as by its domestic audience, the latter particularly in democratic countries (Carey et al., 2015). This was illustrated in the reactions from many Western countries to the violence employed against the Maidan protesters.

The argument of accountability, or more precisely deniability, is thus often highlighted as an important reason for the existence of PGMs. Since PGMs normally have a loose connection to the state, the responsibility of their actions cannot necessarily be pinned on the state, while tasks such as counterinsurgencies still can be carried out efficiently (Aliyev, 2016). Instead of forgoing the suppression of internal threats, the government seeks to avoid accountability by making it difficult to trace responsibility. Carey et al. (2015) suggest that in this way, governments can please popular opinion domestically or internationally by distancing themselves from these groups' actions.

Another commonly cited advantage is more efficient use of resources. PGMs are flexible and unbound by bureaucracy, and can quickly boost the strength of the regular forces at low costs. Militias usually receive little or no training and are often lightly armed. Furthermore, local groups have valuable local knowledge that the regular forces may not have access to (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016; Carey & Mitchell, 2015). Carey and Mitchell (2015) also argue that the involvement of the local population can increase the legitimacy of the regular security forces as it can create the impression of local support. In summary, the above strategic advantages can be described as deniability; efficient use of resources; local knowledge; and legitimacy.

Hitherto, it may appear as PGMs arise either against a government's control, or as a calculated and strategic creation of the state. Many cases will however be placed somewhere in between; groups arise and the state may choose to tolerate or align with them, due to a lack of better alternatives. This is more compatible with the

slightly different approach from Aliyev (2016). He does not distinguish between paramilitaries and PGMs, but instead suggests the terms; *state-parallel* and *state-manipulated* groups. State-manipulated groups are often created and always financed by the state, but in most cases, it is done so informally and covertly. A piece of the state's monopoly on violence is thus granted to them. As a counter measure, the state will seek to ensure that the group remains under its control and does not grow too powerful. These are according to Aliyev (2016), the type of militia most commonly seen throughout history. They are relatively weak and typically used to do the "dirty work" of the state.

He contrasts these groups to the state-parallel groups, which possess a military strength that is essential for the survival of the state. They are superior to the state's regular forces in terms of military capacity and/or motivation, which make them a key counterinsurgency force irreplaceable by the regular army. These groups appear only in critical moments for the state when it is acting from a weak position. They emerge when the government's ability to exercise effective control over its territory has been reduced, and in the context of armed conflicts. State-parallel groups will therefore in most cases represent examples where the state unwillingly parts with its force monopoly, in return for guarantees of its survival (Aliyev, 2016).

Comparing PGMs and state-parallel groups, the latter can be viewed as a strong PGM. Many strategic advantages to be drawn from PGMs stem from their flexibility and lesser professionalism, which implies weakness compared to the regular forces. Although PGMs generally are more independent and more difficult to control than paramilitary groups, they will in many cases still be partly dependent on the state for their survival.

Aliyev's (2016) terms add more layers to the dominant tendency of applying a pure principal-agent model to the understanding of state-militia relations. In principal-agent models an actor referred to as an agent, assumes an action on behalf of another actor, referred to as a principal. The principal can then make decisions that affect the incentives of the agent to take any of its various possible actions (Mitchell, Carey & Butler, 2014). In the PGM literature this has often

been evident in the uneven power balance and the way militias first and foremost are deemed useful for the state, or according to Staniland (2015): "subservient junior partners of governments" (p. 2).

Staniland (2015) therefore suggests moving away from the conventional distinctions and stresses that:

> Over time, their political positions can also change: militias may become insurgents, and vice versa, or shift into crime or electoral politics. In turn, insurgents and armed political parties can become militias. Rather than static and intrinsic, the political roles of armed groups are potentially fluid and changeable. (772)

So, when Staniland (2015) outlines his typology of strategies the state can apply towards militias, he does not separate between militias and PGMs. He is critical of the mainly one-dimensional way of conceptualizing the relationship between militias and the state, with the state outsourcing violence, or what he terms as *collaboration*. The state has according to him several additional options; targeting in order to eliminate; absorb them into the state apparatus; or contain them as a "low level but endemic challenge" (p. 2). His four strategies each reflect two dimensions: The level of motivation for the state to eliminate the group, and which mix of conflict and cooperation it chooses to pursue that goal. Suppression and incorporation both seek the elimination of a group as an independent actor, but through different means. Containment and collusion both tolerate their existence, but reflects different blends of cooperation and repression. While containment seeks to limit the group's activities, collusion seeks to coordinate its activities with the government (Staniland, 2015). These strategies will be recurrent in the following chapters.

4. What were the reasons behind the emergence of the volunteer battalions in Ukraine?

The unrest and protests that took place in several cities across Ukraine in 2013 and 2014, challenged the authority and the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government. When control over Crimea was lost and separatists declared autonomy for two "people's republics" in the east, the most central component of the Westphalian state was challenged. While the annexation of Crimea had taken place barely without confrontations, an armed conflict broke out in the east, and it

became evident very soon that the security forces were incapable of efficiently counter the separatist offensive.

The roots of the volunteer battalions are often traced back to the Ukrainian historical tradition of volunteer or civilian participation in security tasks. For instance, Kopytin and Piriienko (2016) draw the lines back to *Atamanshchina,* the phenomenon of military gangs led by independent and self-proclaimed leaders, from the era of Zaporozhye Cossacks in the 15th century. The Polish kingdom and the empire of Muscovy engaged the settlers on the southern border of the steppe in border guard services, and the men became known as Cossacks. Symbols inspired by the Cossack tradition were visible both on the Maidan and amongst the volunteer battalions.

More controversial are the use of symbols from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which during the second world war was a volunteer armed formation created by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) (Karagiannis, 2016). The UPA fought against both German and Soviet forces in Ukraine, against the latter up until 1953 (Kopytin & Piriienko, 2016). "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Heroes!", originally used by the OUN and UPA, also became a slogan on the Maidan. Its association with far-right movements, is claimed by Kvit (2014) to be a misconception based on the idea that if the UPA fought the Soviet army, they must consequently have been supporters of national-socialism. He argues that the slogan expresses the idea that national liberation in Ukraine can be achieved only by creating a Ukrainian independent and unified state, a critical idea in the 20th century when Ukraine was split in half. The OUN and UPA remains however, controversial in today's Ukraine and are actively used by extreme right-wing groups (Karagiannis, 2016).

Although volunteer battalions may have found inspiration in these traditions, the immediate reasons for their emergence ought to be found in factors in more recent times. In 2014, the structure of the UAF was neither up to date nor operationally fit for the challenges it suddenly faced. Its combat ability was low, training had been poor and corruption was widespread (Facon, 2017; Klein, 2015). Ukraine had inherited its military infrastructure, equipment and training systems from the

Soviet army with the independence in 1991, and the army had mainly remained unreformed with little or no investment in equipment, development and research over many years. Low wages and poor career perspectives had additionally kept many educated and motivated individuals out of its ranks (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016; Puglisi, 2017).

Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) quotes numbers from the yearly White book from the Ministry of Defence, stating that in 2012/2013 merely 15% of 150 000 troops were deemed battle-worthy, and more than 50% of the army weapons had been used for more than 25 years (p. 7). Another estimate puts the number of combat ready troops to 6 000 (Facon, 2017, p. 1; Finkel, 2016, p. 5). According to the former Chief of the General Staff, Viktor Muzhenko (as cited in Akimenko, 2018), the UAF had under every president since 1991 been funded to merely half of the minimum requirements. Similar problems were also faced by other armed units participating in the ATO. For example, the Border Guards were unable to efficiently defend the borders because they lacked heavy weapons, and the rapidly re-established National Guard, initially lacked basic equipment such as helmets and bulletproof vests (Klein, 2015).

The desolate state of affairs was confirmed when allegedly as many as 70 percent of the Ukrainian forces stationed in Crimea may have defected to the intruders following its annexation (Akimenko, 2018). In the east as well, a number of police and security forces simply disappeared, left their jobs or shifted sides, many in fear of retributions for their previous or future actions in a volatile time. According to an estimate by the Ministry of Interior (as cited in Puglisi, 2015), between 25 and 30 percent of the forces in the Donbas defected to the separatists (p. 9).

In hindsight, it may appear puzzling that Ukraine had neglected its security forces to the extent that they were unable to perform its tasks. However, the focus of national security had for many years shifted from threats of inter-state armed conflict to internal security threats. Funds from the military were allocated in the state budget towards branches responsible for the domestic security. The Strategy of National Security for Ukraine and the Military Doctrine adopted in 2012,

declared Ukraine's defence policy to be self-restrained and moderate, and military cooperation with Russia in areas of intelligence, transportation and production was upheld (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016). An armed aggression resulting in local or regional war was defined as unlikely in the medium term (Puglisi, 2017). It is a reminder of how unexpected the conflict in Ukraine actually was.

The emergence of volunteer groups must thus be seen as a response to the situation above. Faced with a threat, and a void in the state apparatus, civilian volunteers sought to fill in, not only in the security sector but also in other political and socio-economic domains. In other words, the volunteer battalions took on tasks of a government that was unable to respond effectively (Bulakh et al., 2017). In a country that predominantly has been labelled with a weak civil society, although increasingly challenged (see e.g. Krasynska & Martin, 2016), the mobilisation was impressive. Moreover, the volunteer battalions reportedly proved successful, particularly during the first months of the ATO. Despite their lack of professional training and poor equipment, they contributed to contain the separatists and to bridge the gap in the effectiveness of the regular forces (Klein, 2015). Their efforts also allowed the government to build up and restructure its forces.

A few voices challenge the more or less established fact of the military success of the volunteer battalions, like Likhachev (2016), who claims they actually did not play a significant role during the operations. It should be stressed that the volunteer battalions represent merely a small part of the civic efforts in the post-Maidan time (Krasynska & Martin, 2016). The relative impact of the volunteer battalions additionally needs to be assessed in the light of the massive media attention they received, also compared to the regular forces. Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) highlight that the volunteer battalions may appear to have played a bigger part then they did in the conflict because they were generally more welcoming towards the media than the regular forces, and consequently received more media attention, partly also as a result of the controversy surrounding some of the groups. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that elements within the government and the army, retrospectively may want to downplay their significance.

As shown previously, the presence of militias is often linked to failures in control or the weak state label. Oxfam (2013) defines fragile states as states "that fail, through lack of capacity or lack of will, to provide public goods to their citizens—including safety and security, economic well-being, and essential social services (p. 2)." It is rarely disputed that the Ukrainian state in early 2014 was not fully capable to protect its territory and its citizens when its sovereignty was attacked. It follows, that if we adopt an institutional approach to Weber, Ukraine could be categorized as a weak or fragile state, at least temporarily. Even in a recent report, the Ukrainian state is described as "fragile and in peril" (Ash et al., 2018, p. xi).

Empirical findings support that a government's failure to provide security can motivate groups within society to create militias. The state's failure becomes a window of opportunity for the society to participate and PGMs have an incentive to emerge (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Puglisi, 2015b). The volunteer battalions may from this perspective also be viewed as an outcome of the lack of trust in state institutions in the Ukrainian society, as expressed by a commander in the Donbass 1 battalion: "We don't trust them, we don't trust the local police, but we're ready to cooperate with the 'patriots' among them — if there are any" (as cited in Resneck, 2014, para. 7). The authorities had first used excessive coercive power at the Maidan, and when armed conflict was on the verge, the same institutions could not counter the security threat. The so-called bloodless takeover of Crimea had additionally caused severe damage to the image of the UAF (Karagiannis, 2016).

If PGMs arise spontaneously the government will face a dilemma of whether to try to demobilize the groups, or to take advantage of their resources (Bukkvoll, n.d.). Though Weingast (as cited in Carey & Mitchell, 2017) argues that true grass-root movements are a rare phenomenon, recent research suggests that the initial volunteer mobilisation was mainly a bottom-up movement. Although central opposition politicians tried to take lead or at least to take part in the movement at the Maidan, they often appeared to fail. For instance, the "peace agreement" that was negotiated between the government and the opposition, was rejected by the protesters (Krasynska & Martin, 2016). And when opposition

leader and former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, held her speech after her prison release, many responded in a muted manner (Kiev Crowd Not, 2014).

A study by Krasynska and Martin (2016) highlighted the spontaneity and popular drive of the volunteer movement during the Maidan events. Even though many sotnyas became more formal in terms of hierarchy and organization in a short period of time, the changes were attributed to a collective realization of the need for organization. The lead from below is also highlighted as one of the main distinctions between the Maidan and the Orange Revolution (Puglisi, 2015b). Many representatives from the Maidan did however quickly get positions and influence in the new state apparatus (Krasynska & Martin, 2016), and the state gradually took a role in encouraging volunteers to join, for example, the National Guard as well as reinstating conscription (Puglisi, 2015b). Additionally, little is known about the role of oligarchs in the formation of groups. It may thence be a combination of bottom-up and top-down formation, where the grass-root element was predominant at the outset. The repeated issues of orders to disarm the then labelled "illegal armed formations", illustrates that the government took efforts to control the movement while not succeeding completely; or in an alternative narrative, it can be seen as a strategic move in order to create distance.

It is disputed whether PGMs generally arise as responses to specific situations (see e.g. Kishi & Raleigh, 2015), but most factors suggest that the volunteer battalions did grow out of the critical situation the Ukrainian nation was facing in 2014, partly as a continuation of the protests at the Maidan, but mostly as a response to the lack of capacity in the regular security forces to respond efficiently to a pressing security threat. It can also be seen in light of the almost non-existent trust in the state institutions and security apparatus, that parts of had participated in brutal attacks against protesters at the Maidan, and from which a substantial number of personnel had deserted, quit or switched to the separatist side. Citizens filled a void in many sectors, including in defence and security, and thus took an active role in tasks usually deemed exclusive for the state. While the initial mobilisation appears to have been a bottom-up initiative, it gradually took on a more official role, where the government tried to centralise its control.

5. What functions did the volunteer battalions fill from the state perspective? And why did they fill them?

Whereas the previous chapter looked into potential causes for the emergence of the volunteer battalions, the following will focus on the functions they filled once they had emerged. It is less a discussion of their practical tasks as it will be linked to the theory about PGMs and the advantages the existence of such groups are thought to offer a state, to explore if there are valid points for the Ukrainian context. Elements from the previous chapter will be picked up and expanded further upon when exploring potential reasons for the battalions assuming these functions; especially the degree of control the state might have had on their development.

Minakov (2014) lists five state functions that civil society in the post-Maidan period, participated in the execution of: counter propaganda, election monitoring, lustration, and participation in internal security and defence sector tasks. The first three were mainly carried out by activist networks and the two latter via the self-defence groups that policed several cities, and the volunteer battalions (p. 2). While Zeller (2016) notes that the first three are not completely uncommon tasks for a state to delegate to civil society, as for example private groups participate in election monitoring in Russia, it is the latter two that are the most controversial. Security tasks are not only bound very closely to the state, but protection of its citizens, are one of the most vital tasks of a functioning state (Wulf, 2007).

In the ATO-zone the volunteer battalions took part in several battles, including the battle of Mariupol in May/June 2014, Ilovyask in August 2014 and the second battle of Donetsk Airport in September 2014/January 2015. They executed police functions and conducted special operations against separatist groups in the Donbass, and several volunteer battalions were directly involved in military operations side by side with the UAF. Some experienced heavy losses, especially in Ilovyask in August 2014 (Karagiannis, 2016; Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016).

Puglisi (2015b) describes a post-Maidan civil society that became a de facto security actor. Not merely through the volunteer battalions, but also in the procurement of military equipment for the troops and the provision of logistical services, and in the monitoring and oversight of defence-related issues and

military operations. Krasynska and Martin (2016) for instance, demonstrate in their study that some of the self-defence groups from the Maidan moved on to more supportive tasks in the security sector. For example, after the self-defence group St. Michael's Movement was dissolved, some members continued to collaborate on projects, such as providing support to the UAF.

Adopting the traditional Weberian approach, Bohmelt and Clayton (2018) notes that states which lack the capacity to impose control on their territory, naturally are more likely to tolerate militias that support their case. In this situation, the weakness of the state forces it to accept these armed groups, either because it is not capable of suppressing them, or because it may actually need them as a resource. As Staniland (2015) accentuates, even states acting from a weak position will have an element of coercive capacity, as Ukraine demonstrated in 2014 by deploying the regular forces, activating the reservists and rather quickly re-establishing the National Guard. The government was not in a position of complete impotence.

In the case of the volunteer battalions, circumstances suggest a blend of the state not having the capacity to supress the them, at least initially, and a strategic alignment due to the critical situation in the country. After all, Ukraine had gone through the turmoil of regime change and loss of the Crimean peninsula, and was facing armed conflict in the east. Its resources and alternatives were scarce. As reinforcements to the regular forces, PGMs require limited state support, often restricted to the provision of weapons or minimal rewards, appealing to a state acting from a weak position (Bohmelt & Clayton, 2017). This was reflected in the early stages of the ATO, when images of poorly equipped volunteer soldiers reached the public and caused massive critique (Puglisi, 2015a). Bohmelt and Clayton (2017) warn however, that this "win" may turn to costs as the lesser control with PGMs can result in groups taking actions that undermine the state. The benefits and costs therefore need to be balanced with the desire for control.

Additionally, the volunteer battalions mobilised rapidly and were able to skip the more lengthy and bureaucratic recruitment processes of the regular forces. The conscription system was ineffective and there were instances of boycotting and

actions to disrupt conscription in some regions (Bulakh et al., 2017). According to Facon (2017) the government's absolute priority at the beginning of the conflict was to mobilise enough recruits, and there were even reports of coercion and soldiers without proper training. Speaking to a journalist in May 2014, the politician Oleh Liashko (as cited in Walker & Amos, 2014) was in the middle of setting up his own battalion, elaborating on the recruitment criteria: "(…) they should be physically fit, have combat experience, and undergo a background check to ensure they were not working for foreign intelligence agencies" (para. 24).

This leads to the postulation that the volunteer battalions initially functioned as a cheap force multiplier to the regular security forces, as their rapid response and mobilisation allowed the state to respond to the offensive in the east while simultaneously building up its regular forces. In this context, it is however worthwhile to consider if the results could have been different if the state had not let masses of poorly trained soldiers go to the frontline area, for the civilian population, but also operationally. A poll by Bulakh et al. (2017) showed that 83 percent of the volunteer soldier respondents had no military training or military experience prior to joining a volunteer battalion (p. 11). The Dnipro and the Donbas battalions were for example sent into Ilovaisk in August 2014, to what should become one of the worst defeats for the Ukrainian side. In an interview with Newsweek, a 43 years old retired police colonel explained that their function until then had been to police areas liberated by the army. Before entering the battalion, he used to work for security in a supermarket: "It was our first combat experience, but we learned quickly from our mistakes" (as cited in Kim, 2014, para. 19).

The volunteer battalions did however build up a strong popular support in the general population (Bulakh et al., 2017; Klein, 2015). For this reason, one could argue that the volunteer battalions, in line with Carey and Mitchell's (2015) previously presented arguments, had the effect of increasing the legitimacy of the regular force's efforts. It was however not so much the cause that lacked support, as the massive popular mobilisation illustrated very well, as the government and the security forces as such. It is questionable whether the participation of

volunteer battalions did anything to enhance the army's poor image in the short term. Many volunteer commanders outspokenly criticized the regular forces and the leadership of the ATO generally (Puglisi, 2015a), illustrated for example by the statement of Dnipro-1 Commander Vladimir Shilov (as cited in Gzirian, 2015), after the devastating retreat from Ilovaisk in August 2014: 'I hope it is incompetence, but on the front lines peoples are talking about betrayal" (para. 2).

Nor did all volunteer battalions make a good impression on the population in the east. In their documentation of the conduct of hostilities by the UAF and the Azov battalion in Shyrokyne, OHCHR (2016a) recorded mass looting of civilian homes, as well as targeting of civilian areas. And whilst nationally applauded by many as a committed fighting force, the Aidar battalion were locally known for brutal reprisals, robbery, beatings and extortion. "Members of the Aidar territorial defence battalion (…) have been involved in widespread abuses, including abductions, unlawful detention, ill-treatment, theft, extortion, and possible executions" (Amnesty International, 2014a, p. 1).

Another factor is that Ukraine was and still is, a country in transition, aiming towards more democracy and to fit into the frameworks of western institutions like the EU and NATO. In the aftermath of the Maidan it became principal for the new government to signal both internally and internationally that it was committed to reforms (see e.g. Lins de Albuquerque & Hedenskog, 2015). Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) therefore argues that the volunteer battalions were strategically set up and used to lessen accountability for actions in the ATO-zone. The interim government first declared that it would finalise the campaign against the separatists by the end of September 2014; a communication of its desire to respond quickly and efficiently to the offensive. According to them, the government deemed the conflict unwinnable if the law were to restrict their actions, and consequently delegated the suppression of the separatists to the PGMs. It could as such avoid formally involving the UAF in possibly disreputable actions and to declare a state of civil war; a strategy in order to preserve the fragile legitimacy of the new government. With a policy of informal support and formal distance, the government hence created a space to manoeuvre in (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016).

And indeed, several volunteer battalions have been accused of atrocities and war crimes. Some prosecutions and trials have taken place, for instance eight members of the disbanded Tornado battalion have been sentenced to prison for torture and rape of civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2018). However, OHCHR (2016b) concluded that while the early cases suggest perpetrators mostly from volunteer battalions, the SBU was often a co-actor. Moreover, information from late 2015 mostly implicated the SBU and less the volunteer battalions. This is in line with Kishi and Raleigh (2015) who is critical of the common argument of deniability as a reason behind state use of militias, partly because the attractive prospect of deniability should make PGMs a lot more prevalent, but also because regular forces commit atrocities despite their presence. Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) are also promoting a strict functionalistic principal-agent logic where states task militia agents to take on "dirty jobs".

Kishi and Raleigh (2015) challenge the approach where the actions of PGMs are seen to supplement and/or replace the state. Supplementing by contracting out particular acts to the groups; or replacing as evidence of a fragile or failed states. They argue that PGMs do not arise in response to the need for states to deflect responsibility or to act when the state is absent. According to them, PGMs are built on the everyday governance, dependent on a level of collusion between state and non-state actors. This may partly be flawed when applied to the Ukrainian context, since they reject the idea of PGMs as phenomena arising in response to specific crisis, as this thesis argues. It may nevertheless assist to bring forward a more nuanced perspective. The volunteer battalions arose because the government initially may have lacked the capacity to supress them, as suggested by Zeller (2016), but also because it did not have good reasons to do so considering the situation the nation was facing. It was a matter of taking advantage of their resources of personnel and motivation, and controlling them as much as possible. If so, the volunteer battalions filled in for the state, not as strategically calculated top-down constructs, nor as a phenomenon arising in a complete power vacuum, but somewhere in between.

To summarise, the thesis argues that the volunteer battalions can be understood to have functioned as cheap force multipliers to the regular forces, and to a degree with potential to act as agents for deniability. Rather than increasing the legitimacy of the regular forces in the eyes of the public, the arguments suggest that they, on the contrary, may have had negative effects in the short term.

If we move to the current situation, the former volunteer battalions function as parts of the regular forces and thus have roles and tasks integrated into ordinary operations, no longer distinguishable without proper insight. The exception is the Right Sector, that still remains outside the state security apparatus, but reportedly continues to operate in the ATO-zone (Losh, 2017). It follows that the applicability of our terms needs to be revised. When categorizing units such as the Azov regiment, now under the National Guard, it does not fit in the box of PGMs per se, as it formally is part of the regular security forces. Consequently, only battalions not integrated can be defined as PGMs while the rest, depending on their structure, will either be paramilitary units or regular forces. It is nevertheless the case that the status and "brands" of some of the former volunteer units are very dominant still. In this context, it is worth discussing if a small part of the original movement may have transgressed into state-parallel militias. As previously noted, Ukraine did fulfil the two preconditions for the rise of these groups; an impaired state with low capacity to resist insurgents, and a context of armed conflict (Aliyev, 2016).

6. How can strong pro-government militias like the volunteer battalions represent a threat to the state's legitimacy and effective execution of power?

A vibrant civil society carries a lot of positive aspects with it. It is considered a vital part of a well-functioning democracy, ideally contributing to transparency and to keep the official power structures in check (Puglisi, 2015b). Nevertheless, if civil society plays into the sphere of the state, there may also be problematic elements to it, especially if the state itself is in a transitioning phase. With Zarembo's (2017) words: an "oversized and over potent civil society" (p. 51) can pose a threat and rather create obstacles for state development. This chapter focuses on the potential risks associated with strong PGMs and the volunteer battalions especially, and how their presence potentially can pose a threat to the

state's legitimacy and execution of power. It concentrates roughly on the time period from their emergence in 2014 to the end of 2015, when most formations were formally integrated into the regular security apparatus. It will nevertheless include examples from more recent times, from groups remaining outside.

Two main discourses can be identified on the development of the volunteer battalions. For instance, Bulakh et al., (2017) represent the positive outlook, describing a situation where the battalions rose to a challenge and filled a gap in the state apparatus, for then to step back to become part of the state structures:

> At a critical moment, the citizens of Ukraine decided to exercise their right to defend themselves. Thanks to the fairly effective self-organization, they managed to ensure the continued functioning of the national defence system. From the very beginning, the state tried to create a legal basis for the volunteer movement, starting a process that ultimately led to the integration of all units into official state structures. (p. 7)

In contrast, Thomas Arnold (as cited in Zeller, 2016) has characterized militias and irregular warfare generally as a great evil, giving "licence to a whole population to commit all sorts of treachery, rapine, and cruelty, without any restraint; letting loose a multitude of armed men, with none of the obedience and none of the honourable feelings of the soldier" (para. 6). Despite the clearly outdated view on warfare, Arnold warns strongly against letting untrained civilians participate in military tasks. On the same note, Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) paint a very different image of the volunteer battalions than the one presented above, with volunteer units and public officials competing for access to illegal markets. "Confrontation between the ruling elites and paramilitaries supported by public opinion makes the weak Ukrainian state seem even weaker (…)" (p. 13).

The early phases of the ATO brought plentiful stories of poor coordination and cooperation, and less than clear command lines and structures. The pace events had moved at, had opened up at times chaotic situations. Walker and Amos (2014) for instance, describe scenes from the ATO-zone with volunteers in unmarked uniforms, making them difficult even to identify. The following episode took place during an attempt to hold an unrecognised referendum in the town of

Krasnoarmeisk, when a volunteer battalion appeared and allegedly tried to stop the voting. The men said they were from the Dnipro volunteer battalion, but wore similar outfits as another volunteer unit, the Donbas battalion:

> There was shouting and aggression from the crowd about the men who had disrupted the voting. At one point, several people lunged towards them, unarmed, and the men shot into the air. The volley of bullets did nothing to placate the crowd, and the men kept shooting, a look of panic on their faces. The incident ended with two civilians dead, and later the Dnepr battalion claimed its forces had never been there. (para. 29)

There are numerous similar accounts from the early stages of the ATO, although the government mostly gave the impression that it was all well-controlled. For instance, Andriy Parubiy, head of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), responded to Walker and Amos (2014) that all groups were coordinated from the ATO-command centre. Albeit true on paper, numerous sources on the ground told stories about poor coordination in the initial stages, and there were concerns over the combat preparedness of some of the volunteer battalions. According to Akimenko (2018) the lack of coordination and joined-up command were one of the main problems with the ATO.

As noted earlier, the delegation of traditional state functions to non-state actors is not per se problematic. The matter is not necessarily who exercises force, but how the application is organized (Wulf, 2007), that is, if any non-state actors like the volunteer battalions are somewhat regulated and controlled by the state. Rather than defining states by its ability to force the population to obey its laws, the question should according to Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert (2016) rather be why people follow the law when no state officials are there to enforce it. If the focus shifts to how authority and claims to control are being negotiated and used by different actors, it can be asked why the volunteer battalions protected the nation without anyone forcing them, or how power was negotiated with the state, from being little regulated to becoming more embedded in the state structures. Despite no violence monopoly, there was still "meaningfully oriented social action" taking place, a precondition for the sociological existence of a state, according to Weber (as cited in Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert, 2016, p. 1475).

Insights drawn from many of the accounts from the early stages of the ATO, leads to the realization that many volunteer battalions were not well controlled by the ATO-command in the initial stages. The actors were not sufficiently integrated and were not governed cooperatively, a prerequisite for what Wulf (2007) introduces as an alternative to the classic state-monopoly ideal; *legitimate multi-level public monopoly* of violence. If volunteer battalions as agents, act either independently from its state principle or without sufficient monitoring, the state are left without necessary information to control the agents, for example from exercising power out of self-interest rather than state interest. It is the classic moral hazard (Mitchell et al., 2014). It is however worthwhile to consider, if the situation would have been utterly different without the volunteer battalions, taking into account the poor state of the regular forces. It may not necessarily have been the case.

If this lack of centralized control on the other hand should be a strategic move from the government to avoid accountability for some of the actions taken, for example when volunteer battalions repeatedly blocked humanitarian aid from entering the separatist-held areas (Amnesty International, 2014b), it seemingly backlashed when battalions regularly criticised central orders publicly. For instance, in July 2015 the volunteer battalions which had participated in the battles for the strategic town of Shyrokyne, first stated they would not leave their positions despite it having been declared a demilitarized zone (Halko, 2015). As they were pulled back and replaced by regular forces, the decision was openly criticized: "To talk about demilitarization now is to talk about the surrender of our territories. We have already demilitarized Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk instead of taking measures to free them", stated the commander of the Donbas battalion, Anatoliy Vynohrodskyi (as cited in Stek, 2015, para. 12).

This is according to Wulf (2007) the dark side of a system with multiple authorities; if one authority encroaches on another, it means a loss of authority for one and gain for another. The potentially undermining effect of open opposition was visible in the public protests that followed in Kyiv and Mariupol, calling for the return of the volunteer battalions to the front line (Peterson, 2015b). The president even publicly reassured the Mariupol residents that their safety would

not be compromised by the rotation (Halko, 2015). By engaging in open clashes with the regular command structure, a situation that Bohmelt and Clayton (2017, 209) describe can arise; PGMs rise to support a weak state, but undermine it through their presence. Many residents in the Mariupol area attribute the defence of the city to the volunteer battalions, and it was speculated whether the decision to pull the volunteer units out, was a political move to their neutralization. According to Kyiv, it was a routine rotation reflecting the increased capacities of the regular forces (Peterson, 2015b).

If looking upon the relationship between state and non-state actors as one formed by bargains and deals, it can in the early ATO-phase be placed in the category of pursuing shared interests, in this case supressing the separatists, or collusion in accordance with Staniland's (2015) terms. It was cooperation between the state and the volunteer battalions, starting out more loosely or perhaps even uncontrolled, but evolving into something more embedded and sustained, for example, as the state with time provided heavier weapons and equipment, and sought to gain more centralised control (Puglisi, 2015b).

With this state strategy, the PGMs keep their arms and continue to operate as political entities, but do not target the state consistently with violence. Its main foundation is according to Staniland (2015) the operational value of the entities. As noted earlier, this was deemed high in the early phases of the ATO. It will be shown however, that PGMs still within the collusion strategy can pursue political goals not consistent with the states. Staniland (2015) warns against the main risk with the strategy; it can hollow out state power and provide a base for the PGMs to become too powerful relative to the regular forces. This concern appears to have been the main spark of the literature on the volunteer battalions as strong PGMs.

The degree of control a state has with PGMs, will depend on their relationship. Agents with private agendas or goals differing from those of its government principal, and with an information advantage, will be more challenging to control (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). Moreover, although the volunteer battalions were categorized as PGMs they are not necessarily pro all government actions. The

relation between any militia and its principal is never static. The state and the volunteer battalions share the aim of keeping Ukraine united, but otherwise may not necessarily be pro-government as such. As Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) suggest, they may more accurately be referred to as pro-Ukrainian than pro-government.

Based on the above, the early stages of the ATO may resemble what Aliyev (2016) describes as a situation where the state is close to losing control both over its violent means and its territory. If the volunteer battalions made up a strong military capacity in the beginning, they as such became vital for the state. Taking into account their relatively strong support from the population, some volunteer battalions could in this time period probably be categorized as state-parallel militias, as Aliyev (2016) suggests. Although the main objective of state-parallel militias is the survival of the state and not regime change, they may ignore the government and have as such a potential of becoming a threat due to their relatively strong position. On the other hand, the implementation of a collusion strategy, can be seen as a signal from the government that they did not deem the groups to pose an urgent political threat as long as the operational needs were there (Staniland, 2015).

That the interests of some volunteer battalions have differed from the official ones, has been evident on several occasions. For instance, in July 2015 in the south-western town of Mukachevo, a standoff took place between government forces and members of the Right Sector. At least two members were killed and several people were injured in the exchange of gunfire. Whereas the state sent reinforcements and armoured vehicles, the Right Sector set up roadblocks outside the capital and demanded the resignation of the Interior Minister and other officials. The group claimed the violence was related to a crackdown on illicit export of contraband cigarettes while others reported that the group itself had been involved in the trade (Oliphant, 2015; Stern, 2015).

Another episode serves to demonstrate what Bulakh et al. (2017) refers to as the socio-political and military ecosystem that has been created around the volunteer battalions. Whereas the original battalions make up the core, a comet-tail of

symbols, myths, media, politicians, businessmen, activists and even foreign interest surrounds them. In January 2017, a railroad blockade was set up to stop the so-called "bloody trade". The aim was to halt the transport of goods such as metal, wood, cigarettes and alcohol, as well as the much needed anthracite coal from the separatist-held areas to the rest of Ukraine (Kostanyan & Remizov, 2017).

Although the blockade had some political support, the government and the president made clear that the campaign contradicted Ukraine's national interests and undermined its economy. After failed attempts first to persuade the activists to leave their checkpoints and to stop their reinforcements, the blockade was attempted to be dispersed by police in mid-March. Following the detainment of around 45 blockaders, protests broke out in Kyiv and several other cities the same night (Zoria, 2017). Two days later, the NSDC authorised the blockade until the "DPR" and "LPR" had restored the Ukrainian factories that had been nationalised as a response to the blockade, to their rightful owners (Kostanyan & Remizov, 2017; Miller, 2017; Sheldon, 2017). The authorities thus adopted an initially illegal blockade as official policy.

It is not clear exactly who was behind the blockade, but most sources report that it consisted mostly of veterans, mainly from volunteer battalions, and "activists". Some, like Ash et al. (2017) claim they were mobilized by political parties, while others postulate that certain oligarchs were involved in financing the operation (Miller, 2017; Sheldon, 2017). The trade blockade nevertheless leaves some unanswered questions, not least why the government seemingly changed their politics rather than remove the blockaders. In addition to constituting a reminder that any state strategy can fail or be challenged, as PGMs have interests of their own as political entities (Staniland, 2015), it may also demonstrate the increased power of veteran groups, which Minakov and Rijansky (2018) forecasts is likely to have an increased influence on national politics in the coming years.

In addition to revealing the occasional successes of the volunteer ecosystem in appealing to the public as a provider of order or justice, the episodes above shed light on another characteristic of state-parallel groups; namely their relative

independence from the state. Not all volunteer battalions depended completely on the state for funding or resources, as many had alternative means of income such as private means, fundraising and support from corporate actors (Aliyev, 2016; Puglisi, 2017). Asked about the funding, the commander of one volunteer battalion replied that he could not elaborate on all the support provided: "We crowd-fund on the Internet, including publishing our bank details on Facebook, and we use our own money". Despite what appeared for the journalist to be new uniforms with UAF patches, the soldiers were according to the commander, not affiliated with the regular army (as cited in Miller, 2014, para. 7).

It has thus been questioned if some volunteer battalions may have had loyalties elsewhere than the state. According to Karagiannis (2016) for instance, tens of independent battalions were formed with the help of Ukrainian oligarchs and businessmen. The most prominent has been Ihor Kolomoysky, one of the then wealthiest men in Ukraine, who allegedly played a leading role in financing and/or organising several volunteer battalions. He was additionally appointed as the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region in March 2014 (Dabrowski, 2017). Around a year later, he was dismissed as governor after uniformed men apparently loyal to Kolomoysky, had showed up at the headquarters of two of the largest energy companies in Ukraine. Even the president stated that no governor should have "his own pocket armed forces" (Ghazan & Olearchyk, 2015; Gzirian, 2015).

Arrangements where militias get resources from politicians, and politicians in exchange get security, are typical according to Dowdle (2007). The clientelism encourage loyalty as long as the militias benefit from the relation. With funding from both the state and the private sector it can therefore be questioned to whom the PGMs would stay loyal to if the interests were to conflict. The landscape is complicated further in Ukraine as several volunteer ex-commanders have entered into politics, causing scholars to criticize the close bonds between volunteer battalions and political influence (e.g. Aliyev, 2016; Puglisi, 2015a). Whereas some argue that this can harm the independent authority of the official structures (Gzirian, 2015), Bulakh et al. (2017) note that the transition into politics mostly have had a negative effect on the volunteer battalions standing. If the latter is the case, it can also be seen as a move to take out some of the most controversial

power figures, as was speculated amongst commentators when Dmitry Yarosh, leader of the Right Sector, was appointed as adviser to the Commander-in-Chief of the UAF (Gzirian, 2015).

It adds yet another layer that the political influence of certain oligarchs increased with the new regime, due to their support of the Maidan and the fight against the separatists (Dabrowski, 2017). Although ties between power and the military is nothing new and goes back to Ukraine's Soviet past (Puglisi, 2017), it is unsettling if a disproportionate number of officials have loyalties to the volunteer movement, or vice versa.

For whereas it can be argued, as Minakov (2014) does, that with a lack of formal legitimation mechanisms, civic groups can get legitimacy from public interest, it would no longer be about the collective conservation of the population's security if the volunteer battalions could be used in the interest of the few; whether it be corporate forces or self-preservation of political or military actors. The idea of a social contract between the state and its citizens is still central in modern theory about democratic rule and state legitimacy. With the social contract, political legitimacy, authority, and obligations are thought to be drawn from the consent of those who created the government, who also operate it through a type of consent, such as representation or tacit consent. Legitimacy is hence dependent on consent, and not on factors like patriarchy, theocracy or divine rights (Riley, 1982). It thus fits within the legal-rational framework of Weber. The toppling of the Yanukovich government can in this context be seen as an expression of withdrawal of the consent from the population, after it had failed in its essential tasks, and shattered the last pieces of trust it may have had.

Minakov (2014) goes on to suggest that the volunteer battalions in 2014 were responding to the legitimate public interest of self-preservation. If so, it can be argued that it was no longer solely the state that held the legitimacy to use violence, but also the volunteers and the volunteer battalions. Burlyuk, Shapolavova and Sharembo (2017) even claim that the volunteer movement was bringing in a new social contract based on trust and solidarity, on which a new state could be founded. In 2014, volunteers in general scored highest on the

population confidence index; volunteer battalions with seven out of ten, and the president with just above five (Bulakh et al., 2017, p. 9). Today, voluntary groups still enjoy the highest level of public trust among all civil society institutions. More than fifty per cent trust volunteers, in comparison to nine per cent who trust the government (Ash et al, 2017, p. 71). Actually, 74 per cent of Ukrainians responded in another poll that they do *not* trust the government (p. 49). It can be derived from this, that the official structures struggle against civil society if legitimacy were to be based solely on trust.

The low levels of trust in public institutions in Ukraine is closely connected to the prevalence of corruption in society. Referred to as "Ukraine's biggest social disease" by Dabrowski (2017, p. 11), it undermines the foundation of the Ukrainian state and political system. With such a disproportionate level of public trust in the official and non-official structures, there lies a potential for a popular power base for formations such as the volunteer battalions. Perhaps this is what was reflected when the authorities did not forcibly remove the trade blockaders permanently.

On the other hand, it should be recalled that some volunteer battalions have themselves constituted a severe threat to the local population and the rule of law in certain areas, although the latter admittedly was not always strong in Ukraine before the conflict. Incidents like the one accounted for in Krasnoarmeiske, would very likely be impossible to hold anyone accountable for. If one imagines a social contract existing between the population and the battalions, that too would be a breach of the contract. Rule of law is essential in any state building process as it is through that security and protection are achieved (Wulf, 2007).

Creating or upholding a state monopoly of violence is not always in line with a state's political interest. Instead of unquestionably adopting the classic Weberian ideal, it has been argued that a state can engage with PGMs like the volunteer battalions while still upholding legitimacy and control of force. These groups can however still represent a threat to the state, if for instance, not controlled and coordinated sufficiently, as was the case in the initial phases of the ATO. PGMs can thus act independently or in an unauthorized manner, leaving the state without the necessary means to effectively control or execute legitimate force. With the

volunteer battalion's high popular support and ties to business and politics, a few battalions resembled state-parallel militias, with a potential to impose its interests on the state, or to take advantage of its relative strong position to undermine the legitimacy of the state to strengthen its own position. This leads to the conclusion that strong PGMs have the potential to represent a threat both to a state's legitimacy and its execution of legitimate power, if for instance, a strategy of collusion fails in its aims to utilise the resources of the PGMs while keeping their political threat in check.

7. To what extent and how did the integration of the volunteer battalions into the state structures contribute to more or less stability?

According to Zarembo (2017), the effects of substitution on a state's ability to perform its functions, are not obvious. On the one hand, civil society engagement can contribute positively to state-building by strengthening the state capacities. The authorities can thus gain by demonstrating that it has the ability to cope with its shortages, if it maintains power and control. Alternatively, it can leave the state capacity intact with the state counting on civil society to continue its services, or even weaken it by encroaching on its monopoly. This chapter moves to the time period after 2015 when most remaining volunteer formations had been integrated into the state structures. It explores how a strategy of incorporation potentially can address some of the challenges identified in the above section, and discusses if and how it can counter the potential destabilizing effect of these factors.

Without linking their presence to a weak state, Ahram (2015) stresses the importance of how a state deals with PGMs as they are less likely to disappear once they have arisen. Like Staniland (2015), he too seeks a broader perspective on state-militia relations that includes how norms, legitimacy, and power relations produce different patterns for managing their interactions. He claims that once these patterns have become embedded, they will be progressively harder to eliminate and easier to repeat (Ahram, 2015). The discussion in the previous chapter, therefore draws attention to the significance of relatively rapidly contain or potentially repress elements of the volunteer battalions with an independent power base and diverging political interests. It appears even more paramount in a state like Ukraine, where the public trust in the official institutions is critically

low.

In the context of this study, stability relates to several dimensions. The most imminent threat for Ukraine is still against its territorial sovereignty, from separatist forces as well as from Russia. Militarily, this calls for a capable and functioning security apparatus, to hold the state together and resist attacks. The government has additionally committed to major structural reforms for the armed forces to meet NATO standards by 2020 (Akimenko, 2018). The other facet of this dimension is subtler; namely resiliency against destabilizing efforts, especially through information warfare. As Ash et al. (2017) state, Ukraine will be vulnerable to information war, penetration, sabotage and destabilization if law enforcement, security and defence institutions are not fit for purpose. Yet, the latter is as much a battle of ideas and narratives.

After a period in between, Ukraine has taken a firm decision in its orientation towards Europe versus Russia, especially through the EU Association Agreement. The EU and NATO can therefore be stabilizing long term projects where reform demands will need to be implemented by the state, ideally with positive results on political and economic levels. The lack of confidence in official structures and resentment against corruption, were important rationales at the Maidan (Dabrowski, 2017). These factors are not only important factors to be targeted by the reforms, but also for establishing an effective, trusted and accountable state, important for national security and political legitimacy, and possibly also for avoiding another Maidan.

As demonstrated, the initial response from the Ukrainian government towards the volunteer battalions, was a collusion strategy where it let the battalions continue as armed entities, and rather sought cooperation in force deployment and targeting. Collusion is according to Staniland (2015) often a short-term phase, for example, to build trust, or as in the Ukrainian context; to fight a mutual enemy. With the proposal by president Poroshenko in November 2014 to disband and incorporate the volunteer battalions into the UAF (Bulakh et al., 2017), the authorities moved towards a new strategy aimed at incorporating the volunteer battalions into the regular security structures. In other words; demobilization by

integration into normal politics (Staniland, 2015). By October 2015, those which had not dissolved or been incorporated already, were decided to be incorporated into the special-purpose units of the National Guard, or into the police as part of the Rapid Operational Response Unit or police line units (Bulakh et al., 2017). The only major formation remaining outside is the Right Sector, which according to Akimenko (2018) refused to amalgamate and thus keeps operating as a PGM (Bulakh et al., 2017). Several sources report that they still coordinate their operations with the ATO-command (Akimenko, 2018; Losh, 2017; Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016).

Bulakh et al. (2017) claim that the incorporation strategy came as a response to political pressure, but also after advice from military experts and some of the volunteers themselves. Lins de Albuquerque and Hedenskog (2015) suggest that it most of all was an attempt to technically abide by the Minsk II[4] agreement. Regardless of the underlying motivations, Karatnycky (2015) identified four specific aims with the new strategy: to cripple the ideological influence of the right-wing oriented volunteer battalions; to channel the resources constituted by the volunteers into the regular forces; to establish control over the many weapons at their hands; and to remove them from the front line. With these aims, the strategy would successfully eliminate what the previous chapter identified as potentially destabilizing factors; independent entities with diverging interests and a power base; while simultaneously taking advantage of their resources. The volunteer battalions keep their guns, but exist only as an integrated part of the state (Staniland, 2015). This shift from collusion to integration, reveals that the Ukrainian state aims towards the classical Weberian ideal; perhaps not surprising with the newfound orientation towards western-dominated institutions.

In terms of stabilizing a situation where the state does not have sufficient control over all agents of violence, an incorporation strategy can ideally through the formalization of links to armed non-state actors, lead to increased transparency, as well as a decreased information gap between the state principal and the agents, thus strengthening accountability (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). The information

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[4] The so-called Minsk II was negotiated after the collapse of the first cease fire agreement, the Minsk Protocol from September 2014, and was intended to revive the Protocol with a new package of measures. Its full title is the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements. One of the measures called for disarmament of all illegal groups.

advantage some volunteer battalions had in the initial ATO-phase, would most likely diminish. As a consequence, it would be more difficult to operate independently to pursue private goals, or to operate out of consistency with the state due to lack of training or professionalism. After all, there is little reason to doubt that the majority of volunteer soldiers mobilised mainly with good intentions (see e.g. Bulakh et al, 2017; Karagiannis, 2016), although exceptions are easily found.

Ukraine's regular forces are today reportedly larger and better equipped than ever before, with around 200 000 active-service military personnel (Akimenko, 2018). Ash et al. (2017) confirm that the UAF and National Guard are considerably more capable than the volunteer battalions were in 2014, and the military budget is set to rise. Bulakh et al. (2017) found that a number of volunteer soldiers expressed scepticism towards the incorporation process before it commenced, and were hence concerned that the moral could drop during such a process. This is not particular for the Ukrainian context though, as according to Ron (as cited in Aliyev, 2016) few militia members are eager to merge with the state forces after experiencing their ineffectiveness. Akimenko (2018) however, reports that moral has improved; an essential factor to avoid a repetition of the defections experienced during the early operations in Crimea and the Donbas.

More importantly, the level of trust has started to move in the right direction for the authorities. A survey from 2016 showed that while the level of trust in volunteers began to decline, the figure for the UAF had increased significantly. It thus seems like the goal of transferring some of the positive energy of the volunteers to the regular army, has partly succeeded (Bulakh et al., 2017). This could be a vital step towards stabilizing the situation where non-state actors can use the uneven trust-balance to put pressure on the government or to undermine its legitimacy, whether it be veteran groups or PGMs. Nevertheless, the level of trust in the government and the politicians remains low (Ash et al., 2017).

If these positive trends are as a result of the incorporation strategy, is difficult to assess. It is generally challenging to determine the actual state of the integration process. Whereas the process is almost complete according to the government,

Akimenko (2018) stresses that it is hard to verify for outsiders. There are however several examples, revealing the process not at its end point yet. For instance, after an article in the British newspaper the Guardian, had referred to the Azov regiment as "a notorious Ukrainian fascist militia" (Rawlinson, 2018, para. 2), the Ukrainian Embassy to the United Kingdom released a statement to clarify that the initial volunteer battalion Azov now was the military Regiment Azov of the National Guard of Ukraine: "As a regular military unit of the Ukrainian Security Forces, "Azov" has no official ideology and does not affiliate itself with any particular political party or movement" (Embassy of Ukraine, 2018, para. 5). The official response reveals some of the sensitivity that still surrounds the volunteer battalions.

There is no causal connection between the implementation of a strategy and its success. PGMs have, as we have seen, a will of their own and can manipulate or reject strategies from the government. An incorporation strategy can for example drag on without ever becoming successful. A full implementation will additionally require that the militias cease to exist as independent actors (Staniland, 2015), not consistently the case in Ukraine, as pointed out by Lins de Albuquerque and Hedenskog (2015) as highly problematic. Rather than incorporating individual soldiers into different military units, at least two battalions remain intact, but under official structures. Sheldon (2017) identifies the former Donbass and the Azov battalion as parts of the National Guard's 18th Operative Purpose Regiment.

Although Akimenko (2018) points to the Azov regiment as a case of successful integration, the same battalion is the prime example of what Bulakh et al. (2017) referred to as battalions with comet-tails. Azov as a "brand" consists of three bodies; the main body now integrated into the National Guard, and two non-state bodies; the Azov Civil Corps and the political party the National Corps. The Civil Corps is a civil society movement that amongst other arranges community activities (Sheldon, 2017). They are nevertheless known also for activist activities like staging blockades of private and public companies. For instance, in 2016 the Civil Corps blocked employees from entering the building of the construction company Kyivmiskbud, and in March 2017 the Civil Corps together with other

groups, walled off the headquarters of the Russian Sberbank in Kyiv to protest against a decision from its main office in Moscow to recognize documents issued by "DPR" and "LPR" authorities. The activists wanted a ban from the parliament to prevent Russian banks from operating in Ukraine (Ash et al., 2017; Sheldon, 2017; Ukrainian Protesters Wall, 2017).

Ash et al. (2017) refers to the Civil Corps as a nationalist movement with a claimed membership of around 10 000. The political party the National Corps, is according to them generally becoming more visible in the public, and have repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to hold radical protests among young people. Although these structures are not formally connected to the Azov regiment, the links are difficult to overlook. As one of the activists explained when asked about the Civil Corp's connection to the military regiment:

> We are somehow related indeed. But those are two different structures. For example, I used to be a soldier of the Azov battalion. There are many veterans of Azov regiment in our movement. Our leader, Andrii Biletskyi is the former commander of the Azov battalion. (Azov Press, 2016)

In January 2018, another formation appeared in Kyiv; the National Militia. This is an unarmed group aiming to patrol the streets to ensure law and order, as the police is deemed corrupt and incapable of fulfilling its tasks. The group reportedly has a high number of volunteer veterans amongst its members, and there are again allegations of ties to the Azov regiment (Bennets, 2018).

Having a former volunteer battalion with such a strong brand as part of the regular security structures, may in the long run turn out to be destabilizing rather than stabilizing. That their identity is still intact, was illustrated when the Azov regiment recently posted a video online to counter accusations that they no longer contribute in the ATO. The video shows regiment soldiers fighting with snipers and conducting tasks like reconnaissance activities (Азов показал, как, 2018). It does not resemble a unit eradicated as an entity. The above examples also illustrate Sheldon's (2017) point that these units have been able to expand their functions beyond what would be considered acceptable for an ordinary state unit.

Azov was one of eight formations that according to Likhachev (2016) was founded by far-right groups, as the Right Sector Volunteer Corps was (Karagiannis, 2016). A report from Chatham House states that the Azov promotes a radical agenda of ceasing economic, cultural and political bilateral relations with Russia and has an anti-EU agenda. The same report expresses concern over the "growing impact and visibility of intolerant, extremist organized groups in the public space" (p. 71) that recently caused Freedom House to downgrade Ukraine's score for civil society (Ash et al., 2017). The formal integration may as such increase the legitimacy of radical nationalist ideas, as Likhachev (2016) has noted. He sees Azov as the primary example of how ultra-nationalism has been "legalised and even lionised" (p. 15) in public discourse.

While one might question the rationale behind incorporating battalions with controversial ideologies, it is doubtful that the government had the capacity to apply the other option for elimination; namely suppression. In addition to demanding large-scale investments in their destruction (Staniland, 2015), not a rational option when an armed conflict is ongoing, the groups' popular support surpassed that of the government. As Staniland (2015) remarks, the masses sometimes restrain the options of the decision makers. One source told me that a surprisingly high number of ordinary Ukrainians are against even prosecuting former volunteer soldiers, due to the prevalent conception that "they did what they had to do". Additionally, as long as the conflict is ongoing, the government is not likely to do anything that threatens the fight against the separatists (Akimenko, 2018). This demonstrates that it is a matter of priorities for the government when they choose their strategies in relation to militias; it is an evaluation of the groups' political value or of what represents the greatest threat politically at a certain time. (Staniland, 2015).

Just as the government is unlikely to take actions that gamble with their ability to counter the separatist, the armed formations, both the incorporated units and the ones operating outside the legal framework, do not appear likely to do anything to put their participation in the conflict at stake. As has been a common thread throughout the thesis; the main aim of the volunteer battalions, as typical for PGMs and state-parallel militias, were and are to fight the enemy which at this

point is shared with the government. As a Right Sector soldier explained: "(…) Things are different in the east. We have a good relationship with the soldiers. We share the same enemy. We're Ukrainian partisans" (Losh, 2017, para. 5). Similarly, when separatists shelled Sartana village close to Mariupol, the Azov regiment was ready to deploy. A commander explained: "We wanted to go to Sartana, but we had no orders" (Peterson, 2015b, para. 19). Another Azov soldier expressed his frustration over being pulled back from the frontline, but continued: "(…) our role is very simple; we don't question orders. We are only soldiers" (para. 39). In this respect, the incorporation strategy has seemingly, at least militarily, succeeded in gaining control over the application of violence even for the most controversial groups, despite their still prevalent identities.

The assessment of the incorporation process and its possible stabilizing effects, may therefore best be made when the conflict moves towards its end. There is always a risk of militias preventing a political settlement if not properly aligned with the government. For instance, according to Bulakh et al. (2017) the clear majority of volunteers considered the signing of the Minsk II as a betrayal of national interests. Alexander Tumanov, a Right Sector commentator (as cited in Karagiannis, 2016) illustratively stated that "we have an opportunity to gain real freedom and a real state. This is why anyone who speaks about the necessity of solving the conflict diplomatically is an enemy" (p. 7). On the Twitter account Azov News, the words of Andriy Biletsky was recently recaptured in the occasion of the fourth anniversary for the Azov Regiment: "We will not retreat from our struggle and the task of a definitive victory" (AzovNews, 2018). This forecasts a prospect where certain groups may think the government is settling for less (Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016) and thus have the potential to become spoilers of a peace agreement, destroying prospects for the most essential part of stability; namely security.

Alarmingly, Bulakh et al. (2017) found that it was a widespread opinion amongst the volunteer soldiers that the current conflict is not the last Ukraine will face. Members of far-right have often generally portrayed the conflict in the east as a battle of ideas, drawing parallels to holy wars and the European liberation wars (Karagiannis, 2016). As Likhachev (2016, 6) reminds us, the volunteer battalions,

obtained their public support by their status as defenders of their homeland. It may be hard to let go of their status and to step back into the lines of ordinary citizens; a transition found difficult by many of those who have returned already (Bulakh et al., 2017). There is also a potential for the most radical formations to turn against the government when their uniting enemy ceases to pose an imminent threat. If the incorporation has failed in its goal to eliminate former volunteer battalions as entities, the results remain to be seen when their interests no longer necessarily overlap with those of the state. It may also be the time when the ties to non-military structures within politics and civil society will unveil.

A strategy of incorporation can contribute to increased stability in the sense that it has the potential to channel the resources of PGMs into the regular structures, while simultaneously reducing the distance and the information gap between the militias and the state, to increase accountability and state control. The Ukrainian security forces are today much stronger and more capable of defending the country's sovereignty than it was in 2014. On the other hand, the incorporation has for at least two former volunteer units been done only partially as they still exist as entities, merely placed under official structures. Although some highlighted examples suggest that the identity of especially the Azov regiment is still strong, the incorporation has seemingly succeeded in regaining control of the former volunteer battalions as agents of violence. The thesis has argued that whereas the shared goal of defending the nation enables the (former) PGMs mainly to accept their subordination, the real test may come when the conflict moves towards an end.

8. Conclusion

Summarizing the main findings
This thesis has through a critical analysis of the existing PGM literature, used the framework of the Weberian ideal of state monopoly on legitimate violence to discuss the case of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions and their state relations. It set out to answer the following research question: To what extent and how can strong pro-government militias represent a threat to the state, and how and why can their incorporation into the regular security forces contribute to more or less stability?

The study put forward the claim that most of the existing research on the Ukrainian volunteer battalions have been focused on the period from 2014 to 2015 when the groups were at their strongest both in terms of independence, support and attention. Naturally, this no longer gives an accurate description of the current situation, when most volunteer formations have either been dissolved or integrated into the state structures, and as such have ceased to exist as PGMs. The time when completely uncontrolled battalions overtly opposed the central command, is mainly over; and the phenomenon has moved to a new phase.

The thesis has argued that the volunteer battalions emerged as a response to the specific political and military developments that took place in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014, when its territorial sovereignty came under attack and the regular security forces proved unable to respond efficiently to these challenges. The poor state of the regular forces was a result of many years of neglect, low maintenance and hardly any investments; mainly caused by a shift in the national security focus from external to internal threats. An armed aggression resulting in local or regional war was defined as unlikely in the medium term (Puglisi, 2017). Their formation can partly also be seen as a phenomenon emerging from the lack of public trust in the official institutions in Ukraine; at its lowest after the excessive force used against the protesters at the Maidan.

The volunteer battalions, and the volunteer movement as such, filled important state functions within security and defence in the immediate post-Maidan period. Based on the existing PGM-literature, the thesis has argued that the volunteer battalions functioned as cheap force multipliers for the state in a time where the primary state concern was to mobilise enough people to counter the separatist offensive. They filled a gap in state resources while giving time for the state to strengthen its regular forces. Although with an inherit potential to act as agents of deniability, allowing the state to distance itself from an efficient and harsh repression of the separatists, the groups are mainly seen to have arisen initially as bottom-up constructs, but rather rapidly with a more active role from the state in channelling their resources. The volunteer battalions emerged on a spectrum between the state not having the *capacity* to restrain them, and not having the *motivation* to do so, as their resources were well needed.

An underlying argument has been that the presence of PGMs does not pose an axiomatic threat to a functioning state. Multi-level public monopoly on violence (Wulf, 2007) was introduced as an alternative to the classical Weberian approach. By initially applying a strategy of collusion towards the PGMs, the Ukrainian state set out to part, at least temporarily, with some of its essential security tasks. It has nonetheless been argued that PGMs with a strong position relative to that of the state, can be undermining and hence constitute a threat. The lack of control and coordination in the initial ATO-phase, left room for agents of violence to act as independent actors, and weakened the rule of law in certain areas. The thesis put forward the claim that the open opposition of some volunteer commanders towards the government and the central ATO-command, had an undermining effect on the state; partly due to their relative high levels of trust in the general population. Diverging interests have surfaced in some cases, as for instance, with the trade blockade in 2017, where activists seemingly put pressure on the government to change their politics. The image comprises bonds between volunteer battalions and corporate and political actors, leading to questions of loyalties. Together, it makes up the socio-political ecosystem that according to Bulakh et al. (2017) has sprung out around the original volunteer battalions.

A strategy of incorporation was adopted early on, and by the end of 2015, most remaining volunteer formations had been incorporated into the formal security apparatus. The thesis has argued that this strategy has the potential to eliminate the possible destabilizing effects of some of the challenges accentuated above. Successfully, it eradicates the armed groups as independent entities while simultaneously taking advantage of their resources. In the Ukrainian context, an important challenge can however be posed by the fact that some volunteer units have been integrated as units, and not as individual soldiers; leaving their original identities intact. In the current situation, the (former)volunteer battalions share their primary enemy with the state, in the fight against the separatists in the east. The overarching goal of keeping the nation intact, appears to have lead the central command to mainly achieve the control and coordination that were absent in the initial ATO-stages. The real effect of the incorporation strategy may therefore first surface when the conflict moves towards an end. Will the incorporated former

volunteer units still be aligned with the state, or can they become spoilers of a potential peace agreement, or even turn against the government, perhaps united with related civil organizations? And for the remaining PGMs, the state will most likely need to adopt a new strategy.

To conclude:

- Strong PGMs like the Ukrainian volunteer battalions, can pose a threat to the state's legitimacy and effective execution of power if they have an independent power base strong relative to that of the state, based for instance, on factors like popular support or financial resources, if the state does not achieve sufficient control over the militias.

- A state strategy of incorporating strong PGMs into the regular security forces, has the potential to counterbalance some of these challenges, and can thus contribute to increased stability. With future chances for the interests of the state and the (former) PGMs ceasing to overlap, the success is likely to depend on the eradication of the groups as independent entities.

Further research

The main limitation of this study is the absence of primary data to build the analysis upon. As a consequence, the thesis has not been able to move deep below the surface level when answering the research questions, especially when it comes to the current situation of which produced knowledge naturally is less. However, an important aim of the study has been to identify novel elements which can make for rewarding future research projects within the same topic. I have thus selected three topics to highlight.

First, it would be fruitful to explore how the former volunteer soldiers and the former volunteer units which have been integrated into the regular structures as *whole units*, are operating militarily today. A study could for instance focus upon topics like coordination, cooperation and motivation, or be carried out as an evaluation of the integration process. In a more culturally or sociologically oriented study, the topic of identity could make for rewarding findings.

The second area to highlight, is the more blurred or loose connections between military units and civil organizations, especially in the case of the Azov regiment, but also veteran organizations and the fairly new National Militia. What are the links between these structures? How much influence do they have? What are the implications for the larger society? Some of these organizations attract a lot of attention due to their sometimes spectacular air, which can contribute to blow phenomena out of proportions. It is regardless of that, an area in need of empirical knowledge as these are formations very likely to have an influence on the development of the Ukrainian society.

Third and last; an area that with certainty will affect the Ukrainian society in the near future and probably for a long time; the volunteer veterans. I will accentuate two perspectives. One is the legal status of the volunteers as many for a long time did not have official status as combatants, and some volunteer battalions never carried complete lists of their members (Goralska, 2015). Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) suggest that the ambiguities in the legal framework may be a fuse for future conflict. The second perspective, is the return and reintegration of the volunteer soldiers. Reintegration as such is not unique for volunteer soldiers, but is likely to involve different aspects compared to regular soldiers, due to factors like the legal framework and other rationales for entering into the conflict.

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