ORGANISATIONS ESTABLISHED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION DURING THE EUROMAIDAN IN UKRAINE

ORGANIZACJE UTWORZONE PRZEZ OPOZYCJĘ PARLAMENTARNĄ PODCZAS EUROMAJDANU W UKRAINIE

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—— **ABSTRACT** ——

The aim of this article is to define the role of the organisations established by the parliamentary opposition during the Euromaidan. The political opposition created the National Resistance Headquarters and the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" at that time. In the long term, they were supposed to become a tool for the opposition in the upcoming presidential elections. In the short term, in turn, they were to coordinate the actions of protesters during the Euromaidan throughout Ukraine. In order to achieve the research objective, the historical, systemic, and case study methods were used.

Keywords: Ukraine; parliamentary opposition; Euromaidan; protest; organisations

—— **ABSTRAKT** ——

Celem artykułu jest określenie roli organizacji założonych przez opozycję parlamentarną na Euromajdanie. Opozycja polityczna podczas Euromajdanu utworzyła Sztab Sprzeciwu Narodowego oraz Zjednoczenie Ogólnoukraińskie „Majdan". W perspektywie długofalowej miały one stać się narzędziem opozycji w nadchodzących wyborach prezydenckich. Z kolei w perspektywie krótkofalowej miały koordynować działania protestujących podczas Euromajdanu w całej Ukrainie. Dla osiągnięcia celu badawczego zostały zastosowane następujące metody: historyczna, systemowa, studium przypadku.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina; opozycja parlamentarna; Euromajdan; protest; organizacje

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INTRODUCTION

The Euromaidan (Maidan)[1] in 2013–2014 came as quite a surprise to both the parliamentary opposition and the government (Bekeshkina, 2014, p. 305). After the 2012 parliamentary elections, President Viktor Yanukovych (2010–2014 term) and his government formed by the Party of Regions and the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) was opposed by three parties that formed factions in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: the All-Ukrainian Union "Batkivshchyna" ("Batkivshchyna"), the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform headed by Vitali Klitschko (UDAR), and the nationalist All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda" ("Svoboda"). In 2013, the leaders of the parliamentary opposition (Arseniy Yatsenyuk[2] – "Batkivshchyna", Vitali Klitschko – UDAR, Oleh Tyahnybok – "Svoboda") were focused on preparing the presidential election scheduled for 2015. The opposition leaders were convinced that President Yanukovych would not yield under the pressure of protests; therefore, they decided to focus on preparations to face him in the next presidential election (Hale, 2015, p. 236).

Thus, the Euromaidan was organised by social activists, journalists, university students, and non-governmental organisations. It began on the night of November 21, 2013, when socially active citizens – organised via social networks – came to Independence Square in Kiev to protest against the decision taken that day by the government of Mykola Azarov to suspend the process of concluding an association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (Rozporiadzhennia Kabinetu Ministriv Ukrainy…, 2013). The first rally organised by opposition parliamentary parties as part of the Euromaidan took place on November 24, 2013 on European Square in Kiev. Besides the "no politicians" social Maidan on Independence Square, the opposition launched the "political" Maidan on

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[1] The name refers to the extensive anti-government protests, the centre of which was Independence Square in Kiev. The word "maidan" is a synonym for the word "square" in everyday language. Firstly, the term 'maidan' was used to describe the epicentre of the protests – Independence Square (Maidan). Secondly, the protests themselves were referred to as the "Maidan" or "Euromaidan" (due to the direct reason for their initiation – the suspension of the process of signing the association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union). Thirdly, the terms 'Maidan' and 'Euromaidan' were also used to describe the protesting community. By opposition politicians, the Euromaidan was also described as "the revolution of dignity" (Rudenko & Sarakhman, 2020).

[2] Due to the imprisonment of the leader of the Batkivshchyna – Yulia Tymoshenko – in 2011, during the Euromaidan the party was represented by Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who served as the chairman of the Batkivshchyna faction in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine after the 2012 parliamentary elections.

European Square. Ultimately, on November 26, 2013, the leaders of the political opposition decided to join the "no politicians" Euromaidan on Independence Square (*Dva…*, 2013).

During the Euromaidan, the protesters articulated two main demands to opposition leaders: to designate the main leader of the protests and one candidate for the next presidential election. However, none of the opposition party leaders took on the role of the leader of the Euromaidan, unlike Viktor Yushchenko, who was the main leader of the Orange Revolution in 2004 (Way, 2019, p. 15). The opposition leaders also stated that each of them would run as candidates in the upcoming presidential election. As resulted from the agreement concluded on May 18, 2013 by the opposition parties, it was only in the second round of the election that the candidate with the best first round result would receive the support of all the opposition forces (Halabala, 2014). During the Euromaidan, the leaders of the three opposition parties competed for support in the future presidential election. As rightly stated by O. Onuch (2015), the political opposition during the Euromaidan was not as united as during the Orange Revolution. The opposition leaders oscillated between cooperation and conflict (Onuch, 2015).

The opposition leaders joined the Euromaidan without having a plan of action (Amosov, 2018). They undertook to develop an action plan for the participants of the Maidan as part of the National Resistance Headquarters established on December 1, 2013, and the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" established on December 22, 2013. Every Sunday, the leaders of the opposition parties organised rallies and were representatives of the Euromaidan in negotiations with the authorities. However, they did not manage to gain full control of the protesters, especially those taking part in encounters with force units.

The aim of this article is to define the role of the organisations established by the political opposition during the Maidan. The research hypothesis formulated is the following: The political opposition influenced the protesters during the Euromaidan with the help of the organisations it had established on the Maidan: the National Resistance Headquarters and the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" (AUU "Maidan"). In order to achieve the research objective and verify the hypothesis, the historical, systemic, and case study methods were used. The outlined research problem has been raised in the works of: O. Onuch (2015), H.E. Hale (2015), L. Way (2019), and others.

NATIONAL RESISTANCE HEADQUARTERS

After the unsuccessful attempt to disperse the protests on November 30, 2013 – the destruction of the tent town on Independence Square by officers of the special militia unit "Berkut", which was accompanied by violence against several hundred peaceful protesters, a significant part of whom were students – the Euromaidan took the form of wide-ranging anti-government protests. The Euromaidan activists began to create civic initiatives, activist communities (Euromaidan Civic Sector, AutoMaidan, Euromaidan SOS, etc.).

From December 1, 2013, the political opposition began its attempts to institutionalise the Maidan. In order to coordinate the protesters' actions, on December 1, 2013, the opposition parliamentary parties created the National Resistance Headquarters, co-chaired by the opposition leaders: A. Yatsenyuk, V. Klitschko, O. Tyahnybok. According to the leaders of the opposition parties, in the long term, the National Resistance Headquarters was intended to unite and coordinate the actions of opposition activists throughout Ukraine in connection with the presidential election scheduled for 2015. In the short term, in turn, it was to play the role of the Euromaidan coordination centre (_Opozyciini lidery…_, 2013). The National Resistance Headquarters was also joined by journalists, social activists and activists from patriotic organisations (Kidruk, 2015, p. 9). A Batkivshchyna representative, Oleksandr Turchynov, was appointed the coordinator of the Headquarters (Koshkina, 2015, p. 127). His deputy was Serhiy Pashynskyi, also a member of the Batkivshchyna parliamentary faction. The Trade Union Building became the seat of the Headquarters. The National Resistance Headquarters undertook both ideological and political actions (e.g., generating demands against the authorities) as well as organisational ones. Opposition politicians designed the layout of the tent town on Independence Square along with its fortification in the form of barricades (Koshkina, 2015, p. 127). A commanding office was created for the National Resistance Headquarters. The Maidan commanders were primarily representatives of the opposition parties. Representatives of the Batkivshchyna took the positions of commanders of: the tent town (Andriy Parubiy); the International Centre for Culture and Art of the Association of Trade Unions of Ukraine (Andrey Senchenko, Lyudmyla Denysova); Trade Union Building (Stepan Kubiv). In addition, Mykhailo Blavatskyi, people's deputy from Svoboda, and Serhiy Averchenko from UDAR were appointed as commanders of the Trade Union Building (Kozak, 2022). People's deputy from Svoboda, Eduard Leonov, became the commander of the Kiev city administration

building. Yaroslav Ginka, people's deputy from UDAR, also took the position of a commander.

According to O. Turchynov, the most difficult task was given to A. Parubiy, who was in fact entrusted with the protection and defence of the tent town on the Maidan (Koshkina, 2015, p. 129). For this purpose, the protesters established units called 'sotnyas', which shaped the Maidan Self-Defence system. Branches of the self-defence were established in individual regions of the country. Already during the first week, they were made up of 4 thousand people (*Nachalo Maidana…*, n.d.). As of February 7, the organisation had as many as 12 thousand members (Rud, 2014). Apart from the defence and protection functions, 'sotnyas' also performed other organisational tasks: providing supplies or medical assistance ("Medical Sotnya") (*Parubii…*, 2013). A legal service for the National Resistance Headquarters was established on the basis of the teams of lawyers from the Batkivshchyna, Svoboda and UDAR, to deal with the issues of legal defence and the release of arrested Maidan participants. This service was headed by Pavlo Petrenko – people's deputy from the Batkivshchyna. In order to establish contacts with the Western world, the National Resistance Headquarters had its Political Centre for Foreign Affairs (an international commission), headed by Borys Tarasyuk, a representative of the Batkivshchyna. Svyatoslav Chanenko, a deputy from Svoboda, became the head of the medical service of the National Resistance Headquarters. In addition, the National Resistance Headquarters had a press centre, a psychological service, and a group of permanent volunteers. Branches of the National Resistance Headquarters were created in the centres of opposition parties in: Ivano-Frankivsk, Vinnitsa, Khmelnytskyi, Chernivtsi, Zhytomyr, Rivne, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Poltava, and Odessa (Lukianiuk, 2014).

Gathered within the National Resistance Headquarters, the political opposition developed the "Action Plan of the Maidan participants" consisting of the following five blocks: 1) main goals and tasks; 2) international activity; 3) organisational and legal undertakings; 4) civil disobedience actions; 5) other initiatives (*Opozyciia poklykala…*, 2013). The main goals and tasks included: the release of political prisoners; the initiation of criminal proceedings against Vitaliy Zakharchenko, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and against the officers of the special militia unit "Berkut" guilty of beating up the demonstrators; the dismissal of the government of Mykola Azarov; early parliamentary and presidential elections; and the signing of an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU. In the segment of international activity, the opposition decided to submit reports on the violation of human and civil rights by the Ukrainian

authorities to the following international organisations: United Nations (UN); Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE); the EU. They decided to raise the issue of non-compliance with the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights by the Ukrainian authorities. The National Resistance Headquarters intended to monitor the state finances as well as the authorities' corrupt activities; and also, ask the international community to block the foreign accounts of Ukrainian authorities. The opposition also planned to invite politicians from the Western world to speak at the Maidan in Kiev. In terms of organisational and legal measures, the political opposition planned to demand that the ombudsman should take up the issue of the protesters getting beaten up by the Berkut. They also intended to require the General Prosecutor's Office to initiate an investigation into the beating of Euromaidan participants. From the catalogue of civil disobedience actions, the opposition suggested organising a campaign to boycott the goods and services of enterprises and organisations belonging to the Party of Regions' deputies and activists associated with it. Among other initiatives, the opposition focused on ensuring the protection of places where protests took place. In this context, they proposed: to involve the organisations of veterans of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, participants of the war in Afghanistan; to use construction equipment, municipal services, agricultural engineering to strengthen the fortifications. The opposition also proposed to monitor the transport of people to rallies organised by the Party of Regions in Kiev (*Opozyciia ukhvalyla…*, 2013). The action plan was being successively refined (*U Shtabi…*, 2013).

The National Resistance Headquarters undertook a number of activities aimed at mobilising demonstrators and activating protests. It informed the protesters about the provocations against the Maidan prepared by the authorities (*Vlada hotuie…*, 2014) as well as about the attempts of its dispersion by force units. However, some of this information was not confirmed in practice. Therefore, it seems correct to say that the opposition mobilised demonstrators in order to continue the protests also by maintaining the atmosphere of tension (*Anonsovani…*, 2014). After the first deaths among the protesters on January 22, 2014, the Headquarters decided to activate the protests at the regional level. This decision resulted in the occupation of state administration buildings by protesters in the following oblasts (provinces): Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Ternopil, Rivne, Lviv, Khmelnytskyi, Zhytomyr, and others (*Do dnia…*, 2019). In order to put pressure on the ruling majority, the National Resistance Head-

quarters directed the participants of the protests to the building of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on the days when decisions that were essential to settling the political crisis were made (*Dni…*, 2021). In turn, the international commission of the National Resistance Headquarters systematically prepared reports on the Maidan events for the embassies of democratic states. In order to legitimise the Maidan and to raise the level of activity of the protesters, diplomats from the National Resistance Headquarters organised visits of foreign delegations from EU member states, the United States and Georgia to Independence Square in Kiev (*Borys Tarasiuk…*, 2013/2014).

ALL-UKRAINIAN UNION "MAIDAN"

The All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" was to become a joint organisation for the opposition parties and social activists[3]. It was founded during the fifth Sunday Euromaidan rally on December 22, 2013 by representatives of three opposition parliamentary parties as well as social organisations, i.e., the Euromaidan activist community (*Yevromaidan obiednavsia…*, 2013). The Chief of the National Resistance Headquarters, O. Turchynov, stated that the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" should become a supra-political civic association (Stelmakh, 2013). The Council of the Union was joined by politicians, well-known journalists, social activists, Euromaidan activists, as well as artists and writers. The co-chairpersons of the organisation's Council were: the leaders of three opposition parties (V. Klitschko, A. Yatsenyuk, O. Tyahnybok), Yuriy Lutsenko, Serhiy Kvit (Rector of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), singer Ruslana Lyzhychko (winner of the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest), and former Prime Minister Y. Tymoshenko (*Yevromaidan obiednavsia…*, 2013). It was assumed that the Maidan Council would conduct a public mobilisation campaign to oppose the government in all regions of Ukraine and coordinate the protest movement throughout the country (Stelmakh, 2013). It was supposed to develop an action plan during anti-government protests (create a strategy and tactics), i.e., deal with organisational issues (Stelmakh, 2013).

 The composition of the Maidan Council was dominated by representatives of parliamentary opposition parties (*Rada Narodnoho…*, 2013). This solution

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[3] Its original name was the Maidan People's Union.

caused a wave of criticism from protesters (*Z Rady…*, 2013), and especially social activists (*Aktivisty…*, 2013), who accused politicians that the organisation represented the interests of the parliamentary opposition to a greater extent than "regular Euromaidan activists" (*Rada Narodnoho…*, 2013). Because of this, on December 26, 2013, the Council of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" decided to liquidate the positions of co-chairpersons. The opposition parties' leaders acting as co-chairpersons were reclassified as regular members of the Council. In turn, the "Maidan" Presidium was established, which included members of the opposition parties (Serhiy Sobolev – Batkivshchyna, Valeriy Patskan – UDAR, Andriy Illenko – Svoboda), as well as Ruslana Lyzhychko as a representative of the Euromaidan activists, and Yelizaveta Shepetilnikova – a representative of student youth (*VO "Maidan" vidmovylosia…*, 2013).

In order to improve the functioning of the "Maidan" Council, nine committees were established: program committee; committee for foreign policy and European integration; art committee; youth and students committee; informative committee; mobilisation committee; committee for the coordination of work in the regions; committee for the cooperation with social organisations and trade unions; committee for legal protection (*VO "Maidan" vidmovylosia…*, 2013). During the meeting of the Council of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" on January 4, 2014, a decision was made to establish the organisation's regional centres (*"Maidan" stvoriuie…*, 2014).

The Union could have been joined by political parties, social organisations, and citizens (Bezpiatchuk, 2013). The founders stated that ultimately 10 million Ukrainians could join the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" (Hryshko, 2013). Every citizen who submitted an application to join the organisation could get a membership card.

Focusing mainly on the future presidential elections, the opposition leaders intended to use the Union for: 1) ensuring the duration of protests until the presidential election; 2) conducting an election campaign for the opposition candidates (members of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" would become agitators and social observers); 3) defending the election results – members of the Union from all over Ukraine would come to Kiev on the night of vote counting, to prevent the falsification of the results by the authorities (*Opozyciia spodivaietsia…*, 2014).

During the Sunday rally on December 25, 2013, the parliamentary opposition presented the program manifesto of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" on the stage on Independence Square. In the short term, the following aims were

supposed to be achieved: 1) release and rehabilitation of all arrested Euromaidan activists; 2) release of all political prisoners; 3) ending the repression of the protesters; 4) dismissal of the officials responsible for the crimes against the Maidan and the initiation of criminal proceedings against them; 5) liquidation of the special militia unit "Berkut" and prohibition of the use of internal troops against peaceful protests; 6) dismissal of the government of M. Azarov and formation of a new parliamentary majority that would appoint a new government; 7) commencement of "real, and not simulated, negotiations between the government and the Maidan" (for this purpose, the Council of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" appointed a delegation with a mandate from the Euromaidan to negotiate with the authorities, composed of the opposition leaders); 8) restoration of the Constitution in its 2004 edition; 9) holding early parliamentary elections according to the proportional system. In the medium term, the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" intended to achieve the following: 1) signing of an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU; 2) introducing a visa-free regime for Ukraine from the EU; 3) preventing Ukraine from joining the Customs Union and the Eurasian Union; 4) imposing personal international sanctions against those responsible for the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators; 5) developing a plan of changes in the country, the implementation of which would ensure Ukraine's accession to the EU; 6) ensuring fair and transparent presidential, parliamentary and local elections, which would be the legal way to change the authorities. Finally, in the long term, the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" postulated: 1) making Ukraine a democratic state of law with a socially oriented economy; 2) adopting a new Constitution; 3) decentralisation of power; 4) full reform of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine; 5) comprehensive reform of the judiciary; 6) reforming the education system (*Prohramnyi manifest…*, 2013).

The All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" mobilised and activated the protesters by organising: 1) Sunday people's rallies (they were called during protests every Sunday); 2) boycotts of the public and oligarchic televisions representing the point of view of the authorities and depreciating the Euromaidan; 3) the all-Ukrainian strike (*"Maidan" stvoryv…*, 2014), which was carried out on February 13, 2014 (Khronolohiia, 2014, p. 964); 4) protests in front of private houses of the authorities' representatives, etc. 5) blocking and unblocking of government buildings by the Euromaidan participants (for example, after the release of all imprisoned demonstrators on February 14, 2014, the "Maidan" Council agreed to partially unblock Hrushevskyi Street, as well as to leave the Kiev city state administration building) (*Rada Maidanu…*, 2014). The All-Ukrainian Union

"Maidan" also represented the protesters on the international forum: they asked the US and the EU to impose sanctions against President V. Yanukovych and his entourage; also, they met with foreign delegations to discuss the persecution and repression by the authorities against the Euromaidan participants (*VO "Maidan" prizvalo…*, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

The opposition parties were not prepared for the broad anti-government protests in 2013–2014, referred to as the Euromaidan/Maidan. Unlike the Orange Revolution in 2004, at the start of the Euromaidan, the opposition did not have an action plan or an organisation to coordinate the protests. In addition, none of the leaders of the three opposition parties took on the role of the leader of the Euromaidan. The opposition leaders did not believe that the protests would result in an alternation of the authorities. They focused on preparations for the presidential election scheduled for 2015 (which possibly could have been held earlier). Thus, when creating organisations for the coordination of the Euromaidan (the National Resistance Headquarters, the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan"), the opposition politicians assumed that these organisations would become their tools during the elections. The opposition leaders reckoned that activists should unite around the regional centres of the National Resistance Headquarters, who would then organise their election campaign. In turn, the members of the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" (10 million members, as it was assumed) were supposed to become agitators in the election campaign and social observers, as well as participants of wide-ranging protests in the event of the election results being falsified. One should agree with Volodymyr Fesenko that from the point of view of the leaders of the three opposition parties, the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" was a stage in the opposition's preparation for the presidential election (*Rada Narodnoho…*, 2013). However, the protesters were convinced that: V. Yanukovych should immediately resign as president and the parliament should dissolve; and early elections – both presidential and parliamentary – should be held immediately. The National Resistance Headquarters was dominated mainly by representatives of the three opposition parliamentary parties: Batkivshchyna, Svoboda, and UDAR. On the other hand, the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" was supposed to become a supra-political structure. Social activists, however,

pointed out that too many opposition politicians compared to representatives of social organisations joined the "Maidan" Council (Stelmakh, 2013). They also alleged a lack of transparency in the appointment of the board, as well as in the decision-making process by the "Maidan" Council (*Aktivisty…*, 2013). Furthermore, inconsistency in the action plan proposed by the opposition was pointed out (*Yevromaidan obiednavsia…*, 2013). Thus, the political opposition was not able to exercise full control over the Maidan. The lack of control was particularly evident when protesters did not respond to the opposition's appeals to stop their fights with the militia (*V cientrie…*, 2014). Nevertheless, it should be stated that through the National Resistance Headquarters and the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan", the opposition leaders raised the level of organisation and mobilisation of the Euromaidan, triggered the activation of protests throughout Ukraine, and also articulated demands against the authorities. Thus, the hypothesis that the political opposition influenced the protesters during the Euromaidan with the help of the National Resistance Headquarters and the All-Ukrainian Union "Maidan" is confirmed. It should be emphasised, however, that this influence was partial.

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