FACTORS BEHIND THE ENTRY OF THE DONBAS YOUTH INTO DPR AND LPR TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract. The question of attracting young people to the ranks of the militarized units of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (LPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (DPR) is currently very acute in the conditions of a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. It permanently rose at the state level in 2014-2022, before the beginning of Russia’s invasion of the territory of Ukraine. Currently, the situation developed in such a way that many former ‘graduates’ of paramilitary units, which operated on the territory of the occupied Donbas for eight years, join the armed forces of the Russian Federation as part of the terrorist organizations of the DPR and LPR.

From 2014 to 2022 the Kremlin occupation administration in the East of Ukraine have conducted permanent ideological work with the youth. Thus, there are no educational institutions in the occupied territories where members of illegal armed formations are not periodically involved in order to hold lectures on the topic of the “civil war in Ukraine” and demonstrate weapons and propagandistic documentaries about “new heroes of the so-called people’s republics”. Since 2014, the terrorist organizations LPR and DPR managed and supported from the Kremlin are actively recruiting minors who are under the influence of propaganda or who, as a result of coercion, take direct part in hostilities against the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

A high level of misinformation had a negative impact on the process of formation of children and adolescents, given that the vast majority of people in the temporarily occupied territories did not have access to Ukrainian media. In 2014, one of the first steps of the occupation authorities was to shut down Ukrainian
television, and Russian or militant channels began to use the frequencies. A large number of Ukrainian sites, especially such as “Donbas news”, which honestly covered news in the “republics”, were blocked. This means that the population of the temporarily occupied Donbas received information from channels that were completely propagandistic and anti-Ukrainian, while the children studied directly according to the educational programs determined by the Russian Federation.

Despite the importance of the investigated issue and the large number of materials in the mass media and reports of international organizations, there are currently no publications in the domestic and foreign literature covering the investigated topic. This creates prospects for further research and development in this direction.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, DPR, LPR, youth, socio-psychological processes, psychological reasons, socio-economic reasons, terrorist units, propaganda.

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В УМОВИ ВСТУПУ МОЛОДІ ДОНБАСУ ДО ЛАВ ТЕРОРИСТИЧНИХ ПІДРОЗДІЛІВ ДНР ТА ЛНР

Анотація. Питання залучення молоді до мілітаризованих так званих Донецької народної республіки “ДНР” та Луганської народної республіки “ЛНР” сьогодні стоїть дуже гостро в умовах повномасштабної російсько-української війни. Ситуація склалася таким чином, що значна кількість колишніх членів незаконних збройних формувань, які діяли на Донбасі, вступають до лав регулярних збройних сил Російської Федерації. З 2014 по 2022 роки кремлівська окупаційна адміністрація проводила постійну ідеологічну роботу з молоддю тимчасово окупованих територій Донбасу. На території Донбасу у навчальних закладах регулярно проводилася ідеологічна робота щодо “громадянської війни в Україні”, до якої активно залучали бойовиків терористичних організацій ДНР та ЛНР. Під час цієї роботи молодь знайомили із зразками сучасної зброї та озброєння, демонстрували фільми про так звані “героїв народних республік”. Разом з тим, тривав постійний процес вербування неповнолітніх до майбутньої військової служби в незаконних збройних формуваннях, це відбувалося під впливом російської пропаганди та в умовах інформаційного вакууму.

Негативний вплив на процес формування дітей та підлітків мав високий рівень дезінформації, враховуючи те, що переважна більшість людей
на тимчасово окупованих територіях не мала доступу до українських медіа. У 2014 році першочерговими кроками окупаційної влади стало відключення українського телебачення, а частоти почали використовувати канали Росії чи бойовиків. Велику кількість українських сайтів, особливо таких як “Новини Донбасу”, що чесно висвітлювали новини в “республіках”, заблокували. Це означає, що населення тимчасового окупованого Донбасу отримувало інформацію з каналів, які були фактично пропагандистськими та антиукраїнськими, в той час як діти навчалися безпосередньо за навчальними програмами, яку визначала Російська Федерація.

Не зважаючи на важливість досліджуваної теми та матеріали, які циркулюють у засобах масової інформації, на цей час немає достатньої кількості публікацій, які б повністю висвітлювали питання залучення та участі молоді Донбасу в терористичних організаціях ДНР та ЛНР.

Ключові слова: Україна, ДНР, ЛНР, молодь, соціально-психологічні процеси, психологічні причини, соціально-економічні чинники, терористичні підрозділи, пропаганда.

Problem Statement. The main problem for the Kremlin after the occupation of Donbass in 2014 became the issue of maximum involvement of the youth of Donbass in the performance of tasks of a militarized nature. Since part of the population of the occupied territories of Donbas still had a pro-Ukrainian position, the Russian authorities focused their efforts on strengthening propaganda and creating a feeling of hatred towards Ukraine. The most vulnerable population category was the youth of Donbas, whose consciousness was easily influenced by Russian information flows and propaganda.

In order to further attract young people to illegal armed formations that operated on the territory of the DPR and LPR, local authorities under the leadership of the Kremlin actively created militarized circles, camps, military competitions, propaganda events, meetings with militants of illegal armed formations. Such measures later produced results, which caused a negative impact on the consciousness of the youth of the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Today, there are many studies on the youth of Donbas in the period 2014-2022. They are based mainly on the reports of the state authorities of Ukraine, official data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine and the Office of Prosecutor General of Ukraine, statements of the Commissioner for Human Rights of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, various non-governmental organizations and mass media information. Important aspects of the militarization of youth in the temporarily occupied territory of Donbas are highlighted by V. Horbulin, O. Pashkova, Y. Vermenych and others.
Aim. To investigate the conditions and factors that prevented the youth of Donbas from joining the terrorist organizations of the DPR and LPR.

Presentation of the main material. In the territories controlled by the Russian occupation administration, children of all ages are one of the main objects of propaganda influence by numerous paramilitary public organizations, illegal armed groups and educational institutions. These entities play a special role in creating a new generation of citizens of the so-called people’s republics that are growing on artificially imposed ideas:

- Ukraine’s “East and West”;
- hatred of “everything Ukrainian” - language, historical heritage, the idea of a Euro-Atlantic orientation of Ukraine;
- the identification of eastern Ukraine with the Russian land, the imposition of the myth of belonging to a single people, which must be protected from the “West”, in particular from “western Ukraine”.

One cannot deny the forced mobilization measures were applied to the male population of conscription age (in particular, young people) in the territories of the self-proclaimed republics, but a significant number of young people joined the ranks of militants or special preparatory paramilitary units on their own initiative due to various circumstances. It is this set of circumstances that require a thorough study, because they are the basis of the socio-psychological processes of Donbas youth joining the ranks of terrorist units of the DPR and LPR.

With the start of military operations in Donbas in 2014, the population of the occupied region of Donbas (ORDLO is the term applied to collectively to occupied territories of Ukraine) significantly decreased, according to various estimates, by 20-30% [1]. Simultaneously, the population of Donetsk region aged significantly. The reason behind this demographic shift is that a majority of the population that left the war zone during the first years of the anti-terrorist operation were in the young and middle-age groups. Conversely, a large number of young people together with their families remained to live in the territory of the self-proclaimed republics. Some of these youth were voluntarily or forcibly recruited into the ranks of the units of the so-called DPR and LPR, or into youth military groups controlled by them or Russia, which targeted school-age children or recent graduates. As a result of numerous interviews of witnesses, it became clear that the recruitment of children for service in illegal armed formations takes place against the background of inspired romance and heroics about war. The risk group of people exposed to pro-Russian propaganda operating in the Donbass is mostly teenagers - high school students, students of vocational schools, colleges, and local universities. Another reason for voluntarily enlisting with the armed forces of militants is financial disadvantage and the opportunity to “make extra money”. Minors are often motivated to commit illegal
acts by their relatives, primarily parents, and mentors such as school teachers, sports coaches, etc.

From the beginning of active resistance to Russian military aggression, the information policy of the Kremlin transformed into a total military disinformation campaign aimed at demonizing the current leadership of Ukraine in the eyes of both the Russian and the global community, utilizing various international political platforms. Special attention is directed toward the ideological training of the younger generation in the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine.

Therefore, the factors that forced young people to join the ranks of militants or paramilitary groups can be conventionally divided into two categories: socio-psychological and economic.

**Economic factors of attracting young people to the terrorist organizations DPR and LPR.**

The reasons for the first group of factors are obvious, in particular, the total impoverishment of the population in the territory of the ORDLO due to the closure of industrial enterprises, mines, etc. as a result of hostilities. This situation is due to the purposeful policy of damage by the local “authority”, which led to the bankruptcy of some factories.

The most vulnerable socio-demographic group due to the lack of own life experience, characteristic of their age impulsive affective reactions to the challenges of modernity, is the youth. It is this demographic that is most destructively affected by various extremist and terrorist communities. The rapid commercialization of all spheres of social life, the deepening of social and property stratification, and the permanent struggle for material goods led to reprioritization in the attitude of young people to the role of spiritual values in their lives. This is primarily due to economic reasons.

The difficult economic situation minimized the spiritual priorities of the development of society and youth, in particular, to the background. Material categories became the universal equivalent of measurement for moral and ethical values. Achieving a high level of material well-being acquires the status of an overarching goal that can be realized despite any social prohibitions and restrictions. Driven by these circumstances, selfishness, cynicism, aggressiveness, and cruelty against the background of the rapid devaluation of the prestige of education and knowledge in the LPR and DPR, a decrease in the level of legal awareness and a crisis of spiritual values become a kind of anti-cultural justification for the practice of young people entering the irregular formations.

The economic realities of ORDLO do not significantly reduce an individual odds in obtaining gainful employment, which is required to support a comfortable standard of living. For example, in 2016, if Russian sources are to be believed, the
average salary in the so-called DPR was 4,782 rubles (2,287.08 hryvnias), while the average salary in Ukraine at the same time was 4,585 hryvnias [2]. In addition, the official unemployment rate in the DPR in 2016 was within 20%, while the similar rate in Ukraine, according to official statistics, was less than half [3].

In 2020, the situation changed insignificantly, the average salary in the so-called DPR was approximately 10,000 rubles (3,800 hryvnia equivalent), despite the fact that, according to official data, the average salary in the territories controlled by Ukraine at the end of 2020 amounted to 10,542 hryvnias [4], [5].

In addition to the economic realities of life in ORDLO outlined above, it is also worth adding that within the territory of the self-proclaimed republics there is a distribution system for university graduates who studied with budget funds [4]. It provides for the need to work in a specialty apprenticeship for three years. Most of the young people under such a program must go to places within the self-proclaimed republics where there already exists a shortage of workers due to difficult working conditions or extremely low wages.

The above economic prerequisites encourage young adults who live in the territory of the so-called LPR and DPR to seek alternative sources of income. One of the easiest options is joining the ranks of illegal armed groups. Payments for “service”, for example, in 2017 ranged from 15,000 to 120,000 rubles (7,000 to 54,000 hryvnias equivalent) [6].

This is many times higher than the average wage in the self-proclaimed republics. In general, in the period from 2014 to 2022, the overall composition of the militants trended significantly younger personnel. Seeing no other prospects, young people joined the ranks of the National Socialist Workers’ Party, guided by financial motivation.

**Socio-psychological factors of attracting young people to the irregular units of DPR and LPR**

Socio-psychological factors, in our opinion, to a greater extent than economic or financial ones, determine the reasons why young people join the irregular formations or organizations that prepare young people to join the ranks of terrorist groups. The events of the last two years of the Russian-Ukrainian war clearly indicate that, in addition to the own military activity of illegal armed formations of pro-Russian terrorists and units of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the line of direct contact and in temporarily occupied territories, the enemy has significantly intensified its efforts in other areas less visible to the naked eye “fronts” of confrontation (especially humanitarian). However, this situation poses no less a threat to the national security of our country in the medium and long term.

Information about the attempts of representatives of the occupation authorities and their accomplices to involve minor citizens of Ukraine in terrorist activities is of the deepest concern. The reliability of this information is confirmed by a number
of different, independent military and civilian sources, both official and unofficial. Examples of these sources include photos uploaded onto public access social media networks, witness stories, publications of Ukrainian and foreign media to data of special services and intelligence reports received by the Armed Forces of Ukraine through closed communication channels.

Until 2015, such cases were rather isolated. However, according to the latest information, criminal, and manipulative work with children and youth in the territories temporarily not controlled by Ukraine is beginning to acquire a massive, purposeful, and systematic character. The most worrying is not even the criminal law aspect (involvement of minors in criminal activity is a crime, responsibility for which is provided for in Article 304 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine; recruiting and using children to participate in military operations is also a war crime according to Article XXVI, Article 2 (a) of Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court), and socio-political: there is a possibility that young people, who for various reasons did not leave the territory controlled by the militants, can join the ranks of the extremist pro-Russian “fifth column” in Ukraine, becoming the “lost generation”.

The main socio-psychological factor that caused young people to join the ranks of terrorist groups of the so-called LPR and DPR is anti-Ukrainian propaganda, which served as a component of the “hybrid” or “information” war. In the conditions of isolation from the Ukrainian media, the youth of Donbas were under the constant pressure of propaganda narratives, used to promote hatred of everything that in any way related to Ukraine.

The main theses of anti-Ukrainian propaganda, which was aimed at young people living in the ORDLO, were the narratives that Ukraine itself carried out regular shelling of the territory of the self-proclaimed republics and that Ukrainians are fighting against the “People of Donbas” (definition, Russian Federation) [7].

The main goal of Russian propaganda was to spread the ideas of the “Russkiy Mir” and, based on this, the formation of a clear image of the enemy in the form of Ukraine. Similarly, the formation of the narrative of an enemy in the form of America or NATO in the eyes of the “deep Russian people” was necessary to start a fight against the militarization of Ukrainian children by Russia.

In the future, this was the basis for the involvement of children and young people in illegal armed groups or “patriotic” organizations, which aimed to prepare underage schoolchildren to join irregular formations. Militarization was the main factor in the implementation of the educational process in the so-called LPR and DPR.

The current increase in attention to Ukrainian youth on the part of Kremlin ideologues and pro-Russian separatists under their control indicates, firstly, the acute shortage of adult local personnel to conduct hostilities and, secondly, Moscow’s
attempts to turn the conflict into a protracted one, since similar actions into public an ideological “time bomb” is actually being planted in the consciousness of the local population. The prerequisites are created for the deepening of the mental and ideological split of Ukrainian society. Russia’s desire is to keep its monopoly influence on the occupied territories at any cost. Establishing ideological control over the Ukrainian youth of the temporarily occupied territories is one of the cornerstones of the implementation of the occupation strategy.

The first information about the direct involvement of pro-Russian gang formations of children in terrorist activities dates back to 2014. This evidence is a propaganda video of 15-year-old Andrii (call sign “Rous”) – “the youngest soldier in Donetsk”, the commander of an illegal armed formation - appeared in the Russian mass media. Later, another story appeared on Russian state TV featuring Andriy Ivakhn, a 10th-grade student of the Mospin secondary school (Donetsk region). Andriy was recruited to serve in the separatist unit “Battalion East” as a “son of the regiment” at the request of his father, a member of this paramilitary formation. From there, similar stories profiling, armed boys and girls begin to appear with increasing regularity. Information that minors are fighting in the ranks of the pro-Russian unit was confirmed by OSCE observers in their report dated May 28, 2015. This document revealed a recording of a minor boy in the military in uniform and with weapons in hand at one of the separatist checkpoints near Makiivka. In view of the stated theses, another socio-psychological factor of attracting young people to the military formation of the terrorist units of the DPR and LPR is the creation in the minds of schoolchildren and students of the image of a defender in the ranks of terrorist organizations as a standard of courage, bravery, heroism that is worth emulating separatist.

Stories with such anti-social behavior are picked up and replicated by mass media and social networks. Such demonstrative hooliganism gradually finds approval in the most socially vulnerable and psychologically unstable strata of the population, including teenagers and young people. This passive acceptance leads to the gradual legalization of violence in the minds of the population, since the high social status of the participants and the broadcast of these incidents in the popular mass media unofficially legitimize such specific forms of social activity. Weak condemnation and sometimes approval from the media and society can be traced in the comments on these stories.

Such coverage of negative acts forms in the minds of young people a provide stable idea about the expediency of violent resolution of any conflicts. This repetitive social reinforcement contributes to the spread and consolidation in the mass consciousness of the idea that violence in its various forms is the most effective method of solving existing social problems and contradictions. Another socio-psychological factor in the involvement of young people in the irregular formation
of the terrorist units of the DPR and LPR is the consolidation of the reputation of “people’s avengers” in the perception of the population for individual participants in armed conflicts, who are trying to restore social justice in such an unconventional way. Manifestations of violence related to encroachment on lives and health, aimed at discrediting the activities of state authorities and their officials, are becoming a common phenomenon in the everyday life of the youth of the DPR and LPR. Thus, extremist forms of social activism, despite their clearly criminal orientation, undergo a process of legalization and adaptation in the minds of people. As a sidenote, the activities of any illegal paramilitary and armed formations are perceived as an accepted alternative to the discredited law enforcement system of the state.

Another socio-psychological factor in the involvement of young people in the terrorist units of the DPR and LPR is systematic military-patriotic education in educational institutions, the consequence of which is the formation in the minds of pupils and students of a stable attitude towards the paramilitary defense of the LPR or DPR (In ORDLO, they activated “military-patriotic education” of youth, 2018).

Work with children and youth in the occupied territories is not limited to military training camps and pseudo-patriotic clubs. This “patriotic education” is reinforced in every facet of life where children and young people are present. In both the DNR and LNR, the tasks are not only militarization, but also the installation and reinforcement of self-identification in children and youth as citizens of the “republics”. Although the approaches to the organization of “patriotic education” have some differences, they are generally similar to both groups. For example, in the occupied territory of the Luhansk region, everything is tied to the “World of Luhansk” movement and the security agencies of the “LPR”. Their activities periodically overlap, but most often the “People’s Militia”, “Ministry of Internal Affairs” and “Ministry of State Security” deal with the “powerful” block of education, and “World of Luhansk Region” everything else. In the “DPR” grouping, the “Donetsk Republic” movement and various “ministries” are most often listed as organizers [8].

Militants of the LPR and DPR terrorist organizations prepared young recruits for the irregular military formations in the temporarily occupied territory. Future terrorists from children and teenagers are brought up, for example, in children’s health camps.

The Russian occupation “authorities” in the temporarily occupied territories and their Russian curators continue to attract young people to “youth paramilitary formations” for “moral and psychological training” for further participation in hostilities in the ranks of the armed forces of the Russian Federation. In addition, for antisocial children and adolescents access to the “People’s Wives” organization is always open.
Service of youth in DPR and LPR irregular military formations

Since the beginning of the invasion of Russian troops in 2014 on the territory of Ukraine, there has been a massive recruitment of children to participate in various armed formations in DPR and LPR.

It is appropriate to distinguish three categories of recruitment of children into armed formations:
- forced recruitment (by armed formations through kidnapping and/or threats, causing other harm to children or members of their families);
- conscription (conscription into the armed forces of the state);
- voluntary participation (dependence on ideological beliefs, such as: earning money, revenge for lost relatives, etc.).

At the same time, it should be noted that sometimes the line between voluntary participation and forced recruitment is not clear enough. Undoubtedly, voluntary participation is only in those cases when the decision is made by the child based on his own convictions. However, in many cases, such beliefs were instilled by adults (teachers, sports team coaches, parents who may be involved in illegal armed groups, and other significant adults). Recruitment often took place through social media and during face-to-face interviews.

As mentioned above, the monitoring results show that children recruited into armed formations in the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which are not controlled by Ukraine, participate in armed conflicts both directly and indirectly. Children are accepted for service with weapons at checkpoints as fighters or guards. There are many cases of indirect participation: espionage, “rear support” (for example, working in the kitchen).

Three categories of armed formations can be distinguished:
- government troops (regular army);
- irregular armed formations (groups supported by the state);
- non-governmental armed groups.

An example of the militarization of education was the creation of various social and children’s and youth organizations. The most famous and popular organization in the so-called DPR and LPR was the “Yunarmiya” organization. According to the official website of “Yunarmiya”, anyone who has reached the age of eight can become a member of this organization [9]. The upper age limit for being in the so-called “patriotic” circle is 18 years.

This organization positions itself as an association of children on a voluntary basis, and its goals and activities are presented as “peaceful”. At the same time, the “Yunarmiya” website contains information about what should be included in the duties of a “youth soldier”:

1. Preparation for service in the ranks of the armed forces of the Russian Federation.
2. Carrying out search activities in a number of detachments engaged in search activities.

3. Caring for the graves of soldiers who were killed during military conflicts [10].

In Russia, Yunarmiya was created in 2016 at the initiative of Russian Federation Minister of Defense S. Shoigu, and already in 2019, the organization began to operate on the territory of ORDLO, and to a greater extent, in the so-called DPR. As arguments that confirm this fact, it is possible to cite the pages created by the “Yunarmiya of the L/DPR” in the Russian social network “Vkontakte” between March and October 2019.

Officially, the first organization was formed in occupied Donetsk on the eve of May 9, 2019 and named “Young Guard – Yunarmiya” (there is no fundamental difference between this organization and, in fact, “Yunarmiya). At the same time, 77 teenagers joined it almost immediately after its creation [11]. To raise “patriotism” in children in the occupied territories became the same methods as in Russia. The model of the already mentioned Russian “Yunarmiya” is taken as a foundation.

In addition to military training, ideological work was conducted with children and teenagers on the territory of the self-proclaimed republics, within the framework of which the “correct” story about “peace-loving” Russia is presented. Topics included the “Banderivites” from whom Ukraine must be freed and the “people of Donbas”, who “suffered for years from the actions of the Kyiv regime” [11]. In view of this, it can be argued that anti-Ukrainian propaganda was the main driving force that forced teenagers after reaching the age of 18 to join the ranks of the irregular formations after ideological “processing”. As for the participation of “junior soldiers” directly in hostilities, it is quite difficult to give an unequivocal assessment here. Although members of the “Vostok SOS” community recorded on many occasions the presence of children with weapons in areas close to the demarcation line in combat conditions, cases of their direct involvement in hostilities are extremely rare [12].

In addition to the “Young Guard – Yunarmiya”, other youth militarized associations operated in the territory of the so-called LPR and DPR, which were joined mainly by children of teenage age, in particular, the association “Amazonka”, the Military Industrial Complex “Warrior”, the “School of Courage”, “Recruit”, etc. In total, more than 20 clubs of “military and patriotic education” operate in the territory of the self-proclaimed republics [13]. Meetings of some were regularly held on the territory of Russia in the border regions.

In 2014-2022, teenagers who are members of “patriotic” groups were regularly engaged in patrolling, maintenance of military equipment, protection of military facilities, and various intelligence activities is evidence to support involvement of children in the performance of certain combat tasks (to a greater extent, as scouts or adjusters of fire) [14].
A rather important role in promoting the so-called “patriotic” upbringing of children is played by their own parents. Some adults deliberately sent their children to militarized circles and communities, having clearly expressed anti-Ukrainian position, the “militias” of the self-proclaimed republics themselves. Other guardians send their children to “patriotic” organizations with the mindset of “protecting” them and so that their child does become ostracized.

Currently, there is no publicly available clear data on the number of young people who have joined the ranks of terrorist units of the so-called DPR and LPR. It is known that most of the youth were involved in the two main army corps (the first - Donetsk, the second - Luhansk), which included separate Guards motorized rifle brigades, so-called “Cossack” corps, “territorial defense” battalions, etc. According to Russian sources, the number of militants at the beginning of 2021 varied between 28,000 and 34,000 people [15]. It is quite difficult to say what percentage of them were young people, due to the lack of data. As already noted earlier, the age composition of the army of the self-proclaimed republics became younger from 2014 to 2022, which is due to both economic factors and the lack of any life prospects in the so-called LPR and DPR, as well as the ideological work carried out by the Russian Federation to “zombify” the younger generation.

It is known that young people mainly joined the newly created cadet corps, “Cossack” and “Oplat” type units beginning in 2015-2016 [16]. Officially, they and units of the LPR and DPR Armed Forces are called “people’s militia”.

After the creation in the temporarily occupied territories of the children’s and youth organization “Russian Movement of Schoolchildren” (similar to the pioneer organization of the USSR), the processes of recruiting young people became significantly more active. For children of grades 1-11, “statehood lessons” are held, where children are fed propaganda about the “historical birth and formation” of the DPR and LPR, their “state system”, “symbolism”, “awards”, as well as about heroic biographies militants and leaders (while inviting the terrorists themselves to speak). Additionally, they are taught the fictional “Language of the peoples of Donbas”, “Literature of the peoples of Donbas”, “History of the Motherland”, “Lessons of citizenship of Donbas” appeared among the subjects, all of which is based on imported Russian textbooks.

It is known about the creation of another military children's propaganda project - the military-patriotic movement “Yunarmiya” (under the leadership of the federal agency for youth affairs, but directly morphed - with reference to the places of permanent deployment of military units and units, military universities). In light of the above-mentioned trends, it is quite clear that the appearance of this latest Russian “Hitler Youth” in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine is only a matter of time.

In 2014-2022, the militants were joined mainly by students of “patriotic” circles, local military lyceums, and other specialized “educational institutions” with
a bias towards military and anti-Ukrainian propaganda training. They educated junior commanders of the combined military ranks - junior officers. Accordingly, their functions included:

- command and control of small units - battalions;
- knowledge of battalion tactics and weapons, etc.

The functions of children who fought on the side of the militants included, as already mentioned above, adjusting fire and carrying out reconnaissance.

In general, teenagers who fight cannot be called volunteers. Children’s consciousness was deformed by productions at school in the style of “kill dill”, children’s magazines with “Papa” in the person of Putin, and Russian television [17].

In addition to the already mentioned stages of militarization, which include “training” in “patriotic” circles, the work of specialized “courage” circles, there is also “fruitful” ideological work on the consciousness of those children whose parents were fighters and died. Such children were and are being worked with separately under the supervision of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation. They are brought up as ideological enemies of Ukraine, leveraging the narrative that their parents were “killed by Ukraine”.

As for refusals of young people to serve terrorists, it is logical to assume that there have been such cases in eight years. There were instances when those young people who went there with “considerable enthusiasm” refused to serve in the army of the self-proclaimed republics. This mostly happened due to “hazing” on the part of senior fighters and servicemen of the Russian Federation.

On the basis of the information presented, it is possible to formulate “potential candidates” went through on the way to joining the ranks of the fighters of the so-called LPR and DPR:

- patriotic groups;
- cadet corps;
- military departments in the civilian universities (Institutes);
- military camps for children.

The vast majority of young men and women who passed through the irregular military formations of terrorists (and even more so those of them who will try themselves in real combat, subversive, subversive or extremist activities) will most likely never be able to painlessly reintegrate to normal Ukrainian society. After all, they are not just instilled with the Russian identity, which includes the big-power ideology of chauvinism hate Ukraine and everything related to it, they are taught to kill their fellow Ukrainians. Precisely so that the Russian-Ukrainian war does not drag on for generations, it is extremely important to prevent the Russians-led terrorists in Ukraine from seizing control over the consciousness of the youth of the occupied regions and imposing their Ukrainophobic, misanthropic beliefs on them.
Failure to take quick and decisive measures to prevent and counteract the involvement of our minor citizens from the temporarily occupied territories in criminal activities can lead to the criminalization of the youth environment resulting in the expansion of the social base of separatism and terrorism in the state. But until now, there has been no significant public attention to this problem at the state level. Unfortunately, it is worth stating that official work to counter the involvement of young people of ORDLO to the ranks of terrorist units or preparatory associations basically non-existent. For eight years, a whole generation of youth grew up in the territory of the self-proclaimed republics, brought up in the spirit of hatred for Ukraine and everything Ukrainian. This issue was repeatedly covered (and judging by the materials of the Ukrainian mass media, from 2014 to 2022 it was covered from year to year), but no meaningful steps were taken in the direction of implementing counter-propaganda measures or increasing the media literacy of the youth of the occupied part of Donbas.

Conclusions. Thus, the problem of attracting the youth of Donbas to the ranks of the so-called terrorist units of the DPR and LPR is very important today, given the fact that young people from the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions are now part of the Russian Armed Forces as part of brigades formed from militants self-proclaimed republics. These young manipulated Ukrainians are actively involved in hostilities on the side of Russia. The reasons that encouraged young people to join the ranks of militants and join youth “patriotic” organizations during 2014-2022 can be conditionally divided into economic and socio-psychological motivations. Due to the influence of various factors, such as: socio-psychological and economic, the most vulnerable to ideological influence is such a category of the population as youth. It is young people who are actively replenishing a number of extremist and terrorist groups of irregular units in LPR and DPR, whose leaders use and manipulate them for their own purposes. Young people become a focus group for Russian terrorists, because influencing an immature psyche requires less work and is more successful. As a result, the youth of the temporarily occupied territories simply become victims due to their own inability, social and material insecurity. The young generation, by its very nature, age and position in society, has those features and peculiarities of thinking and behavior that, under certain socio-psychological conditions and under purposeful influence, influence the formation of extremist personalities.

Despite a significant number of publications in the Ukrainian and Western mass media on the subject under investigation, there are currently no thorough studies that would shed light on the reasons why the youth of Donbas join the ranks of terrorists, which, accordingly, prompts further. The results of the research would serve as a solid basis for building a competent and comprehensive strategy for the reintegration of the youth of Donbas after the liberation of the territories.
References:
Литература: