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THE PROBLEM OF ENSURING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

ABSTRACT: *The article analyzes the problem of holding elections in Ukraine in terms of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of the observance of democratic principles of elections. The author emphasizes the importance of holding democratic elections in Ukraine as a condition for building democracy, joining the EU, and forming a positive image of Ukraine in the international arena. Using general scientific, logical and empirical methods, the author investigates the main problems that will violate the democratic principles of elections in the context of elections in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war. It has been proven that holding elections in Ukraine under Russian aggression will violate the following principles of democratic elections: the principle of universal suffrage (will deprive a large number of citizens abroad of their voting rights; will make it impossible for military personnel to exercise their passive voting rights; will lead to an extremely low voter turnout due to security threats); the principle of equal elections (will put opposition political parties and opposition candidates in unequal conditions compared to pro-government candidates and political parties; will lead to a disproportion in the representation of different electoral districts in parliament); the principle of free elections (will make it impossible for candidates and political parties to freely conduct their election campaigns under martial law; will limit the possibilities for the free expression of voters' will), etc. The main potential mechanisms for resolving problems that impede the observance of democratic principles of elections in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war are analyzed, and their low effectiveness is shown. The impossibility of holding democratic elections in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war is emphasized. The expediency of holding post-war elections in Ukraine and the need to apply systemic mechanisms to resolve problems that impede the holding of democratic elections, a significant part of which will remain relevant after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, are emphasized.*

KEYWORDS: elections; democracy; democratic principles of elections; electoral rights; Ukraine.

1. Introduction

In 2014, Ukraine became the object of armed aggression by Russia, which resulted in the occupation of Crimea and part of Donbas. On February 24, 2022, the Russian army began a full-scale invasion of the territory of Ukraine. As a result of the full-scale Russian aggression, martial law was declared in Ukraine, which led to restrictions on the political rights and freedoms of citizens. In addition, under the legal regime of martial law, some political processes were suspended, including the electoral process.

The problem is relevant in the context of the fact that, according to the Constitution of Ukraine, regular elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine were to be held in the fall of 2023. Somewhat later, in the spring of 2024, regular presidential elections in Ukraine were to be held. However, due to the Russian-Ukrainian war and the legal regime of martial law, the aforementioned presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine

were not held. However, in Ukraine, there are constant (with greater or lesser intensity) discussions about the expediency and feasibility of holding elections in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

One of the important criteria that should answer the question of the expediency and possibility of holding elections in Ukraine in the conditions of Russian aggression is the ability of the election administration to ensure the democratic nature of the elections, their compliance with democratic principles of elections. At the same time, the problem of holding elections in Ukraine that will comply with democratic principles is extremely important not only for preserving the democratic progress of the state, but also for forming a positive international image of Ukraine and realizing the state's aspiration to join the EU and NATO.

The problem of holding democratic elections in Ukraine in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is also becoming relevant thanks to Russian propaganda and information warfare. The Russian Federation is trying to use the issue of the re-election of the Ukrainian political elite as a tool to destabilize Ukraine, actively promoting the idea of the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government. The Russian government from time to time declares that it will negotiate the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war only with the new government elected in the elections, pushing Ukraine to hold elections in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the legal regime of martial law. In this way, Russia encourages Ukraine to hold elections in conditions where it will be practically impossible to adhere to democratic principles, which will have the effect of deepening the problem of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government, may cause a split in Ukrainian society and contribute to a decrease in support for Ukraine from international partners.

The need to study the main problems that will hinder the holding of democratic elections in Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war is also caused by the lack of thorough scientific research on this issue. All of the above makes it necessary to conduct a thorough scientific study that would allow us to investigate the main problems that hinder the holding of democratic elections in Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and, therefore, to answer the question of whether it is necessary and possible to hold elections during hostilities, and whether it is possible to ensure their democratic nature.

2. The relationship between elections and democracy

Elections and democracy are closely related categories and socio-political phenomena that mutually influence and complement each other: on the one hand, without democratic elections, the existence of a full-fledged democracy is impossible; on the other hand, only under the conditions of a democratic political regime is the full functioning of the institution of democratic elections possible. Therefore, elections can be interpreted as an attribute, a catalyst and, to a certain extent, an indicator of the level of democracy in a state (Buchyn 2023).

Elections play important functions in a democratic society, namely:

1. Elections are an important instrument for implementing the principle of popular sovereignty, according to which the people, as the sole source and bearer of power in the country, delegate their will to legally elected representatives (Buchyn 2016).

2. Through elections, the people are involved in the processes of public administration. For many individuals, elections are the only form of participation in politics. Therefore, it is elections that make political participation possible for the mass citizen.

3. Elections (which are a way of forming and expressing public opinion) play the role of a kind of social barometer of political life, because through the institution of elections, the attitude of citizens to politics is manifested. In this context, elections should be considered a kind of large-scale public opinion poll.

4. Elections are the main way to legitimize power in democratic countries. At the present stage the people usually recognize and support only the power elected in a legal manner. That is why elections ensure the stable development of society. However, it is worth noting that elections perform the function of legitimizing power only when they are held in accordance with the norms of current legislation and are democratic in nature. Otherwise, elections, on the contrary, perform the function of delegitimizing power (Buchyn 2016).

5. Democratic elections contribute to the easing of social tension and the achievement of social consensus, as they are a kind of way to resolve conflicts and contradictions in society. However, in this context, it is important to emphasize that elections will perform a stabilizing function only if the nature of their conduct corresponds to the population's ideas about what elections should be like. Therefore, elections conducted in an undemocratic manner, with gross violations of the law and fraud, can, on the contrary, perform a destabilizing function, leading to increased tension and conflict. Examples of the above can be the Orange Revolution, which took place in Ukraine in 2004 and was caused by large-scale fraud of the elections by the pro-government candidate V. Yanukovych. Or the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus, which were rigged and caused mass anti-government protests, which were suppressed by force (Nitchenko, Kot 2024: 24-25).

6. Elections allow citizens to exercise periodic control over the activities of the political elite. And if the government does not take into account the general public and group interests, the electorate has the opportunity to "punish" it by supporting other political forces in the elections. This motivates the political elite to act in the interests of society and not to abuse their official position.

7. The institution of elections acts as a kind of filter that prevents unpopular and incompetent politicians from coming to power, thus contributing to the improvement of the efficiency of public administration. However, the effectiveness of this function largely depends on the level of political awareness and political culture of the electorate. This is due to the fact that during the electoral process, candidates and political parties have the opportunity to use manipulative technologies and spread unreliable information, thus imposing their

position on society (Buchyn 2023).

8. Elections play an educational function, as political parties participating in elections disseminate their own election program; bring its meaning and importance to the attention of voters; promote and disseminate political ideology and a system of political values; offer voters options for solving socially important tasks and problems, etc.

9. Elections contribute to the representation of the interests of various social groups. Candidates and political parties represent various social groups, have their own social base and an electorate that is ready to vote in their support, demanding, in return, the representation of their interests at the national level.

10. Elections are a mechanism for recruiting the political elite. It is through elections that citizens have the opportunity to renew the composition of the political elite, choosing those whom they consider worthy to exercise power on their behalf.

11. As a result of elections, citizens have the opportunity to determine the direction of social development for a certain, legally defined period. By carrying out an act of expression of will, the people not only form a representative body of power and determine the configuration of forces in parliament, but also indirectly influence the formation of the executive branch of power, determine the nature of relations between the government and the opposition, and the domestic and foreign policy courses of the state (Buchyn 2016).

Therefore, in the context of clarifying the feasibility and possibility of holding elections in Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the issue of their democratic nature, the possibility of performing the above-mentioned democratic functions in society, is important. Many researchers rightly believe that any state is able to build a democratic regime (within which the institution of democratic elections will function) only when it is in a state of peace, accompanied by economic stability, national security, freedom of speech and pluralism. And only such conditions make it possible to hold democratic elections and form a government that will enjoy trust both within the country and in the international arena. Therefore, experts say, as of today, the defense of democracy in Ukraine is taking place on the battlefield. And only after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war will it be possible to talk about transferring the defense of the democratic regime in Ukraine from the battlefield to the polling stations. At the same time, researchers note that it is currently difficult to predict when this might happen (Chomu 2024).

Therefore, in the context of the above, in order to make a decision on the expediency and possibility of holding elections in Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is important to find out whether the basic democratic principles of elections - their general, free, equal, direct and secret nature - will be violated during such elections. After all, this is a necessary condition for electing democratic government and ensuring public and international trust in it (Buchyn 2023).

3. The problem of observing the principle of general elections in conditions of war in Ukraine

The principle of general elections is to involve the maximum number of people in the elections. At the same time, such persons must both officially possess electoral rights and have the technical ability to exercise them. The last aspect of the principle of universal suffrage depends on the reliability and completeness of the electoral register and electoral lists (Buchyn 2016).

In the context of adhering to the principle of general elections during the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is worth mentioning a number of problems:

A. Voting abroad. The aforementioned problem is multifaceted and related to a number of smaller problems and threats. First of all, we are talking about the unprecedented scale of this type of voting for Ukraine (and for the world community as a whole). Under the influence of hostilities, a large number of Ukrainian citizens were forced to leave for Europe (over 8 million people as of early 2023) or Russia (about 3 million people). Therefore, excluding children, researchers emphasize that as of 2023, about 10 million adult Ukrainian citizens who are voters were outside Ukraine. It is worth noting that in 2025, such figures did not undergo significant changes. Interestingly, before the full-scale Russian invasion, the number of Ukrainian voters who were abroad was 25 times smaller. In particular, in the 2019 presidential elections Only a little over 400 thousand voters – citizens of Ukraine – were registered in the foreign electoral district (Afanasieva 2023).

Researchers rightly note that the primary issue that needs to be resolved in the context of ensuring the voting of Ukrainian citizens abroad is the registration of such citizens. Election administration bodies should know exactly in which country (and region of the country) Ukrainian voters are located, because not all of them are officially registered. Or they are registered, but do not actually live there (Matola 2023).

In the context of voting by Ukrainian citizens abroad, the registration problem is complicated by the fact that, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, only about 5% of Ukrainians who have left the country have registered with consular authorities. This significantly complicates the entry of information about such citizens and the updating of the State Register of Voters (Makarov 2023).

Another problem related to voting by citizens abroad is the actual inability to ensure the expression of will of such a large number of voters. As of today, 102 polling stations have been created and are operating to ensure the voting of Ukrainian citizens who are abroad on election day (100 of them are established in diplomatic institutions of Ukraine abroad, another 2 are on the territory of military units deployed outside Ukraine). (Yurydychni 2023). At the same time, the electoral legislation of Ukraine does not apply to foreign polling stations the restrictions on the maximum limit of 2,500 voters that can be included in the voter lists at one

polling station, which are inherent in regular polling stations (Electoral 2020).

In this context, analysts of the Civic Network OPORA rightly note that this provides more opportunities for the implementation of voting abroad, but is completely disconnected from modern realities. And even before the full-scale invasion, the possibilities of effective functioning of foreign polling stations were based on the presumption of a very low turnout of foreign voters. And the number of voters at individual foreign polling stations was so large (in some cases, tens of thousands of voters) that even with an average turnout, this would have paralyzed the voting process. In addition, the formation of foreign polling stations was based on the diplomatic ties available in Ukraine, and not on real electoral needs (Yurydychni 2023).

For example, in the 2019 presidential election, 55,027 voters voted in the first round in a foreign electoral district. In the second round of the 2019 presidential election, voter turnout was slightly higher: 59,834 voters voted abroad (Vybery 2019). The above figures show that the number of Ukrainian citizens who were abroad during the 2019 presidential election was smaller than the number of Ukrainian voters who were abroad during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. Therefore, the number of Ukrainian citizens who would seek to vote in the elections during a full-scale war is much higher than it was in 2019.

In the current conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, for example, there are more than a million Ukrainian voters in Poland alone. Moreover, only 4 foreign polling stations operate in Poland. Therefore, according to experts, under the current state of affairs during the elections, each of the 4 Ukrainian foreign polling stations located in Poland would have more than 300 thousand voters. Which automatically makes it impossible for the total majority of such Ukrainian citizens to vote (Makarov 2023).

B. Voting by internally displaced persons (IDPs). The next, no less large-scale and important issue for elections in the conditions of war in Ukraine is the problem of voting by internally displaced persons. It is worth noting that according to official data, there are currently 4.8 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine. However, researchers note that the real figure is much higher, and the number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine reaches 7 million people (Afanasieva 2023).

It is worth noting that in 2019, during the presidential elections, the number of internally displaced persons was several times smaller and amounted to slightly more than 1 million 200 thousand people. At the same time, a small number of IDPs took part in the voting in the 2019 presidential elections (less than 76 thousand people), which was only 6% of the total number of internally displaced persons (VPO 2019).

C. The problem of the electoral register and voter lists. IFES expert O. Klyuzhev notes that under martial law, the bodies responsible for maintaining and updating the State Voter Register have suspended their work. Moreover, even the initial registration of voters was not conducted in the occupied and frontline territories. Therefore, the problem lies both in the need to update the State Voter Register and in providing voters with the opportunity to decide on their place of voting after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which will

take some time (Kliuzhev 2023).

This situation with the State Voter Register is quite understandable, given the brutal violation of the rules of war by Russian soldiers. Russian special services tried to obtain data on the population of Ukraine with the aim, in particular, of holding pseudo-referendums on the territory of Ukraine. Therefore, the termination of the State Voter Register became an adequate and preventive measure to protect the population of Ukraine from Russian occupiers (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 117).

D. The problem of implementing passive voting rights for citizens abroad. This is a residency requirement, which is the last 5 years of residence in Ukraine for candidates for people's deputies and the last 10 years for candidates for the President of Ukraine. Therefore, a long stay of citizens abroad may deprive them of the opportunity to run in presidential or parliamentary elections (Yurydychni 2023).

E. The problem of voting by voters in occupied territories. In this context, it is worth noting that as of today, the Russian army (for the period from 2014 to 2024) has occupied about 26% of the territory of Ukraine. Of course, it is impossible to accurately estimate the number of Ukrainian voters who are currently in the temporarily occupied territories. But it is obvious that we are talking about several million citizens who will be deprived of the right to participate in the elections (Vybory 2024).

It should be noted that in 2019, during the presidential and parliamentary elections, voting was not fully held in 26 electoral districts: 12 electoral districts in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 9 electoral districts in the Donetsk region, and 5 electoral districts in the Luhansk region. In another 10 electoral districts and Donbas, elections were partially held (TsVK 2019).

F. The problem of participation in elections by military personnel. It is worth saying right away that this problem concerns the exercise of both active and passive electoral rights by military personnel. On the one hand, it is difficult to ensure that military personnel on the front line can participate in voting during active hostilities as voters without a threat to their lives and the "collapse" of the front. On the other hand, it is even more difficult to ensure that military personnel can participate in elections as candidates. And even more so to ensure that they have equal conditions alongside other civilian candidates (Liskovych 2023).

4. The problem of observing the principle of equal elections in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war

According to the principle of equal elections, citizens should have equal opportunities to influence the electoral process and the results of the elections. The principle of equal elections was primarily reduced only to the presence of an equal number of votes for each voter. However, later it was rightly believed that the principle of equal elections should also provide for the equal "weight" of each vote. However, we believe that

the principle of equal elections should be interpreted even more broadly: not only equal opportunities for voters to influence on voting day are important, but also at all other stages of the electoral process. Therefore, every citizen should be in equal conditions (whether in the status of a voter or in the status of a candidate) at all stages of the electoral race.

In the context of observing the principle of equal elections during the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is worth talking about a number of problems:

A. Ensuring equality when voting abroad. Researchers rightly emphasize that the problem of foreign elections is not limited to the issue of voting. According to IFES expert O. Klyuzhev, during elections in foreign constituencies, important issues are access of Ukrainians abroad to campaign products, meetings with candidates or political parties, etc. In addition, if elections in foreign constituencies are not properly conducted, according to O. Klyuzhev, the equality of elections and the rights of women and youth, who are today the main foreign voters, will be violated (Kliuzhev 2023).

B. The problem of the electoral system. It is worth noting that the current electoral system (according to the Electoral Code, a proportional electoral system with open lists should be used in the next parliamentary elections in Ukraine) does not correspond to the realities of elections in wartime. This is, in particular, because the aforementioned electoral system involves the use of a regional approach (the formation of 27 regional electoral districts) and the dependence of the number of mandates for election on the number of voters in a particular region who took part in the vote (Electoral 2020).

The aforementioned situation could potentially lead to a number of problems. In particular, this concerns the disproportion of representation of electoral regions in the future parliament. The fact is that in some regions (primarily frontline and occupied) there are quite a few voters, while in other regions (where there is no fighting) there are much more, primarily due to internally displaced persons. Therefore, the first (frontline) category of regional electoral districts could potentially be minimally represented in the next parliament. On the other hand, the representation in parliament of the second category of regional electoral districts could be exaggerated (Matola 2023).

An additional problem in the context of the electoral system may be the need to redraw electoral districts in the event that certain territories are still under occupation during the elections. In addition, the fact that a very large number of voters (some internally displaced persons and citizens who will be abroad during the elections) will still be forced to vote only for the party list makes the need for a proportional electoral system with open lists of candidates questionable (Zaiats 2023).

C. The problem of equal conditions for the participation of candidates and political parties in the electoral process. For the democratic elections, it is important that candidates and political parties participating in the elections have the opportunity to conduct a full-fledged election campaign under equal conditions. This is

especially relevant for such aspects of the issue as financing of political parties, the restoration of party centers in temporarily occupied and frontline territories, opportunities for election campaigning, etc. (Afanasieva 2023).

Ensuring equal access of candidates to the media remains problematic in this aspect, which is an important condition for ensuring the principle of equal elections. In this context, the presence of the Unified Information Marathon in Ukraine, a regime in which the majority of Ukrainian media operate under state control, is seen as problematic, first of all. This puts pro-government political forces in a more advantageous position compared to the opposition (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 118).

On the other hand, it should be understood that this is a natural consequence of the Russian-Ukrainian war. After all, in war conditions, power is centralized and the powers of executive structures are increased, which helps increase the chances of the current government winning elections.

D. The problem of protecting citizens' electoral rights. This aspect of the issue is crucial not only for ensuring the principle of equal elections (protection of electoral rights makes it possible to make citizens equal before the law during elections), but also for ensuring democracy in general (human rights and their protection are an integral part of democratic governance). In this context, frontline (as well as temporarily occupied and liberated) Ukrainian territories, where judicial bodies have suspended their activities due to the existing threat, may be problematic (Afanasieva 2023).

5. The problem of observing the principle of free elections during the Russian-Ukrainian war

According to the principle of free elections, a citizen must decide for himself whether to participate in elections. The principle of free elections, in addition to the voluntary participation of citizens in elections, also implies compliance with two important conditions: 1) the ability of the voter to freely form his position during the elections; 2) the ability of the voter to freely express his position during the voting procedure.

In the context of observing the principle of free elections, law enforcement agencies should not interfere in the electoral process, and voters should have the right and opportunity to freely collect, use and disseminate information, unite in parties and public organizations in order to protect their rights and freedoms. In addition, the principle of free elections provides for the right of citizens to peacefully organize and hold strikes, rallies and demonstrations within the framework of current legislation (Buchyn 2016).

The implementation of the principle of free elections also implies compliance with the established voting procedure. An important condition for free expression of will is a legal procedure for counting votes, the absence of fraud not only during the counting, but also during the transfer of votes and the tabulation of voting results (Buchyn 2016).

In the context of adhering to the principle of free elections during the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is also worth mentioning a number of problems:

A. The problem of electoral fraud. In this context, we are talking, in particular, about abuses that are already traditional for domestic electoral practice, such as election bribery (this may be especially relevant in the context of a significant decline in the level of well-being of Ukrainian citizens in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war) or the use of administrative resources.

It is worth noting that the Ukrainian electoral experience has already witnessed the practice of large-scale abuses and use of administrative resources during elections, when, due to the centralization of power, most of the democratic principles of elections were systematically and grossly violated. The apogee of the use of administrative resources in Ukraine was reached during the 2004 presidential elections, when the elections were falsified on a large scale in favor of the pro-government candidate V. Yanukovich. This led to mass protests of Ukrainian citizens called the “Orange Revolution” (Buchyn 2016).

Similar conditions that could potentially contribute to the large-scale use of administrative resources during elections (centralization and monopolization of resources by the authorities, caused by the sole victory of the «Servant of the People» party in the elections, and reinforced by martial law during the Russian-Ukrainian war) exist in Ukraine today.

The first problem, according to domestic expert O. Klyuzhev, can be partially solved by depoliticizing the law enforcement system, the second problem is the introduction of state financing of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political parties (Kliuzhev 2023).

It is also possible to predict that security threats will increase the chances of election results being falsified on election day. For example, in the case of prolonged airstrikes, there will be a problem in controlling election documentation, which will be located in unprotected polling stations, which will increase the chances of falsification and forgery of voting results (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 120).

Researchers also emphasize that in times of war, the authorities have more opportunities to influence the outcome of elections. In times of security threats, the authorities may create obstacles to voting for certain categories of citizens (for example, military personnel) or prohibit holding elections in certain territories, explaining this by security threats or the need to strengthen security. To do this, it is enough for the authorities to know that certain categories of citizens or residents of certain regions are opposed to them (Novak, Moriak-Protopopova 2023: 129-130).

B. The problem of low voter turnout. This forecast of the potential situation is based on several reasons. First, it is worth considering the factor of active mobilization, which is necessary to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities. Therefore, it is logical to assume that a significant part of the conscripted voters, who are currently hiding at home or trying to avoid the possibility of meeting with workers who carry out mobilization,

will most likely ignore the elections and not come to the polling stations (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 117).

Secondly, the presence of security threats will reduce voter turnout. After all, every voter will understand that any polling station is a potential target for both Russian missiles and possible sabotage. Moreover, Russia can very easily disrupt the voting process by organizing long-term alarms (in particular, by organizing continuous flights of missile-carrying aircraft). In this way, the number of voters who will be able to vote will be quite low. As will the level of trust in the authorities elected under such low voter turnout (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 118-120).

According to the head of the civil network OPORA O. Aivazovska, the Russian army does not neglect the practice of shelling places where Ukrainian citizens gather, having previously shelled places receiving humanitarian aid, an exhibition of drones in Chernihiv or participants in a funeral in the village of Groza. Therefore, according to the Ukrainian expert, if there are intensive Russian shelling on voting day, the voter turnout will ultimately be only 5-10%. This can have a very negative impact on the level of legitimacy of the government elected as a result of such elections (Vybory 2023).

C. Restrictions on the freedom of action of participants in the electoral process. The point is that in conditions of war and martial law in Ukraine, a number of rights and freedoms of citizens are restricted, which is justified to ensure security. Therefore, such rights that are important for the proper organization of the electoral process and election campaign are restricted, as the right to peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of movement, the right to freedom of agitation, etc (Hryniuk, Hutsuliak 2023: 118).

This problem is particularly relevant in the context of ensuring freedom of speech and the free functioning of the media. It provides not only for the freedom to disseminate information, but also for free access of representatives of the media sector to any information about the elections. After all, this is, in turn, a necessary condition for voters to receive reliable and diverse information about the electoral process and its results (Zaiats 2023: 46).

6. The problem of adhering to other principles of democratic elections in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war

In addition, holding elections in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war will potentially violate (albeit to a lesser extent) other democratic principles of elections. For example, in the case of the introduction of alternative voting methods such as proxy voting or electronic voting (they are considered a means of ensuring the principles of universal and free elections), the principle of direct elections and the principle of secret ballot will potentially be violated (Markovets, Buchyn, Sprinsyan, Liubchenko 2024). The latter will also potentially be violated in the event of a predicted large influx of people at foreign polling stations. In such a case, huge

queues will form, and people will potentially (to speed up the process) vote outside polling stations or voting booths, jeopardizing the secrecy of the vote.

The difficulty of forming and ensuring a high level of professionalism of election commission members in the conditions of holding elections during the Russian-Ukrainian war will negatively affect the principle of effective election administration. In addition, the restrictions imposed by the legal regime of martial law will negatively affect the implementation of the principle of freedom of campaigning and the principle of public elections. Finally, in the case of holding elections in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we find it doubtful that the principle of liability for violations of electoral legislation, etc., will be effectively observed.

7. Conclusions

An important condition for holding elections is the ability to ensure their democratic nature and compliance with democratic election principles. However, holding elections in Ukraine in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war will significantly violate a number of democratic principles: the principle of universal suffrage (will not allow significant categories of voters to vote; will limit the implementation of the passive right of servicemen, etc.); the principle of equal elections (will not allow the creation of equal conditions for participation in elections by different subjects; will lead to a disproportion in the representation of the interests of voters from different electoral districts in parliament, etc.); the principle of free elections (will create a threat of pressure and abuse during elections; will potentially contribute to voter bribery and falsification of voting results; will limit the opportunities for candidates and political parties to conduct election campaigns); a number of other important democratic principles of elections (will violate the transparency of the electoral process; will reduce the efficiency of the administration of the electoral process; will contribute to the violation of the secrecy of the vote; will limit the possibilities for holding those responsible accountable for violations of electoral legislation, etc.).

As we can see, Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, the socio-political and security situation in the country make it impossible to hold democratic elections. If we ignore this fact and agree to elections that will be held with gross violations of democratic principles of elections, this will have a number of extremely negative and dangerous consequences for Ukraine. These include, in particular, delegitimization of power, political division in Ukrainian society, an increase in the level of conflict, etc. Therefore, holding elections in Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war will meet Russian interests; will turn the institution of democratic elections in Ukraine into a farce; will contribute to the formation of a negative international image of Ukraine; may lead to results opposite to those desired, which will significantly reduce the level of consolidation of Ukrainian society and, as a result, may lead to defeat in the war and the collapse of

Ukrainian statehood.

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