

How did the war influence peaceful territories?

From which sources do inhabitants receive information about the conflict?

What is the attitude towards events and political figures of the recent years?

Chapter 7. Far from the frontline, but not from the war. Experience of peaceful regions

What is the attitude towards people coming from the East?

What influences the relations of different regions representatives?

What is the experience of co-existence with the resettlers?

The terrible word “war”

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The war... When I was small, I heard this word only in the recollections of my great-grandmother, whose life has been burnt with war. I remember that pain with which the old lady told about the terrible war years; tears which fell down her wrinkles... Then it seemed, that the “war”, although it is not a verb, can be used only in the past tense. I suppose that everybody, not only me, was sure that this word became almost an archaism for our country and one come across it only in the history textbooks, in the films about the war or to hear in such painful, as my great-grandmother’s recollections. But life, writing the recent history textbook, returned again to this terrible term. And, so unfortunately, now the word “war” has one of the first places by “popularity” in the society. One can hear everywhere these horrible five letters: in the news broadcasts, in the talks of politicians and ordinary people, young and old, at work, on the bus stop or in the shop, in family by dinner. This word, which is as old as the world, now has received new black and bloody-red colours both for our country and for ourselves.

I live in Kharkiv, in the so-called peaceful region. Fortunately, there are no shots heard in the streets of my city, the walls of buildings have no black “wounds” from them, and the most important thing is that my relatives, neighbours or simply unknown to me people, who also live here are not killed. But I consider that one can call my city peaceful, as any other, where there is no war in the streets, only relatively. Because a country is a whole organism. Can a person be considered healthy, and most important, happy when he/she has pain in a leg or arm? It is a smarting pain, which had lasted every day, every minute for several years. And that pain is not simply localized in a certain place, it is throbbing in the whole body! And so feels my Ukraine: that pain which penetrates every day the east of the country can not but reverberate in other, peaceful regions.

It has become most understandable for me, when a boy from Donetsk came to my class. He is a good boy, with whom I made freinds very quickly. I was not sorry for him, but it was because we were on the same vibe of interests, likes, life principles. And what concerns pity... To tell that I am sorry for my friend means to tell nothing. I learnt from him that Kharkiv is not the first city, which sheltered my friend with his family. I do not know why. My friend does not tell me, and I do not ask, I do not intrude on his feelings, do not want to sting him to the quick. You know, I like travelling very much. What can be better than visiting new places, getting to know something new, to fill with interesting recollections! But however wonderful a trip was, one always wants to return to the native city. Because, east or west, home is best!

And wherever one travels, and however much time one spent in the trip, one always has a return ticket in his/her pocket. It seems to be so customary. But as it turned out, not for everybody. My friend, travelling over Ukraine, changing cities, now does not have this ticket, unfortunately. Although my friend is silent and I think he feels good in our class, school, city, because, as far as I know, his family is not going to leave Kharkiv again, I am sure that the boy is waiting for the happy ticket home, to his native Donetsk, every day.

Kharkiv is a beautiful city. Walking along its familiar busy streets or cosy yards, I always remember my childhood. Here and there appear warm recollections, making my soul warm even on a winter day. And although my friend has left Donetsk long ago, but his recollections, which are different from mine, but equally warm, have been left in his native city. And however hospitable and friendly Kharkiv is for my friend and his family, they will not meet here those important for every person recollections, will not feel those emotions, which only native home can give. And no money can buy, or no booking-office can sell to people, like my friend, a ticket home, to the past peaceful life, which was so familiar, but turned out to be so dear to them.

But I believe that everything will surely work out for the best, and my friend, like thousands of other resettlers, will later return to their native cities and villages, their own homes, and the terrible word “war” will become an archaism. In the meantime, instead of good recollections, which were left in the East, let us warm our new friends with our sincere friendship and support. They need the latter very much!

Life (not) far from the frontline

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I still remember that day when I heard for the first time about the imminent revolution in Kyiv. I was a student of the sixth grade and was drawing an insect for the art lesson, and my parents were observing this terrible conflict on TV screen.

It happened so, that every evening since then we always gathered to watch the news. My frightened eyes not understanding fully the situation were watching the scary colourful picture, where fire, people, shouts and hate were mixed. I could not understand why the rebellion was raised, and why people with the growing passion continued beating, burning and killing each other.

It is sad, but in time cruelty and precipitance of action became a habit. People were no longer surprised by the shots and death in every TV frame, I met indifferently the news about the attacks of the hostile army: first to Crimea, and then – to Donbas.

Although the situation was changing in months and years also in our peaceful city: the inhabitants became gloomier, one could hear talks about political themes, there appeared posters calling men to join the Armed Forces, streets were full of different shades of green – youths in military uniforms. Looking at their smiling faces and listening to their careless laughter, I did not feel anxiety or discomfort, the feeling of danger or general grief did not touch me or my peers.

The check point was built on the city's fringes. Every time with wonder and interest I looked at the weapons which military men carried, their tent composed of natural materials and the armored vehicle near it. Yes, only with interest: there was no fear then. It was stange to observe the military equipment and people who every day were on guard for the danger on the background of blue and cloudless sky, and of your routine and daily troubles. We reconciliated with changes, even such cardinal changes, because they did not touch us directly yet.

Then the school actions started, aimed at helping the military men in the East. It all started with positive, good pictures, in order to support the defenders morally. But later our help became more substantial. We were weaving green camouflaging nets in order to cover them from enemy's eyes, collected the food products. It was not understandable, why do we, simple school students, were dealing with it? Can it be that the responsibility for the life of Ukrainian army lies on children? The game changed into something more serious.

Suddenly the school timetable changed. We were told an unexpected piece of news: the teacher of the subject "Defence of Motherland" has signed

up as a volunteer to the frontline. The news was shocking and even sad. We were all worried with the destiny of the young teacher, who having taken up arms has gone to defend Ukraine, and we followed the news from frontline tensely. We are still following the news, as he is still on the firing line, and we are waiting for him to return home...

But the contribution of our school to the struggle with enemy was not ended. Later we learned that the school psychologist could not keep aside, and signed up as a volunteer. We gathered pictures by the whole school and passed through her to the ATO zone, until that moment when she firmly declared: "I should be there!" The woman was seen for the last time at the city railway station: wearing a military uniform, with a heavy rucksack on her back, she was ascending the steps of the train leaving for Kyiv.

And the war has chosen its first victims... Although it is very sad, those were young boys – the best representatives of our nation, the most sincere its patriots, who were looking at me from the billboards always with a smile, with hope in their eyes. Their open, young faces followed me everywhere, and it was too painful to look into them, reading about the achievements of these heroes on the frontline and the dream, for which they fought. Yes, it was just the youth, who started the list of the war victims, among whom were the killed, who were the fighting soldiers, and simply children – civillians who were accidentally touched by the bloody battles.

Perhaps it is the most terrible destiny for a child – to see how your little world is being ruined in front of your eyes. When one cannot stop the failure of expectations, to start fighting for the happy "tomorrow" of which one dreams. These miserable children, like a fluff by the wind, are taken everywhere, and often – even abroad.

There are, according to estimations, about five thousand of resettlers in our city – too difficult a figure. These are not only five thousand people, these are five thousand destinies, five thousand lost worlds, five thousand stories, which one wants one day to forget, like a nightmare in the morning. Certainly, they receive the aid from the caring people as a result of the actions at the city or international level, but their situation still remains hard. It is always difficult to leave one's home, having no permanent place of work or definite plans for the future.

So, also in my musical school a new student appeared – a resettler from Donetsk region. Her first attempts to become a part of the collective were apprehensive and shy, although she tried badly to make new friends. Having a good sense of humour and demonstrating willingness for new acquaintances, she did it very quickly. Many students liked the newly arrived girl. At first sight she seemed to be understandable: moderst, decent and kind – a rare combination of values today. Only she did not let anyone to get near, as I understood in time. She remained in my memory a "mysterious girl", who protects her really deep inner world from other people's intrusion.

It was always interesting to communicate with her, which distinguished her from the surrounding girls. She was a bit extraordinary, sometimes strange – with this she attracted everyone to herself.

From such conversations I gradually learnt that my new friend lives in a small “rented” flat, and there constantly arises the need for changing a place of residence, parents’ work and even school. The girl is talented in the spheres of mathematics and physics and dreams of becoming an engineer. It had a strange influence on me: what would be her destiny, if it were not for the war? She would receive fundamental education and firm knowledge, having no need to catch up with the school program in different schools, she would go to meet her dream and would definitely reach it. But terrible battles have almost destroyed her young expectations, because education receded into the background. It makes one think over the fact how important it is to appreciate one’s home and the possibility of peaceful learning, the feeling of serenity and confidence in the future.

Resettlers also appeared in our school. They appeared and then suddenly disappeared somewhere... Those were children who exchanged their cloudless childhood for the status of the “forced resettler”. There were really diligent students among them, but somehow... quiet. From their transparent presence and a sad lost gaze, aloofness and unwillingness to reconcile with the abrupt changes, to enter a new friendly collective, in spite of all our attempts, something is touched within one’s soul. Perhaps, it is deep pity and growing despair. And also – fear. The fear to feel something like that for oneself.

The heavy and bloody hand of war gradually chooses and touches people around. Neither adults, nor children will avoid it. Out of simple citizens they become wounded, killed, orphans, resettlers and simply unhappy people.

I look out of the window and observe the regular life in the street: a woman is walking her dog, a noisy group of children is running and shouting, teenagers are dancing to the loud rhythm of music from the loudspeakers. The yellow, tired leaves are falling. People do not show it, but everyone is tired from the constant pressure of uncertainty. Here is the hidden atmosphere of disquietude, which is intensified by the daily portion of cruel news: murders, crimes, explosions, robberies. People can bear no more listening to them, that is why the dusty TV is no more an occasion to gather together and spend a family evening.

My parents have prohibited me to go to the places, where great multitudes of people gather, especially on holidays, being afraid of terrorist attacks. By the way, there is a permanent good tradition in our city: on any small or big occasion to gather on the main street which is symbolically named – Soborna (*Street For Gathering*). As this street is only for pedestrians and it leads to the picturesque embankment, it is the favourite place of walks

for thousands of city inhabitants. It is such a pity that such a wish is putting one's life at risk, and my parents' apprehensions are really not groundless.

Yes, there is enough bad news. Our family has also been touched by the "hand" of conflict: my brother was taken to hospital from the frontline. He has a shell-shock. My parents can hardly hold back their tears, only I cannot do it: we used to be inseparable friends with him, and from the realization of the terrible situation in which he has found himself, whole life flashes in front of my inner sight. My brother dreamt of becoming a military man since childhood: he watched films about the war with excitement, knew all possible types of weapons and even trained to shoot from grandfather's rifle. There were no doubts concerning his future calling. But possibility of using it in real life became a surprise.

In 2016 he was sent to fight near the "hot" Mariupol, where he spent about two months. Constant shootings of the positions and risking one's life is usual there. One can forget about the rifle at home. The military machine-guns are used there ...

We were waiting for news from the hospital with sinking hearts, but, luckily there was no threat for life any more. Having had rest for several weeks, our soldier was getting ready to return to the frontline.

But the next time, in winter, he returned with the frostbitten arms and legs... It was a frightful sight. But the stories, which he told were even more terrible: how our men sleep in the steppe, they have to defend the camp even in the most severe frosts and snowdrifts. There are not enough military uniforms and weapons for everyone, they have to buy them for themselves. Food is often supplied intermittently, they lack even the essential things, to say nothing of the warm clothes...Nobody is really concerned how your military everyday life passes and in which poverty one does his military service: there is a duty and the order "from above", and all the other things should not be of concern. Soldiers do not find support even in the villages: some of them are destroyed and deserted, the plunderers are ruling there. In other villages soldiers can be thrown at with stones, rather than helped.

Only then the realization of the value and importance of volunteering came: nobody else will help our defenders. Because we all are cogs in the big complicated machine called the "state", which is moving only when every part of the mechanism fulfills its role. Everything is interconnected in this system, and a failure of one element causes the stop of the next ones. That is why the army is the embodiment of the strength of civilian people, their support and will for the victory.

But still do children – the flowers of nation and its future successors – have to be dragged into the vortex of the war? It is the game for adults: they begin it and it should be ended by them. But for some reason these people put all the burden of responsibility for their actions on us, and we become participants of the battle for life.

And even when it seems that one is aside from this conflict and stays far from it, it is a big mistake: one is far from the frontline, but not from the war. Everyone, disregarding his/her age or gender, nationality and place of residence, is dragged into this lethal vortex, called “war”.