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YOUTH “MILITARY AND PATRIOTIC” CLUBS IN THE TEMPORARY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF DONETSK AND LUHANSK REGIONS: CREATION AND FUNCTIONING FEATURES

Abstract. *The purpose of the research* is to reveal the specifics of the activity of youth “military and patriotic” clubs in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. **The methodology of the research.** Due to the historical genetic method of research, it became possible, based on a complex of open sources, to reproduce events in their chronological sequence and analyze the main aspects of the military and patriotic clubs functioning, historical systemic – to consider their activities as part of the system of the military and patriotic education formed by the occupational administrations. **Scientific Novelty.** In the article there have been made an attempt to analyze the organizational and substantive aspects of the functioning of such clubs, which have been established since 2014 in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas. Direct military training of minors (with the use of weapons and ammunition) was entrusted to the individuals, who took part in the illegal armed formations with the appropriate content: practical focus (conducting basic military training on a permanent basis, organizing mass events, competitions, military camps, etc.) and ideological work (in particular, forming the image of the enemy, exploiting historical narratives of World War II in a pro-Russian interpretation with reference to the present, etc.). **Conclusions.** The training of youth in similar organizations, including the holding of events on the territory of the Russian Federation, gives reason to believe that the Russian military political leadership tried, on the one hand, to form a new identity for the population of certain regions of Donbas, and on the other hand, to provide minors with specific knowledge, skills and abilities related to military. The combination of these goals was aimed at the future use local youth as a potential mobilization resource in case of a full-scale invasion on the territory of Ukraine.

Key words: military-patriotic education, militarization, military training, ideological work, youth, club, temporarily occupied territory, Ukraine, Donbas, Russian Federation.

МОЛОДІЖНІ “ВІЙСЬКОВО-ПАТРІОТИЧНІ” КЛУБИ НА ТИМЧАСОВО ОКУПОВАНИХ ТЕРИТОРІЯХ ДОНЕЦЬКОЇ І ЛУГАНСЬКОЇ ОБЛАСТЕЙ: ОСОБЛИВОСТІ СТВОРЕННЯ ТА ФУНКЦІОНУВАННЯ

Анотація. *Мета дослідження* – розкрити специфіку діяльності молодіжних “військово-патріотичних” клубів на тимчасово окупованих територіях Донецької та Луганської областей. **Методологія дослідження.** Історико-генетичний метод дослідження дав змогу на основі комплексу відкритих джерел відтворити події у хронологічній послідовності та проаналізувати основні аспекти роботи військово-патріотичних клубів; історико-системний – розглянути їхню діяльність у складі системи військово-патріотичного виховання, сформованої окупаційними адміністраціями. **Наукова новизна.** У статті зроблено спробу проаналізувати організаційні та змістові аспекти роботи таких клубів, створених з 2014 р. на тимчасово окупованих територіях Донбасу. Безпосередня військова підготовка неповнолітніх (із застосуванням зброї та боєприпасів) покладалася на осіб, які брали участь у складі незаконних збройних формувань із відповідним змістом: практичним спрямуванням (проведення початкової військової підготовки на постійній основі, організація масових заходів, змагань, військових зборів тощо) та ідеологічною роботою (зокрема, формування образу ворога, експлуатація історичних наративів Другої світової війни в проросійській інтерпретації з прив'язкою до сьогодення тощо). **Висновки.** Навчання молоді в подібних організаціях, з-поміж іншого, проведення заходів на території Російської Федерації, дає підстави вважати, що російське військово-політичне керівництво намагалося, з одного боку, сформувати нову ідентичність для населення окупованих районів Донбасу, з іншого – надати неповнолітнім спеціальні знання, уміння та навички, пов'язані з військовою діяльністю. Сукупність цих цілей була спрямована на те, щоб у майбутньому використовувати місцеву молодь як потенційний мобілізаційний ресурс у разі широкомасштабного вторгнення на територію України.

Ключові слова: військово-патріотичне виховання, мілітаризація, військова підготовка, ідеологічна робота, молодь, клуб, тимчасово окупована територія, Україна, Донбас, Російська Федерація.

Problem Statement. Since 2014, the Russian Federation has been carrying out armed aggression against Ukraine using its armed forces, as well as self-proclaimed bodies controlled by it, which usurped the performance of power functions in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In order to oppose the state authorities of Ukraine, the illegal armed formations were formed in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which recruited local residents, including youth under the age of 18. Minors were entrusted with a number of tasks, including direct participation in combat operations against the forces of the anti-terrorist operation. Some of them were trained in the so-called military and patriotic clubs, which were established spontaneously in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas in 2014 – 2015. Later, the occupation administrations of the so-called republics began to establish the similar organizations deliberately in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions for systematic work on militarization of local youth – the basic military training implementation, as well as carrying out the ideological work with minors.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. The issue on the Ukrainian youth militarization in the temporarily occupied territories has become the subject focus of domestic researches in sociology, political science, jurisprudence. The impact issue on the child population of the occupied territories can be studied through the lens of a number of humanitarian sciences. According to psychological and educational science, this issue has an impact on specific education, which aims to foster hatred by forming the image of the enemy, among other things, and the development of a new quasi-identity. Sociological science studies this issue in the context of the consequences for society in the long term, in particular

the issue of the potential reintegration of the generation that was under occupation for about 10 years. At the same time, legal science studies militarization from the point of view of the international humanitarian law, which prohibits the minors' involvement of in illegal activities. Olena Klymenko considers separate strategies for recruiting children into illegal armed groups, in particular through the so-called military and patriotic clubs. According to the researcher, this method of recruitment is related to the satisfaction of the public expectations of the community about protection against a possible enemy. In fact, minors were provoked to join the illegal armed formations by preparing them to “defend the Motherland” in specialized organizations – clubs (Klymenko, 2019). Serhii Zubchenko also considers the involvement of children in the activities of military and patriotic clubs, paramilitary camps as an element of recruiting minors into illegal armed groups and predisposing them to terrorist activities in the future (Zubchenko, 2016). In general, the Russian policy was aimed at creating a broad infrastructure (various movements, organizations and associations) of a “patriotic” focus for the local child population in the occupied part of Donbas (Oliinyk, & Bækken, 2023; Bækken, 2025).

The issue on the minors' participation in the armed conflict in Donbas was studied in scientific works of a legal nature (Chekhovska & Nychytailo, 2016; Lesko, 2017; Romantsova, 2020). According to the norms of the international criminal and humanitarian law (Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Participation of Children in Armed Conflicts), recruiting and using children to participate in hostilities is considered a war crime. At the same time, people under the age of 15 and 18 are considered children in the mentioned documents. The Ukrainian legislation corresponds to the specified norms. According to the Criminal Code of Ukraine (Article 304), minors' involvement in the criminal activity is punishable by imprisonment for a term of 3 to 7 years. At the same time, in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On Protection of Childhood” (Article 30), in addition to the direct minors' participation in hostilities, it is prohibited to promote war, as well as training of children in order to use them in armed conflicts or violent actions aimed at overthrowing state power or violating territorial integrity. The military training of minors in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in “military and patriotic” clubs or other similar organizations can be considered as training for criminal purposes, war propaganda and intention of the military and political leadership of Russia and the occupation administrations controlled by it to recruit and use local youth in the armed conflict against Ukraine.

In the context of historical science, the youth policy of the aggressor country to the population of the occupied territories consisted in an attempt to subjugate, form loyalty to the aggressor state, as well as secular and religious education of the younger generation within the framework of its national interests, in particular, use as a mobilization resource, labour exploitation, etc. Thus, the author considers the militarization of the child population of certain districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as a systemic phenomenon through the education system (Pashkova, 2022a; Pashkova, 2023b; Koval (Ed.), 2023, pp. 244–250), non-educational activities, in particular the functioning of paramilitary camps (Pashkova, 2023a), as well as its consequences for the state security of Ukraine in the context of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation (Pashkova, 2022a; Pashkova, 2024).

The research methodology is based on the historical genetic, historical systemic methods. The historical genetic method was used during the disclosure of the military and patriotic clubs formation sequence in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the

peculiarities of the upbringing process of their members. The historical systemic method made it possible to consider the military and patriotic clubs as a component of the system of the military-patriotic education as a whole, established in the self-proclaimed republics. The conducted research is based on a complex of sources: the Official notifications of the state authorities of Ukraine – the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the Ombudsman for Human Rights; Data, collected by human rights organizations; Photo and video materials; Messages in social networks; Publications of mass media, including those controlled by self-proclaimed bodies in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions; Messages from the “official websites” of self-proclaimed bodies in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the specifics of the youth “military and patriotic” clubs activity in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions*.

Research Results. After the occupation of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in 2014, the efforts of the military and political leadership of the Russian Federation, through the occupation administrations under their control, began to be directed at massive influence on the consciousness of local youth through the creation of a dense information space without access to alternative sources and the ability to avoid influence. The formation of new citizens of the republics was accompanied by the creation of the corresponding attributes of “statehood” – legislation, symbols (coat of arms, anthem, and flag), state infrastructure (“authorities”), etc. The self-proclaimed bodies of the pseudo-republics (“ministries of education”, “ministries of youth”) began to work on the implementation of the so-called patriotic upbringing of the local children both through the sphere of education (Pashkova, 2023b) and extracurricular activities.

Organization and support of the activities of military and patriotic clubs: subordination and performers. The system of the extracurricular education (“military and patriotic” clubs, circles, sections) began to be considered by the local “legislation” as one of the ways of forming “patriotism” of the youth of the pseudo-republics (“The Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Luhansk People’s Republic...”). Involvement of minors (aged 8–17 years) in such associations intended to establish control over their leisure time and indoctrinating of new ideologues: allegedly historically determined necessity of the “struggle for independence” from Ukraine, historical and cultural space shared with Russia, etc. During the period of active hostilities in Donbas (2014 – early 2015 year) local military and patriotic clubs were created unsystematically (or repurposed from clubs, that operated before the occupation), their activities mostly depended on the personnel potential, available material and technical base, the level of financial support, etc. With the localization of the armed conflict in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, this work acquired a more orderly character, in particular, due to the creation of appropriate legislation. Thus, in 2015 – 2021, the occupying administrations of the pseudo-republics developed a number of “normative and legal acts” (laws, concepts, programs, orders, recommendations) that determined their visions of the patriotic education of local youth (Koval, 2023, pp. 244, 245). In order to bring the work of such organizations to unified standards in the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic, only in 2018 “Temporary order of activity of patriotic, military and patriotic, sports-patriotic youth and children’s associations of the DPR” was developed, as well as the “Typical program of training of pupils of the military and patriotic clubs, circles and

* This refers to the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions as of February 24, 2022.

associations of the DPR", which was tested in 11 such clubs ("The Resolution of Donetsk People's Republic...").

The work with personnel included the involvement as instructors and mentors of people, who participated in the activities of illegal armed formations, and the retraining of leaders of "military and patriotic" clubs. For example, one of the Chiefs of the so-called the Cossack "military and patriotic" sports club "Stepnie volki" ("Steppe Wolves") (Snizhne, Donetsk region) was a representative of the IAF "Kalmius". The program of work with children included military, physical and medical training, which was carried out by former or active members of other illegal armed formations.

Regarding retraining, it is worth noting that some individuals headed local children and youth organizations even before the start of the armed conflict in Donbas, subsequently changing their views and beliefs, in accordance with new "ideological" postulates. For example, since 2003, the head of the "military and patriotic" sports club "Vitiaz'" ("Knight"), which operated on the basis of a secondary education institution (Donetsk), also taught history and "Defence of Motherland". In the future, the members of his club were involved in hostilities as part of the illegal armed formations of the "DPR" and underwent "military service" in the so-called ministry of defence. At the end of 2014, the "Voin" club ("Warrior") (Rozkishne village, Luhansk region) carried out a new set of pupils, although it was founded long before the armed conflict, and its leader (a physical education teacher at a secondary school) was engaged in "patriotic education" of local youth during 20 years. Since 2014, the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine have been conducting systematic work to identify and bring to justice people involved in the involvement of minors in criminal activities. In 2021 one of the organizers of the "military and patriotic" club "Amazonki" ("Amazons") (Horlivka, Donetsk region), which emerged on the basis of a secondary education institution, was declared suspicious. The organizer of the "Molodaya Gvardiya Donbassa" movement ("The Young Guard of Donbass") and "Spartantsi" club ("The Spartans") were also found and convicted in absentia (Office of the Prosecutor General, 2021).

Teachers of local educational institutions were also forced to get involved in the activities of such associations. Thus, in December 2016, the so-called ministry of education and science of the DPR recommended (read between the lines – ordered) the secondary vocational education institutions to create the "military and patriotic" clubs from among students and teaching staff and to develop relevant documentation (regulations, work plans, etc.). At the same time, already during the period from March to November 2017, the "Ministry" planned to hold a "republican" festival of student clubs "We are for a free republic!", which indicates that the recommendation to create "military and patriotic" organizations carried out a mandatory nature. For example, the "Russkii medved" club ("The Russian Bear") was created at Donetsk Metallurgical Lyceum (Donetsk) under the leadership of its teacher (the military training of club members was carried out at the training base in Vuhlehirsk) (Klymenko, 2019, p. 16), the "Podvig" club ("The Feat") – Shakhtar Pedagogical College (Shakhtarsk, Donetsk region) and others.

Such people as the "Ministry of education" were involved in special events. Thus, the "patriotic education program" for 2020 – 2022 in the so-called DPR provided for the allocation of 300,000 rubles for the organization and holding of the "republican" seminars and conferences for the leaders of "military and patriotic" clubs and circles. The situation was similar with other teaching staff of educational institutions of all levels. In particular,

the so-called DPR annually organized “educational seminars for training (improvement of qualifications) in the field of patriotic education”: in 2017 – 3, in 2018 – 1, in 2019 – 4. It was planned to allocate funds of 134 thousand rubles for such events in the period of 2020 – 2022 years in the pseudo-republic (“The Resolution of Donetsk People’s Republic...”).

Financial support for the activities of such associations was carried out at the expense of local or “republican” budgets, voluntary contributions and donations (both direct members of the club and outsiders) and sponsorship from commercial structures, and the material and technical base (property, equipment) was supplied by certain organizations. For example, in the so-called LPR, the “people’s militia” provided uniforms for teenagers – who were members of the “Molodaya Gvardiya – Yunarmiya” (“The Young Guard – Yunarmiya”) movement. Other self-proclaimed authorities also took care of “military and patriotic clubs”. For example, on the initiative of the so-called Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LPR, there were established the following clubs “Zvezda” (“The Star”) in Luhansk, “Yunost Novorossii” (“The Youth of Novorossiya”) in Otamanivka (Molodohvardiisk), etc. In particular, the latter was created in the fall of 2014, and most of its participants were orphans and children, who found themselves in difficult life circumstances (Klymkovetskyi, 2022). In addition, in 2018, employees of the “ministry” – participants in hostilities against forces of the Anti-terrorist operation, created the public organization “Patriotic Association of Donbass”, which, in particular, organized “patriotic” events for local youth, including on the territory of the Russian Federation. The supervisory board of the association included well-known representatives of illegal armed formations and occupation administration of the “LPR”.

Reaching a wide range of minors with the militarized leisure time through the expansion of the network of the military and patriotic clubs. In the occupied territory of Donetsk region alone, by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine discovered more than 10 so-called military and patriotic clubs, including the “Molodaya Gvardiya Donbassa”, the “Amazonki”, the “Patriot”, the “Bastion”, the “Stepnie volki”. For example, the “Stepnie volki” club was created in 2018 for the children of the so-called Cossacks, who came from the village of Vasilievskaya and in 2019 26 local minors were involved in its activities. Its structure based on a military model, including wearing military uniform, awarding “military ranks” for reaching success in training, etc. During the three-day festival “The future of Russia – is us” (Stavropol, Russian Federation) they “... *marched in formation, did everything like soldiers*”. Also, this club became one of the first to pass the approval of the “Typical training program for pupils of military and patriotic clubs, circles and associations of the DPR”.

There are other similar organizations from Donetsk region the “Kaskad” (“The Cascade”), the “Suvorovets”, the “Severnii veter” (“The Northern Wind”), the “Berkut” (“The Golden Eagle”), the “Yermak”, the “Peresvet”, the “Zastava-58” (“The Outpost-58”), the “Mech” (“The Sword”), etc. According to data published by the DPR, the number of “military and patriotic” clubs, circles and associations in this part of occupied Donbas as of the end of 2019 was 62 organizations in total, and the number of their pupils was 2,014 (“The Resolution of Donetsk People’s Republic...”). Similar clubs also operated in the occupied territory of Luhansk region (the “Amazonki”, the “Dobrovolets” (“The Volunteer”), the “Redut” (“The Redoubt”), the “Voin”, the “Vympel” (“The Pennant”), the “Vityaz”, etc.). As of 2020, there were 32 “military-patriotic” clubs in the “LPR” and 987 people were involved in their activities (Pashkova, 2022a, p. 56). Moreover, a number of the “military and patriotic” clubs based on the Cossack identity was more visible in so-called LPR (Bækken, 2025, p. 41). According to the Eastern Human Rights Group, in 2014 – 2021, 8,437 children underwent

military training in similar clubs in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Lysianskyi, 2021).

Although the local clubs activities were aimed at "educating republican patriotism" and forming children's readiness for their "defence", the military and political leadership of the Russian Federation continued to "feed" the ideology of "Russian world" in relation to the youth of the territories occupied by it. In 2019, in the "LPR" (February) and the "DPR" (April), the so-called public organizations military-patriotic movement "Molodaya Gvardiya – Yunarmiya" based on the Russian model were founded: regulatory framework (statute), symbols (uniform, badges, and card), rituals (oath), military training. Structurally, the "Yunarmiya" movement in the so-called DPR consisted of four territorial headquarters – Donetsk, Horlivka, Kalmiuske (aka Komsomolske), Novoazovsk. In the so-called LPR, in turn, three cities (Luhansk, Alchevsk, Khrustalnyi (aka Krasnyi Luch) and five regional (Luhansk, Alchevsk, Kadiivka (aka Stakhanov), Brianka, Khrustalnyi (aka Krasnyi Luch) headquarters were opened.

The training program of "young soldiers" as a whole was similar to other "military-patriotic" organizations. Classes with minors were conducted mainly during the vacation period, 3–4 times a week, during the school period – mostly on weekends. The representatives of the occupation administrations spoke frankly about the purpose of creating the movement, as well as plans for its further integration into the all-Russian movement: *"... it is from such young ... people, who love their homeland that the future of all ... Russia depends"* ("Vladimir Antonov visited field gatherings of the young army men", 2021).

At the same time, unlike the Russian "Yunarmiya", the ranks of Donetsk movement were allowed to accept people under the age of 35 years, which indicates the drastic need of local youth organizations for human resources, which cannot be satisfied only at the expense of minors. This is due to significant demographic changes that took place in Donbas after the start of the armed conflict. Thus, the migration processes (movement of young people and families with children to the territory controlled by the state authorities of Ukraine), a drop in the birth rate caused a 10% reduction in the number of young people under 20 years of age. The share of residents aged from 20 to 39 years (down to 27%) also decreased, with a simultaneous increase in the share of residents aged from 40 to 59 years (up to 35%), and those aged from 60 years and over up to 28% (Vyshnevskiy). At the same time, in 2019 the "Molodaya Gvardiya – Yunarmiya" of the so-called LPR had about 400 minor participants, at the end of 2020 the number of local "Yunarmiya" was about 1,500 people, and as of the end of 2021 – more than 5 thousand participants and 12 detachments from various cities of the temporarily occupied territory of Luhansk region.

Owing to the systematic work on expanding the network of the "military-patriotic" clubs and associations, as well as including as many young people as possible in their activities, it became clear that the priority of this direction for the occupation administrations of the pseudo-republics. In particular, in the so-called DPR, this was defined as one of the tasks of the "patriotic education program" for 2020 – 2022 years. So, in 2014, there were 19 such clubs in the "republic", in 2015 – 30, in 2016 – 41, in 2017 – 51, in 2018 – 60, in 2019 – 62. The predicted number in 2020 was 72 organizations, in 2021 – 80, in 2022 – 90. At the same time, the number of their "protégés" in 2014 was 573, in 2015 – 912, in 2016 – 1,368, in 2017 – 1,549, in 2018 – 1,980, in 2019 – 2,014. According to the forecast of the occupation administration, the number of their participants was to increase in 2020 to 2,400 people, in 2021 – 2,600, in 2022 – 3,000. At the same time, it is worth

noting that a significant amount of funds (more than 28 million rubles) was planned by the program specifically for the expansion of the network of “military-patriotic”, military sports clubs and associations in the pseudo-republic in three years (“The Resolution of Donetsk People’s Republic...”).

The intentions of the occupation administrations to increase the number of “military and patriotic” organizations and the number of minors involved in their activities were mainly aimed at forming a positive attitude to “military service” among local youth, motivation to perform it in the future, and readiness to defend the so-called republics. In other words, to further participation in the armed aggression against Ukraine. Thus, representatives of the occupation administrations and “military-patriotic” clubs stated openly the prospect of further recruitment of “protégés” of such organizations into the ranks of illegal armed formations: “...you link your future with the protection of the republic and its citizens...” (“The head of the DPR and the leadership...” 2020), “... all of our boys want to join service in the security forces in the future”, “Many of our young soldiers want to connect their lives with military service, forceful or rescue structures in the future. Now there is a war ... and it is necessary ... to prepare a worthy replacement!” (“Path of the scout – 2019”, 2019). For example, as of 2019, about 15 people – former members of the “military-patriotic” clubs of the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk region were doing “military service” in the so-called internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 19 – in the “people’s militia”, 15 – in the “Ministry of Emergency situations”, etc. Håvard Bækken and Hanna Oliinyk assume that in the occupied territory of Donbas expectations to join armed formations after reaching adulthood were higher than in the remaining post-Soviet space (Oliinyk, & Bækken, 2023). It is worth noting that the work in the “law enforcement system” of the pseudo-republics for many residents of the temporarily occupied territories was associated with the prospects of high financial support.

Admission of children to the “military and patriotic” clubs was determined, as a rule, by the decision of parents or other relatives (Klymenko, 2019, p. 17) (mostly former or active members of illegal armed formations and the representatives of occupation administrations – children of “security forces” members were primarily considered as a potential resource for staffing such structures in the future), on one’s own initiative (“Young people from Luhansk spoke about patriotism and love for the Motherland”, 2022) or by the example of the peers (attractiveness of military uniforms, leisure activities, including participation in events in Russia, etc.). At the same time, parents’ permission for their children to participate in the “military and patriotic” organizations, clubs, and movements was not always determined only by their personal beliefs, but sometimes by the desire to avoid children’s standing out among their peers (Bukhtiarov, 2021). There were also cases of forced minors’ involvement in the youth organizations due to agitation by pedagogical workers in educational institutions with the demand to provide a written explanation to the parents in case of the refusal (Burov, Lazarenko, Ianova, Nekrasova, & Shcherbachenko, 2016, p. 11). It can be assumed that such episodes did not happen often, because the refusal could attract unwanted attention from the “security forces” and cause suspicions of disloyalty to the occupation administrations.

The content of the activities of the military and patriotic clubs: the practical orientation and ideological work. The work program of the “military-patriotic” clubs provided for basic military training (tactical, formation, fire, physical, medical), as well as appropriate ideological processing of an anti-Ukrainian character. Minors were able to demonstrate their achievements in the military camps (Pashkova, 2023a), during various meetings of the

"military-patriotic" clubs, in particular on the topic "Survival in the forest zone", "Survival in winter conditions", "Survival during combat operations" ("The Resolution of Donetsk People's Republic..."), etc. For example, the large-scale event "Tropa razvedchika – 2019" ("The Scout Trail – 2019") with involving of 100 young "soldiers" (aged 11–16 years) from 12 clubs from the occupied cities of Donetsk region (Donetsk, Makiivka, Mospine, Ilovaik) was organized in the summer of 2019. The gathering with minors were conducted by 20 instructors – heads of these clubs and active representatives of the illegal armed formations. The winner of the event was the "military-patriotic" club the "Kaskad" (Mospine) under the leadership of former member of the illegal armed formation "Vostok". The teams went through a series of stages involving military, medical, and physical training tasks: moving along a suspended log, crossing a "mine" field, carrying out "demining", passing in a plastun style under a string, maintaining a circular defence using small arms mockups, ascent and descent from a tericon about 40 m high, providing medical aid to the "wounded", transporting him for 100 m, etc. According to one of the club's instructor: *"Such gatherings help us develop physically, train us, because ... even if we are girls, there is a war going on, and we may need these skills in life!"* ("Path of the scout – 2019", 2019).

Similar mass events involving a number of the "military-patriotic" organizations were also held on the territory of the so-called LPR. For example, on November 1–2, 2019, in the city of Brianka, a "St. George's gathering" was organized with the participation of members of clubs from Luhansk, Perevalsk, Sorokyne (aka Krasnodon), Otamanivka (aka Molodohvardiisk) of the temporarily occupied territory of Luhansk region. The event was held with the support of the occupation administration of the city of Brianka, the so-called Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LPR, the Patriotic Association of Donbas, as well as a number of the "Cossack" organizations from the Russian Federation. During the 2-days gathering, the participants competed in throwing a grenade, shooting from a prone position, shooting with obstacles, assembling and disassembling automatic weapons, and also took part in a competition using laser models of weapons – laser tag. In addition, the program included "historical and ideological" events, in particular the reconstruction of battles of the "Great Patriotic War", as well as contests, where children demonstrated their knowledge of the "history of the Motherland".

It is worth noting that in the work of the clubs special attention was paid to carrying out ideological work with minors, which was a combination of the Russian chauvinism ("Russian world"), Ukrainophobia, historical myths of an expansionist content (about "the Russian heroes-collectors of land", "natural borders of the motherland from the Carpathians to the Pacific Ocean"), as well as falsifications of modern events of the armed conflict in Donbas, glorification of representatives of illegal armed formations. For example, members of the military-patriotic club of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LPR "Yunost Novorossii" organized an honour guard at the tank monument dedicated to "defenders of the republic" (Khriashchuvate village, Luhansk region) to *"...draw attention to the need for military and patriotic education and in memory of the victims and heroes of the fight against Ukrainian aggression"* ("Activists of the Patriotic Club...", 2017).

Similar events were held by the members of the club in five settlements of the "LPR" and on the occasion of the 72nd anniversary of the "victory in the Great Patriotic War". At the same time, the appeal to the events of the German-Soviet War of 1941 – 1945 years was, as a rule, accompanied by a reference to the events of today. For example, in 2017, as part of events dedicated to the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Donbas from German

troops, the occupation administration of the so-called DPR opened a chapel in the Savur-Mohyla Memorial Complex in honour of representatives of illegal armed groups, who died in battles for this area in 2014. Later, the annual “patriotic” action “Walk of Fame” was started on the basis of the Memorial Complex. In the words of a young army woman from the so-called LPR after visiting it: “... we were told about Savur-Mohyla, that during the Great Patriotic War there were battles there. And then, in 2014, history repeated itself. The fighters of Ukraine tried to conquer this place...” (“Young people from Luhansk spoke about patriotism and love for the Motherland”, 2022). Thus, in the minds of the local youth, a belief was formed about the modern armed conflict in Donbas as a “continuation of the war with fascism”, in particular through drawing historical parallels. By the way, in 2021, 70 “young soldiers” from Horlivka (Donetsk region) were involved in the event.

It is worth noting that the ideological processing of minors in the “LPR” was carried out by the so-called head of the above-mentioned “Patriotic Association of Donbass” Oleksii Selivanov. At the same time, until 2014, O. Selivanov, as a representative of the public organization “Loyal Cossacks” (now liquidated and banned in Ukraine), carried out subversive activities against Ukrainian statehood, propaganda of “Russian world” through veiled anti-Ukrainian rhetoric (Pashkova, 2021). After the beginning of the armed conflict, he switched to the side of the enemy, in particular, he was appointed to the position of senior operational officer for particularly important cases of the department for work with minors of the “Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LPR”.

The creation and comprehensive support of “military-patriotic” clubs, organizations, associations for children and youth of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions had the purpose of military training of minors (with the corresponding ideological processing of an anti-Ukrainian nature) for further recruitment into illegal armed formations. After the full-scale invasion of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, former and current members of the so-called the military-patriotic clubs were involved in hostilities against the Defence Forces of Ukraine (Pashkova, 2022b, pp. 516, 517). For example, a graduate of the “Yunost Novorossii” club, as well as a minor (16-year-old) member of the “Nasledniki Pobedi” club (“Descendants of Victory”) (Kalmiuske aka Komsomolske, Donetsk region) died during hostilities in the spring of 2022 (Denisova, 2022a; Denisova, 2022b).

Conclusions. After the proclamation of the so-called republics in 2014, the activities of the occupation administrations formed and managed by the Russian Federation in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions began to focus on intensive “state building”. An important place in this process was occupied by the “republicanization” of the local population, particularly the youth. The formation of relevant views and beliefs among minors was carried out, including through the so-called military-patriotic clubs, which aimed to conduct basic military training (combat, fire, tactical, physical, medical), as well as ideological work. The activities of such associations were carried out according to the military model: military organization, uniforms, ranks, insignia, symbols, etc. Leaders and instructors were, as a rule, representatives of illegal armed formations that directly participated in illegal actions against Ukrainian statehood in the spring of 2014, and later in combat actions against the forces of the Anti-terrorist operation/Joint Forces operation. The “military and patriotic” organizations (clubs, groups, movements) accepted children of all social statuses, without gender restrictions. By the way, the “Amazonki” club was staffed mainly by female members. The admission of minors, whose age ranged from 8 to 17 years, was determined both by the

decision of parents or other relatives, by personal desire or by the example of friends, and by coercion, in particular by pedagogical workers of educational institutions.

From 2014 to 2019, the number of similar organizations in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas increased significantly. In particular, in the so-called DPR, their number increased in 3 times, and the number of their protégés – almost in 4 times. At the same time, the number of club members was heterogeneous and depended on the size of the settlement – from several dozen to several hundred people. In addition, in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas, a youth movement “Yunarmiya” based on the Russian analogue was launched. If the number of participants in the youth army movement in the so-called LPR increased in 12(!) times over the full three years of its existence, it can be assumed that such an increase is connected with the mandatory enrolment, in particular for the children of employees of “law enforcement system”.

The creation and expansion of the network of the “military and patriotic” clubs was aimed at involvement of the maximum number of young people in their activities. Taking into account the limited human resources of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the practical orientation of the clubs was primarily aimed at preparing resources for the state (occupational administrations) and the military (illegal armed formations) service in the pseudo-republics, which required appropriate worldview attitudes and practical skills. Thus, the activities of the “military and patriotic” clubs in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions can be considered as military training for further use in the armed conflict of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and also as propaganda of the war among minors, which is considered a crime, in accordance with the current legislation of Ukraine. After the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in 2022, the facts of the participation of former and active (underage) members of such clubs in hostilities against the Defence Forces of Ukraine were revealed.

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