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THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE: INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

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Abstract

Non-governmental organizations play an extremely important role in the social and political life of democratic countries of the world. They involve broad segments of the population in state-building activities. Public organizations are a link of communication between the authorities and society. Many studies and scientific publications by leading Ukrainian and foreign researchers are devoted to analyzing public organizations in the context of management, ideology, economic role, etc. This article focuses on the practical aspect of research: how different non-governmental organizations influence / should influence political life on the international, national, and local levels. Similar foreign experience is taken into account, where non-governmental organizations are powerful tools for influencing managerial decision-making. They can accumulate, articulate, protect, and lobby the interests of their members. However, in today's Ukrainian realities, they only have potential. To effectively represent their interests, public organizations must cooperate with political parties or join public councils under executive bodies. Thus, they lose both self-government and non-governmental character. Moreover, the criteria for selecting organizations to participate in public councils under Ukrainian executive bodies remain unclear. Currently, Ukraine hosts thousands of public organizations, but they lack real political influence. Nonetheless, foreign experience, active collaboration with influential international organizations, and a thorough examination of the mechanisms through which foreign non-governmental organizations shape social and political life could offer valuable insights. The theoretical foundation for this analysis is drawn from the scientific works of leading foreign and Ukrainian researchers.

Keywords: non-governmental organizations, public organizations, international, national and local level, social and political life, political parties, state institutions, democratic countries.

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations play an important role in the socio-political life of democratic countries, as they involve broad segments of the population in state-building activities. Non-governmental organizations (NGO) are a link between the government and society. Public organizations can be international, national, or local and are aimed at protecting various public interests within the country. There are many powerful international non-governmental organizations of various orientations in the world. These organizations aim to draw attention to solving environmental problems, protect and support vulnerable

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segments of the population, and involve young people in active public life on a global scale. Of course, such organizations are the most powerful in terms of attracting funding, influence, and number of participants. The latter two are actively represented in Ukraine. In comparison, small international non-governmental organizations, and even more so national and local ones, very often suffer from a lack of funding, internal restrictions, etc. In addition to the global and local social significance of public organizations, scientists also emphasize the importance of their participation in political life. Non-governmental organizations are a powerful lever of influence on political life in the democratic world, for example, in Western Europe and the USA. Public organizations can be seen as a tool of influence on administrative decision-making, which can accumulate, formulate, protect, and lobby the interests of their members. Ukrainian public organizations have limited influence on political life. To realize the interests of their members, they must cooperate with political parties or state institutions.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the essence and features of the influence of non-governmental on political life in Ukraine in comparison with foreign experience. The objectives are subordinate to the topic and are aimed at determining the effectiveness of the functioning of public organizations in Ukraine compared to international non-governmental organizations. Particular attention is focused on the activities of public organizations during the full-scale invasion and the post-war period.

The research questions are the following: 1. The difference between the terms “non-governmental organization” and “public organization”. 2. The influence of different types of non-governmental organizations on social and political life: International level. 3. The importance of the participation of non-governmental organizations in political life: International and National levels. 4. The role of public organizations in social and political life in Ukraine on National and Local levels. 5. Criteria for selecting representatives of public organizations to join public councils under executive authorities. 6. Prospects for the activities of public organizations in the post-war period.

Literature Review

A number of publications by foreign and Ukrainian authors are devoted to the study of non-governmental organizations. For example, Spenkuch, Teso, Xu explore ideology and performance in public organizations (Spenkuch et al., 2023). An article by Neumann, Guirguis and Steiner is devoted to the issue of exploring artificial intelligence adoption in public organizations (Neumann et al., 2024). Volkivskyi and Semenchenko explores non-governmental organizations as “third sector” groups in civil society (Volkivskyi & Semenchenko, 2024). Okunovska and Prymush investigate the issues of involving citizens in solving important issues at the local government level in conditions of full-scale invasion (Okunovska & Prymush, 2024). And the article Tokar researches public organizations of Ukraine in the system of development of public-administrative relations (Tokar, 2020). Yatsyna raises the question of the difference between the terms “non-governmental organizations” and “public organizations” (Yatsyna, 2022). Polovyi and Polukhina raises the issue of the importance of local democracy in the context of involving citizens in the exercise of state power (Polovyi & Polukhina, 2020). However, the issue of the role of public organizations in political life remains relevant and requires further research.

The methodological basis of the article includes the following methods and methodological approaches: historical, systemic-structural, comparative, empirical analysis.

Definition, Essence, and Purpose of Public Organizations

There are various definitions of public organizations in the scientific literature. Thus, according to Hazuda and Sliusarenko, “public organizations are understood as voluntary formations of citizens that are formed as a result of their free will to express collective interests and solve public issues and problems (Hazuda & Sliusarenko, 2011). At the same time: “In Western scientific sources there is an opinion that emphasizes the non-governmental and non-profit nature of such formations” (Hazuda & Sliusarenko, 2011). According to the Law of Ukraine on Public Associations: “A public association is a voluntary association of individuals and /or legal entities of private law for the exercise and protection of rights and freedoms, the satisfaction of public, in particular economic, social, cultural, environmental, and other interests” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2013). At the same time, it is worth noting that “in Western scientific sources there is an opinion that emphasizes the non-governmental and non-profit nature of such formations” (Hazuda & Sliusarenko, 2011).

The Law of Ukraine on Public Associations deals primarily with the types of such associations, namely public organizations and public unions (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2013), the principles of their formation

and activity, namely: voluntariness, self-government, equality before the law, openness, publicity. However, one of the points is “the absence of property interest of their members (participants)” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2013). Thus, Ukrainian legislation also emphasizes the non-profit nature of public organizations.

There are differences in the interpretation of the essence of public organizations in Western and Ukrainian scientific literature. Thus, Yatsyna notes that “an equivalence sign can conditionally be placed between the national concept of ‘public organization’ and the foreign term ‘non-governmental organization’”, however, “the concept of non-governmental organizations is somewhat broader than the Ukrainian concept of a public organization” (Yatsyna, 2022). That is, in Western scientific literature primarily uses the term “non-governmental organization,” while Ukrainian literature predominantly refers to “public organization”. However, when considering the role of public organizations in social and political life, referring to the works of foreign and Ukrainian scientists, it is advisable to use both terms.

Types of Public Organizations and the Degree of Their Influence on Social and Political Life: International Level

When it comes to the role of public organizations in social and political life, of course, one must clearly understand why these organizations are created and what social objectives they pursue. Hazuda and Sliusarenko note, that, “through public associations, socio-political movements, political parties, broad segments of the population are involved in active state-building activities, the political and economic interests of a particular part of society (people, nation, social group) are realized and protected. They maintain ties between civil society and the state” (Hazuda & Sliusarenko, 2011).

Denhard also emphasizes the importance of public organizations and public activity in public life. According to the researcher, “public organizations can look quite different,” depending on the type of their activity (Denhardt, 2008).

In this context, it is important to understand the types of public organizations. Mendzhul suggests dividing them according to the following criteria: by subjective composition, by field of activity, by status or territory of activity (local, regional, all-Ukrainian, and international), by the number of members, etc. (Mendzhul, 2009).

The most important of these criteria, in our opinion, is the field of activity (because it is through it that the goal and the meaning of the existence of a public organization are realized), as well as the territory of activity (because it reflects the scale of activity, degree of influence, funding volumes, number of participants, etc.).

Let’s begin with the territorial criterion. Public organizations can be international, national, or local, and aimed at protecting various public interests within the country. There are many powerful international organizations of various orientations in the world, including Doctors without Borders, BRAC, Greenpeace, AIESEC, etc. Of course, there are many more of them, but we included the second criterion in the analysis, namely the sphere of activity, and selected the most famous and powerful non-governmental organizations of the world of various orientations.

Volkivskyi and Semenchenko note: “In international politics, they play a very active role and form a very broad coalition. They can give a voice to groups that have suffered from globalization: human rights problems, environmental rights, religious communities, animal rights, students, women’s groups, and professional associations” (Volkivskyi & Semenchenko, 2024).

For example, “Doctors without Borders” provides medical assistance to people affected by conflicts, disasters, epidemics, and social isolation” (Doctors without borders, 2024). “BRAC” invests in socially responsible companies that help to expand the opportunities of “people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice” (BRAC, 2024). The Greenpeace Ukraine website states that: “Greenpeace is a global movement that actively protects nature from destruction” (6). And the goal of the world’s largest international youth organization AIESEC is “to develop leadership among young people” (AIESEC, 2024).

These organizations aim to draw attention to solving environmental problems, protecting and supporting vulnerable segments of the population, and involving young people in active public life on a global scale. Of course, such organizations are the most powerful in terms of attracting funding, influence, and number of participants. The last two are actively represented in Ukraine.

In comparison, small international organizations, and even more so national and local ones, very often suffer from a lack of funding, internal restrictions, etc. As Volkivskyi and Semenchenko note: “Many small public organizations are not as effective for some reasons: small membership, lack of funds, internal

government restrictions, lack of access to physical resources, internal systems of checks and balances, etc.” (Volkivskiy & Semenchenko, 2024).

The Importance of the Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in Political Life

In addition to the global and local social significance of public organizations, scholars also emphasize the importance of their participation in political life. Thus, Volkivskiy and Semenchenko note that: “NGOs oriented towards democratic values usually reject authoritarian rule, whether left or right, as inherently corrupting and exploitative. They profess the democratic principle according to which sovereignty belongs to the people. Therefore, regimes will consider NGO as a political and social force to strengthen pluralism and restrain the power of the state concerning civil society” (Volkivskiy & Semenchenko, 2024).

Denhard insists that public organizations influence the development and implementation of state policy, therefore they should be subject to the same evaluation criteria as other participants in the political process, namely: freedom, equality, justice, etc. Accordingly, the main goal of their activities is the “democratization of governance” (Denhard, 2008).

Aykac and Metin write, that “public organizations perform various roles: from intellectual support of administrative activities, public management to increasing the number of beneficiaries of public services, technological innovations, and social changes in general” (Aykac & Metin, 2012).

Indeed, non-governmental public organizations are a powerful lever of influence on political life in the democratic world, for example, in Western Europe and the USA. In confirmation, we will cite the following thesis: “Americans were among the first to be convinced of the political profitability of implementing such projects and began to actively use their potential. Public organizations use indirect influence primarily on the legislative branch of government. In particular, they actively use the method of lobbying for this or that decision. Representatives of the non-governmental dimension have serious interests of their own in both business and politics” (Viche, 2008).

This type of functioning of public organizations refers to the Anglo-Saxon one. Okunovska ovskaya also gives an example of the corporate type, which is typical of Germany, Belgium, Sweden, and other countries: “Researching the activities of organizations in this list of countries, we can determine that in this model the non-governmental sector plays a powerful influence due to its number of members, long-standing history of development, affiliation to its, as a rule, ideological, political and trade union preferences” (Okunovska, 2016). At the same time, according to the researcher: “The sector of public organizations is in a political environment characterized by a two-party system, strong traditions of decentralization, a powerful civil society and a “Bismarckian” system of social security, that is, with the leading role of trade unions (Okunovska, 2016).

Thus, we can conclude that non-governmental public organizations are powerful players in the political process in Western Europe and the USA.

The Role of Public Organizations in Social and Political Life: National and Local Level (Ukraine Realities)

From the analysis of foreign realities, let us move on to national ones. Yatsyna notes that “the environment of public organizations in Ukraine has long been a complex heterogeneous space while playing a significant role in the political process” (Yatsyna, 2022). The website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine contains information on registered public organizations. As of 2009, more than 200 of them had been registered (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2010). Menzhul cites data from the State Statistics Service, according to which, as of January 1, 2008, 54,862 public organizations were registered in Ukraine (Mendzhul, 2009). We predict that since then, their number has increased significantly. However, in the context of considering the issue of the role of public organizations in public life, we are concerned not so much with their number as with their actual activity, namely, their influence on the political process.

Above, using the example of the corporate type of functioning of public organizations, the prominent role of trade unions was emphasized. In Ukraine, there are currently over 20,000 trade unions and trade union associations, but unfortunately, we have not seen any actual, clear protection of the rights of members of a particular trade union at the state level. There is a whole series of publications by domestic scientists devoted to the role of trade unions in the political process, however, they are mostly purely theoretical. For example, Tupytsia notes that “The political role of trade unions tends to grow. A way of adequately representing the interests of the population at the level of political and state institutions must be invented since further neglect of this issue can ... result in a powerful social explosion” (Tupytsia, 2009). At the same

time, the author acknowledges that, under current domestic conditions, they do not have such power. He expresses hope that “political mobilization on a professional basis should become a factor in overcoming the tendencies of technological and manipulative mobilization of the electorate” (Tupytsia, 2009). Mokra notes: “speaking of the participation of trade unions in the political process as interested groups, it is worth considering their cooperation with political parties. Trade unions can create their political parties, be their collective members, and finance them from their political funds” (Mokra, 2010). And further: “The analysis of the interaction of trade unions and other actors of the political process revealed that their program requirements and the vital interests of ordinary members of trade unions rarely coincide. This indicates the direct political influence of party systems and individual parties on the internal structure and methods of trade unions’ activities even in democratic societies” (Mokra, 2010).

That is, Ukrainian trade unions can achieve their objectives exclusively through cooperation with political parties, and individual deputies who represent the legislative power at all levels. This raises legitimate concerns regarding the non-governmental nature of these public organizations.

Zorych examines public organizations through the prism of civic identity for which they are “one of the most significant agents” (Zorych, 2014). This is explained by the fact that “they form a social network of coordination of interests between individuals and government institutions, develop common motivation and a communicative environment for social development based on political self-determination of individuals and the community as a whole” (Zorych, 2014). Consequently, various political forces are interested in having “controlled public organizations” (Zorych, 2014). This once again confirms the fact of cooperation between non-governmental public organizations and political parties. For example, in Ukraine are various youth public organizations of political orientation, such as “Solidarna Molod”, “Ze! Molodizhka” etc. What is the goal of such a youth NGO? As stated on the Ze! Molodizhka website aims to involve young people in participating “in solving society’s problems and building the future” (Sluha narodu, 2024). Their competitors, Solidarna Molod, consider themselves “a platform of opportunities for youth,” and “a social elevator that always works” (Habbibullaieva, 2020).

Another type of non-governmental organization is actively represented in Ukraine – women’s public organizations. For example, “Women’s Perspectives” aims to “implement gender policy in Ukraine, reduce violence, increase women’s competitiveness in the labor market and promote them to the decision-making level in Ukraine. The organization works to ensure that the rights of no woman in Ukraine are violated” (Zhinochi orhanizatsii, 2024). And also, the NGO “Women for the Future of the Country”. Based on the information from social networks, they are currently engaged mainly in volunteer activities (Facebook, 2024b).

Of course, not all types of public organizations that exist in Ukraine have been considered. However, the analysis is based on the three most common ones, those that have the potential to influence political life in Ukraine.

A separate type of interaction between authorities and non-governmental organizations can be public councils under government bodies. The role of public associations under the executive authorities of Ukraine is the subject of a scientific publication by Vikhliaiev. He notes that such councils must perform many functions, and their activities are regulated by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 2010 (Vikhliaiev, 2013). However, the question arises as to how effective their functioning is. In addition, in the system of public councils, there is the Council of Heads of Public Councils under the executive authorities, which, according to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 2012, is “a temporary consultative and advisory body of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, established to establish interaction between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and public councils under ministries, other central executive authorities, the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, regional, Kyiv and Sevastopol city state administrations” (Vikhliaiev, 2013). Interestingly, representatives of public, religious, charitable, and other organizations, creative unions, associations, etc. can be elected to such councils (Vikhliaiev, 2013).

That is, public organizations can take part in political life, in particular, in the process of making administrative decisions, but in cooperation with state authorities. In this case, the question of the non-governmental nature of public organizations in Ukraine is again raised. Vikhliaiev: “Public councils under executive authorities, following current legislation, are entrusted with the undoubtedly important task of ensuring public participation in the formation and implementation of state policy” (Vikhliaiev, 2013). But, the author himself notes the following: “However, there is an urgent need to increase the effectiveness of their activities, since the vast majority of public councils created in Ukraine are extremely passive, and the factor of this passivity is both the executive authorities, which do not pay due attention to the need

to activate the activities of public councils, and the public associations themselves, whose representatives are members of public councils only to improve their image or the reputation of their public associations, but their activities in the councils are completed already at the stage of entry" (Vikhliaiev, 2013).

This assessment vividly illustrates the current state of affairs: although Ukraine hosts a wide array of public organizations, their actual (as opposed to nominal) role in political life remains questionable.

The website of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine contains the composition of the Council of Heads of Executive Authorities. It should be noted that it was approved back in 2020. According to the list, this Council includes 77 people, either state secretaries or heads of public councils under regional state administrations. However, the lion's share of the heads are also members of public organizations, for example: "Living Planet", "Community Development" (Lviv region), "Agrarian Union of Ukraine" (Kherson region), "Civil Rights Protection", "Union of Entrepreneurs of Transcarpathia", "Business-Volyn", "Berehynia" (Kherson region), "Public Control", "Ukrainian Prism", "Intellectual Ukraine", "Union of Women of Kyiv Region", "Ternopil Maidan-2004", "Union of Armenians of Ukraine" (Kirovohrad region), "Veteran Brotherhood", "Center for Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption", etc. (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020).

The list includes both public organizations at national and local levels. This list raises many questions, in particular: based on what criteria is this list formed? After all, firstly, not all regions of Ukraine are represented, secondly, one of the largest regions of Ukraine (both in terms of population, entrepreneurship, budget revenues, and defense capability) is represented by the "MGO Kodak Army Zaporizhzhia". Thirdly, the list of areas of activity includes construction, accounting, television, furniture, audit, fire safety, endocrinology, energy, fish production, etc. Not all of these areas are relevant for Ukraine today, neither at the national nor at the local level. There are several veteran organizations on the list, two women's, two environmental, one child's sports, and no youth organizations. There is a lack of a powerful type of public organizations that have real influence today – volunteer organizations. Perhaps the selection criterion is their effective activity. To answer this question, it is necessary to analyze public information about these organizations. The fewest questions are for: "Ukrainian Prism", which deals with various aspects of Ukraine's foreign policy (Ukrainska pryzma, 2024); The Center for Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption, which aims to introduce "effective justice" and "inevitability of punishment" in Ukraine (Tsentr zapobihannia koruptsii, 2024); the NGO "Living Planet", which deals with environmental issues, in particular, national standards for industrial parks, climate change issues at the UN level, energy efficiency, etc. (Facebook, 2024a) and some others, which are either international or national. However, this does not apply, for example, to "Civil Rights Protection", since this officially registered NGO does not have a website, and there are no pages on social networks. The situation is similar with regional organizations. For example, "Ternopil Maidan-2004" is registered as a public organization, but there is no information about its activities in public access. Therefore, publicity, activity or effectiveness of activities is not selection criteria. Thus, the question of criteria remains open.

It should be noted that volunteer public organizations and individual activists were among the most active participants in the Revolution of Dignity. Since 2014, they have been helping the Ukrainian army in its resistance to Russian aggression. For example, "Euromaidan SOS" united human rights defenders, public activists, lawyers to "provide legal assistance to the injured participants of Euromaidan" (Tiahnyriadno, 2020). Today, in the conditions of a full-scale invasion, the organization sets the goal of "carrying out a democratic transformation of the country and surviving the war with Russia" (Tiahnyriadno, 2020). In Ukraine today, there is a powerful volunteer movement, which consists of a number of public organizations, charitable foundations, and individual activists. The main purpose of their existence is to resist Russian aggression. They attract billions of hryvnias to help the Ukrainian army and communicate with representatives of state bodies. For example, the S. Prytula's Foundation attracted "about 8.5 million transactions in 2.5 years!" (Removska, 2024). In 2022, the Community Development Centre conducted a sociological survey of public activists on the topic of their activities during the war. The question about further prospects for activity (in the post-war period) is indicative: "Most organizations, regardless of the geography of their activities, note a change in the direction of their activities towards the reconstruction and restoration of post-war Ukraine, strengthening the public sector. Organizations will be forced to reorient the current war and pre-war strategy of the organization to the post-war one" (Tsentr rozvytku hromad, 2022).

However, the biggest problem for such organizations will be the reorientation of their activities after the end of the war. S. Prytula, in one of his numerous interviews, noted that one of the biggest problems is corruption (Removska, 2024). Therefore, the main efforts in the post-war period should be focused on helping

to overcome it through the active participation of the public sector in this process, in particular, public organizations. It is such organizations that should be actively included in political life and involved in the process of making managerial decisions.

Conclusions

Public organizations are undoubtedly an important part of the public and political life of a democratic country. They are the ones who can mobilize broad segments of the population to address socially significant issues. It is important to note that in Western scholarly discourse, the term “non-governmental organization” (NGO) is more commonly used, whereas Ukrainian academic literature typically employs the term “public organization.” There is also a difference in the role of these organizations in the USA, Western Europe, and Ukraine. In the first case, non-governmental organizations are powerful players that have real leverage over managerial decision-making. However, in today’s Ukrainian realities, unfortunately, they only have potential. To effectively represent their interests, public organizations are forced to cooperate with political parties or join public councils under executive bodies. Thus, they lose both self-government and non-governmental character. In addition, the criteria by which these organizations are selected for public councils are unclear. Currently, there are thousands of various public organizations in Ukraine, but they do not have a real impact on the political life of our country. However, this is exactly the case when foreign experience, active cooperation with powerful international organizations, studying the experience of foreign non-governmental public organizations, and their tools of influence on public and political life can be useful.

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