Радевкін М., курсант ННІ № 1 Національної академії внутрішніх справ Консультант з мови: ГрабовськаН. А.

THE PROBLEM WITH UKRAINIAN POLICE REFORM

Over the past year, thousands of newly recruited police officers have taken to the streets of Kiev, Odessa, Lviv, and other cities across Ukraine. In contrast to their predecessors in the old, postSoviet militsia, these newcomers are polite, well-trained, and physically fit. Perhaps most importantly, they refuse to take bribes. Many of the new recruits sympathized with the 2013-2014 Euromaidan demonstrations that overthrew the corrupt political order of former President Yanukovych, and they are genuinely interested in building a new, more democratic Ukraine. Over a quarter of the new police force consists of women — one of the highest rates in the

world. The new units enjoy high approval ratings in Kiev and are regarded as a symbol of a "civil" state.

International experts are thrilled, too. They tout the new patrol police as one of the brightest rays of hope in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. It's been described as a "force for change" and even the "cops who would save a country." It's no wonder the foreigners are happy — much of the new police reform has been funded through the U.S. State Department' s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), with additional help from Canada and Japan.

What such an approach tends to miss is that the police aren't responsible only to people at the top. Police forces should also answer to the people they serve. For this reason, successful police reform depends on forging a consensus between the state and society on how and when the state may employ violence: consider, for example, the ongoing discussion in the United States on the relationship between the police and African-American communities. That debate is taking place in the wider democratic context of free media, frequent and fair elections, and impartial courts.

But Ukraine and other countries with a long history of authoritarianism lack such venues for an effective state-society dialogue. As in other post-Soviet states, Ukraine's Interior Ministry (which oversees the police) was designed to support government policies, to punish dissent, and to demonstrate the government's reach across the country. Despite several rounds of competitive elections, a diverse civil society, and numerous media outlets, Ukrainian officials continued to use the police to coerce the opposition right up until the Euromaidan uprising. International donors looking for quick results risk inadvertently supporting, or even strengthening, the state's punitive apparatus, without ensuring more active participation of the citizenry in overseeing the police.

To date, Ukraine's new police have been focused on a myriad of petty matters: smoking in public places, homeless people sleeping in tourist areas, and cars parking around bus stops. But the new policing model in Ukrainian cities does not explain how bigger and more violent crimes are prevented through policing small things. Meanwhile, top-level police offers, accustomed to deploying excessive

force against peaceful demonstrations or operating criminal syndicates, remain unchallenged and unreformed. And while a shiny new police force might challenge small-scale corruption, there has still been no serious anti-corruption drive from the top.

Even more worrisome are the Interior Ministry's plans to organize a new SWAT force supported by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Border Patrol, and the State Department's Bureau for Narcotics and Law Enforcement. In a repeat of the patrol police project, only a closed circle of ministry officials and U.S. donors are involved in designing the new force, which is supposed to replace former special operations police forces such as "Berkut," infamous for its deadly violence against Euromaidan demonstrators. Activists worry that adopting the U.S. model for a militarized police force will allow Ukraine's leaders to use brutal force against antigovernment demonstrations in the future. A better fit might be found in neighboring Poland and the Czech Republic, where military police units are assigned exclusively to the armed forces or to carry out counterterrorism missions.

Since the ouster of Yanukovych, Ukraine has experienced an inflow of former government officials from Georgia, including former president Mikheil Saakashvili. Inspired by the reforms they carried out at home, these officials have sought to export their experience to Ukraine. The Georgian police reform eradicated petty corruption and gained international praise for its dramatic break with a repressive past.

Unfortunately, the methods used to direct top-down reform in Saakashvili's Georgia are now being replicated in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Only a narrow group of people are interacting with the external donors and making key decisions. Civil society activists are only invited to oversee procedures already in place, as opposed to generating ideas for the reform's direction. The vision of change is transmitted directly from the deputy-minister level to specific projects on the ground, bypassing public discussion.

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