

# DEFENCE REFORM: CERTAIN ACHIEVEMENTS, UNCERTAIN FUTURE<sup>1</sup>



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The process of security sector development and reform has been carried on for almost two decades in Ukraine – since 1991, the first year of modern independence. A lot of work has been done. There are different opinions about the level of success achieved by Ukraine in its endeavour to develop a democratic, cost-effective and efficient system for protecting the country’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as a system providing reliable security for its citizens. At the same time, there is a general understanding that this work still has a long way to go. The Ukrainian security sector needs to be reformed – and not just because the world is changing.

The classic and simple definition for “reform” is “making changes for improvement”. So, a reform must be a project of implementing changes with the beginning and end, with clear goals and objectives, and within a defined budget. Having in mind the duration, scale and complexity of changing the armed forces, for instance, it is naïve to expect full satisfaction even if everything is done according to an initial plan. Because again – the environment is changing too fast. However, there must be significant and measurable improvement at the end of each stage.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the progress made in Ukraine’s defence reform and in the area of developing democratic civilian control. It is mainly focused on the Armed Forces reform as one of the most significant and costly, despite the well-known fact that the reforms of other numerous security structures are even more problematic and their effectiveness are even more significant for both national and human security of the citizens.

## History or the Background of Problems

The whole process of development of the Ukrainian Armed Forces is officially divided into four stages: Stage One (1991-1996) – laying down the basics; Stage Two (1997-2000) – building and development; Stage Three (2000-2005) – reform and development; Stage Four (2006 - present) – development.

Stage One was characterised by simultaneously establishing the administrative control structure, development of the legislative base, and transformation and downsizing of the Armed Forces. On 24 August 1991, Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) subordinated

“all military forces located on the Republic’s territory” and established a legal basis for the creation of the Ministry of Defence and the national armed forces.<sup>1</sup> The first reform efforts, i.e. transformation of the Soviet Army’s fragment, basically came to downsizing without a systemic approach and a clear strategic vision of the national force model. The scale of downsizing was unprecedented: 410,000 personnel were discharged and 3,500 military units and structures were closed in the period of the first five years.<sup>3</sup> It was widely acknowledged later that the mistakes made during the first stage significantly complicated subsequent reforms.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the author’s presentation delivered at the SIPRI Conference “Ukraine’s integration into European security cooperation”, Stockholm, 21-22 June 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The Resolution “On Military Formation in Ukraine” No.1431 of August 24, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> History – MoD of Ukraine official web site, [www.mil.gov.ua](http://www.mil.gov.ua).



Stage Two could be described as the beginning of a systemic process of developing national armed forces. It started with the approval of the State Programme of Building and Development of the Armed Forces until 2005. During this stage (1997-2000) significant improvement was made in the legislation and regulations providing an opportunity to implement the Programme. At the same time, for a number of reasons, above all, of political, financial and methodological nature the Programme became outdated well before its completion. In 2000 it was modified into the State Programme of Building and Development of the Armed Forces for the period until 2005.

Because of the lack of strategic vision and experience, the process of transformation during these two stages was mostly of an evolutionary nature. As Volodymyr Horbulin, the Ukrainian security guru, says:

*“Instead of focusing their efforts on developing a new framework for the army, Ukrainian military insisted on preservation of the inherited according to the CFE Treaty (Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe) four thousand battle tanks, over one thousand aircraft, one thousand artillery system and so on. Our military kept talking about the readiness of the Ukrainian forces to defend the whole perimeter of state borders until the beginning of the new millennium... Because of the artificially overblown organisational and personnel structure the army in fact was inapt for a reform for many years... The real administrative action on reform began only in the years of 2002-2003”.*<sup>4</sup>

Stage Three was carried out under the renewed State Programme with the main objective to develop “optimal in strength, mobile, well armed, adequately supplied and trained forces capable of performing their mission”. In December 2005 the Defence Ministry’s Board giving an assessment of its implementation came to the conclusion that “the main measures had, on the whole, been carried on, thereby creating sufficient foundation for the next stage of military reform”.<sup>5</sup> To put it simply – *the main result of the reform was the creation of a basis for reform.*

Despite the fact of partial satisfaction with the results, it should be acknowledged that the “creating sufficient foundation” should be seen as a significant progress. Over the time passed a sound security and defence legislative base was created. Civilian **democratic** control over the security sector has been increasingly developing – from the viewpoint of its non-existence at the beginning. Ukraine acquired necessary experience from the lessons learned and due to fruitful international cooperation. NATO has been permanently providing expert advice, consultations and various forms of support for the

security sector reform. Since 1998, the key framework for all these activities has been the NATO-Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform. Ukrainian military has been actively participating in international peacekeeping operations and joint military exercises with its western partners. Almost 2,000 Ukrainian officers and NCOs went through different programmes of international military education and training, and about 1000 civil servants from different security structures have been trained in the framework of the NATO-sponsored Professional Development Programme.

### Current State and Way Ahead

Stage Four (2006 - present) has been performed under the State Programme of Development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for 2006-2011 (hereinafter – Programme 2006-11). Among its main distinctive features were the set of initial data for mid-term planning, including, first of all, the level of available resources forecast. For the first time the general objectives of “protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity” were interpreted into a list of realistic scenarios with “clearly set timeframes for mission training and the required capabilities”. The Programme 2006-11 was seen as “realistic from the viewpoint of the existing and potential threats, the missions of the Armed Forces, and resource capabilities of the State”.<sup>6</sup>

Among other novelties, the Programme 2006-11 set new terms for transition to contractual manning – 2010 instead of 2015. Most of the measures envisaged by the State Programme of Transition<sup>7</sup> (44 out of 47) were to be implemented by the end of 2010, i.e., on the condition of proper and timely funding, the prospects of successful transition to an all-volunteer force looked quite realistic.<sup>8</sup>

After the first two years of implementation the MoD reported “in-depth systematic changes aimed at... creation of modern armed forces in Ukraine, adapted to new security challenges and ready for designated missions and participation in international military cooperation”.<sup>9</sup> But, in February 2010 the MOD had to admit that “due to objective reasons fulfilling key activities under the State Programme 2006-11 slowed throughout the year. However, the expansion of destructive processes in the Forces was avoided and the potential for continuation of reform in the future has been retained”.<sup>10</sup> So, it seems that even a well-developed, well-detailed and well-started Programme does not secure success.

Why it is so? Why has the current Programme produced limited results, and in some domains – actually failed? Despite its significant achievements

<sup>4</sup> Horbulin V. With no right for repentance (*in Russian*). – Kharkiv, 2009, p.100-101.

<sup>5</sup> White Book 2005, Defence Policy of Ukraine. – Kyiv 2006, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp.22-23.

<sup>7</sup> State Programme of Transition of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Manning with Contracted Servicemen, approved on April 17, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> For more detail see: Professionalisation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: Quo Vadis? Razumkov Centre analytical report. – National Security & Defence, 2008, No.5, pp.2-51.

<sup>9</sup> White Book 2007, Defence Policy of Ukraine. – Kyiv, 2008, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> White Book 2009, Armed Forces of Ukraine. – Kyiv, 2010, p.9.



during 2005-2006, defence reform has slowed down, and in some areas such as manning, combat training, modernisation of weapons and equipment, prestige of military service etc., many signs of degradation have become evident. The answer is obvious: mainly the financial constraints combined with other factors made that reform a hostage to the same problems that disrupted all the previous reform efforts.

Those main factors that hinder the successful implementation of reform are still the same. They are, *first of all*, of political nature, i.e. the secondary importance of defence issues for the government and the lack of strong political will, commitment and ownership to implement reforms at the highest level. *Second*, it is the ineffective strategic planning and management mechanisms, poor intragovernmental coordination that does not enable a priority list to concentrate resources in order to achieve the most important goals and subsequent open, honest and transparent reporting of results. And *last*, as a factor and a consequence of the first two, is the ineffective use of human and financial resources, inadequate funding and the ineffective and inefficient use of limited budget funds.

This year, 2010, is another essential stage for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) is to be completed before the end of the year. This SDR is expected to provide clear answers to a number of critical questions such as:

- What is the assessment of the strategic environment and its trends up to 2025?
- What are the future challenges and treats to national security?
- What are the national interests to be protected in the area of security and defence?
- What measures should be taken to protect national interests? and
- What security and defence capabilities are needed to protect national interests?

By answering these questions the SDR should provide a comprehensible strategy for future development of the entire security sector and each security structure. The next step is to determine: a structure, composition, personnel number, weapon and equipments needed for the security sector to perform its new missions. It is expected that the next step will be the development of the State Programme for Defence Reform for 2011-2016.

There are at least two grave reasons to be pessimistic about the real value of the SDR outcome.

*First*, the new Ukrainian government has recently made a critical amendment to the country's foreign and security policy course. Most of work under the SDR was done when Ukraine was going to join a collective

security system. It should be noticed, that the first Defence Review was conducted in 2003-2004 with support of the NATO International Secretariat and allied countries. As a result, the Strategic Defence Bulletin up to 2015 was published and the new Military Doctrine was approved in 2004. Right after the 2005 presidential election an ultimate goal of NATO membership was introduced in the Doctrine and Euro-Atlantic integration was a basis for the next five years of military reform. So, there may be a big challenge in how the performed changes will fit in the new strategic vision of the country's political leadership. It seems that most of the SDR's assessments and conclusions need significant correction.

*Second*, one of the main obstacles on the way of the efficient execution and timely completion of the SDR remains an absence of economic forecast data. The recent information that the Finance Ministry prepared a draft resolution "On Prognostic Indicators of Budget Allocations for Defence Needs for the Period up to 2023" provides even less ground for optimism. According to the draft the guaranteed Defence Budget (from the Primary Fund) will "increase" from UAH 9.6 bln. (\$1.2 bln.) in 2011 to UAH 15.9 bln. in 2023. In fact this will be a conservation of the existing under-funding for the next dozen of years. If the draft becomes a document then the Ukrainian military should disregard any development. International practice suggests that a good-quality defence budget should be distributed as follows: 50% – for maintenance (personnel and running cost) and another 50% – for force training, armament and infrastructure development. It was never the case for the Ukrainian military. In 2009, 84% of the Defence Budget was "eaten away" and the rest: 9% – for training, and 7% – for development.<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to remember that in the 2004 Defence Bulletin a significant reduction of troops and armaments was envisaged. According to the document the total strength of the Armed Forces was established up to 105,000 by the end of 2009.<sup>12</sup> Later this decision was revised several times towards an increase and now the total strength is almost 200,000 including 50,000 civilians, and the total number of the military is to be increased by 9,000 at the expense of civil servants by the end of 2010.<sup>13</sup>

Now, here is the most important question, which disturbs many Ukrainian experts: how can the Armed Forces be developed under such circumstances?<sup>14</sup> There are two or three possible options. The first one is to double a defence budget, which is hardly possible especially in a time of economic crisis. The second option is to make a 50% reduction in personnel, which is also very costly in both financial and human terms. The third, – the most likely option – is not to change anything and to create another Programme, which will definitely end up with the same results as predecessors. It looks like a "Catch-22" situation.

<sup>11</sup> More detail see: Ye. Shelest's comments. – Defence Bulletin of the Centre for Military and Defence Policy, 2010, No.5, p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Ukraine's Strategic Defence Bulletin until 2015. – Kyiv, 2004, p.54.

<sup>13</sup> White Book 2009..., p.79.

<sup>14</sup> For example: Ye. Shelest, "Armed Forces need realistic priorities and resources" in this issue.



Now, it is time for the new government to show that they are able – if they really have the will – to find a real solution of such a complex and important issue for the country.

### Civilian Control: a Right to Oversight without Responsibility

Ukraine has made considerable progress in establishing civilian democratic control over the security sector. However, it should be noticed that the progress is relative in comparison to the initial state of the early 1990s. As was mentioned above, there is a solid legislation base, providing the possibility for exercising civil democratic control in accordance with international requirements and the best democratic practice. The Ukrainian security sector, in general, has become more open to citizens and international partners. Formally the security structures are depoliticised and are object to parliamentary and civil society's oversight. There is positive cooperation between civil society and the security sector in different frameworks, including Public Boards at ministries and state agencies. However, the state of affairs is still far from the democratic standards in this domain.

Back in 2000, the Razumkov Centre in its study made an assessment of the effectiveness of democratic civilian control in Ukraine on five basic criteria. These criteria include not only the rights of civilians to obtain information, inspect, but also their responsibility for “defining the functions and tasks of the security structures; for creating the regulatory and legal grounds for their activities; for setting concrete dimensions of the military formations' structure and numerical strength; for supplying them with necessary resources; for drafting long-term development programmes (in compliance with the country's needs and resources); and for insuring the social and legal protection of servicemen and their families, etc”.<sup>15</sup> The main conclusion of the study was: “Despite some evident successes, Ukraine has not yet built a reliable system of civilian control over military sector, that would provide clear delimitation of the powers and responsibilities between the civilians and the military. The situation with civilian control... cannot be assumed satisfactory, since one of its fundamental principles – the responsibility of civilians for the effectiveness of security structures – has been violated”.<sup>16</sup> Now, ten years after, it must be stated that there has been little change to report.

### Conclusions

To conclude, Ukrainian defence reform may be characterised in Ukrainian as *Dovhobud*, a “long lasting, protracted construction”. This has been an endless enterprise to build “modern professional armed

forces” – permanently under-funded, but still costly. Moreover, for at least the first 10 years the construction (or reconstruction) sometimes was carried without any project and when there was one it appeared later to be wrong.

There have been some achievements and a lot of problems during almost the two decades of existence and development of the Armed Forces. Trying to evaluate the overall outcome **it needs to be admitted openly and honestly that the reform has been a failure so far**. In the White Book 2009, the then acting Minister of Defence said: “the Armed Forces is able to fulfil its main constitutional task to defend the State sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the state borders of Ukraine”.<sup>17</sup> A few months later, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief has stated that “the Ukrainian Armed Forces are restrictedly ready to fulfil their assigned mission”.<sup>18</sup> Did this surprise any security expert or any Ukrainian man or woman in uniform? Perhaps, it did not. But it is extremely important for many experts, soldiers and other taxpayers to know where exactly the indicator of the forces' readiness is – on the 10-point scale between “unable” and “fully ready”.

Now it is time for the new Ukrainian President, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, to understand at least three fundamental principles of civilian democratic control: firstly, subordination of the military to civilian authorities; secondly, civilians' responsibility for the effectiveness of security structures; and, thirdly, accountability of civilian authorities and military to civil society.

The main factors of successful reform and development of the security sector remain:

- strong political will, commitment and ownership at the highest level;
- effective management and intragovernmental coordination;
- personal accountability and responsibility at all levels; and
- open, honest and transparent reporting of results, engaging civil society.

Reforms should be accompanied by constant analytical support for the development and implementation of programmes and plans. Finally, ambition should match the resources available and in case of failure of an approved State Programme – those who did not provide resources, did not secure their efficient use or failed to assure an achievement of its objectives – should bear inevitable responsibility. ■

<sup>15</sup> For more detail see: Democratic Civilian Control over the Military in Ukraine: the Path from Form to Substance, Razumkov Centre analytical report. – *National Security & Defence*, 2000, No.11, pp.2-45.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>17</sup> White Book 2009... p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Address by the President of Ukraine to Ukrainian People of June 3, 2010. – Official Web-site of the President of Ukraine, [www.president.gov.ua/en/news/17307.html](http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/17307.html)