



Challenges of the Ukrainian Mobilization

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Executive Summary

Two years into the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine is facing an acute manpower shortage. Although it tried to reform its mobilization system on the eve of the war, the changes had not been sufficient and had not been implemented in time to meet the wartime mobilization needs. While a large share of Ukrainian males liable for military service understand that mobilization is necessary, they believe that it needs to be just and better organized. Among things that deter people from going to the army are fears of the lack of proper training and ending up under a bad commander.

To improve the situation, Ukraine is taking a wide range of measures which include punishing corrupt mobilization officials, digitalizing military record keeping, introducing professional recruitment, making amendments to the mobilization law, and trying to balance its economic and military needs. While the process is generally democratic and there is an open discussion, Ukraine's institutional weakness and the lack of clear leadership on the part of the country's top officials make it disorderly and slow. This also opens up a window of opportunity for the Russian propaganda that has been active since as early as 2014 trying to undermine Ukraine's willingness to fight.

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine swelled the Ukrainian Armed Forces from 246,000 personnel in February 2021 to approximately 700,000 in October 2022.¹ With an influx of the highly motivated volunteers into its military, Ukraine was able to liberate 45 per cent of the territory previously captured by Russia. As the war continues, Ukraine must mobilize more people to replenish its losses and prepare the army for another counteroffensive. The government also needs to provide those who have spent two years at the frontline with some much-needed respite. The country's mobilization infrastructure is inadequate for these tasks. A general mobilization is also believed to be unpopular with Ukrainians, making the issue sensitive, as President Zelenskyi has acknowledged. This report investigates how Ukraine is responding to these challenges.

¹ «Як змінювалася чисельність Збройних Сил України», *Слово і діло*, 14 жовтня, 2022, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2022/10/14/infografika/bezpeka/yak-zminyuvalasya-chyselnist-zbrojnyx-syl-ukrayiny>.

Mobilization Runs Into Problems

The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi's decree on general mobilization has been in force since 24 February 2022. In the initial stages of the full-scale invasion, men and women lined up outside conscription offices ready to join in the defence of their country against Russia's aggression. A year later, the lines were gone, and news was appearing here and there of personnel shortages. In August 2023, the then Defence Minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, was quoted as saying that no additional mobilization was necessary – it was only that mobilization work needed to be streamlined. In November 2023, however, the problem of manpower shortages was openly acknowledged by Ukrainian officials. Head of Sumy Oblast Military Administration Volodymyr Artyukh, for example, said that the city of Sumy had supplied only 8 per cent of the planned number of personnel. In Zaporizhzhya Oblast, the officially published number was at 40 per cent.

In addition, the international press has reported on the widespread practice of draft dodging, which is not unusual for a country at war. According to the BBC, nearly 20,000 Ukrainian men illegally fled Ukraine between February 2022 and 31 August 2023. Some had swum a dangerous river to get to neighbouring Romania. A similar number of people had not managed to escape. Bribing your way out of military service was also a common solution.² Prosecutions of draft dodgers have also increased in number. In the first three months of 2023, law enforcement agencies registered 1,455 new cases against draft dodgers, equivalent to 60 per cent of all similar cases in the whole of the previous year.³ By February 2024, there had been over 9,400 investigations and 2,600 indictments sent to court.⁴

The Territorial Recruitment Centres and Social Support Centres (TRCs and SSCs) that replaced the Soviet legacy military commissariats in late 2022 were meant to improve recordkeeping, make mobilization more efficient, ensure transparency and enhance the quality of administrative services provided to citizens. However, too little time had passed since the start of the invasion for the reform to take root. In the spring of 2023, several scandals arose involving violence and corruption in the TRCs. The most notorious of these involved Yevhen Borysov, head of the Odesa Regional TRC, acquiring a villa on the coast of Marbella for \$4.35 million, along with an office in the Spanish resort town and an expensive car. Several videos of TRC personnel mistreating the mobilized went viral on the internet.

Demobilization of active military personnel has been delayed indefinitely. The President's general mobilization decree, issued on 24 February 2022, states that release to the reserve will occur “only after official announcement of demobilization in accordance with the established procedure”. According to the current law, in wartime, military personnel are subject to demobilization on reaching the age of 60, based on their health and a decision of the military medical commission, or due to a court sentence. Ukraine's law “On Training and Mobilization” was adopted in 1993 when the country's institutions were just being formed. The numerous amendments made since have failed to address many existing issues.

2 Oana Marocico and Calvin Brown, “Swimming rivers and faking illness to escape Ukraine's draft”, *BBC*, 17 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67120904>.

3 Ігор Бурдига, «Мобілізація в Україні: ухилення без покарання», *DW*, 18 квітня 2023, <https://www.dw.com/uk/mobilizacia-v-ukraini-uhilanna-bez-pokaranna/a-65349201>

4 Поліція розслідує близько 9400 справ за фактом ухилення від мобілізації», *Укрінформ*, 13 лютого, 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3826494-policia-rozslidue-blizko-9400-sprav-za-faktom-uhilenna-vid-mobilizacii.html>

A related issue is that Ukraine's armed forces personnel are reported to be among the oldest in the world, with an average age of 43 in November 2023 – 10 years older than in March 2022.⁵ The army needs younger personnel as they are usually in better physical shape and better able to perform combat duties.

Response and Controversies

The issue of mobilization became a subject of increasing interest at the highest level in mid-2023. At the 27 July meeting of the Chief Commander's Staff, President Zelenskyi announced a comprehensive review of the work of the TRCs. On 11 August, he said that an inspection had found "Illicit enrichment, legalization of unlawfully obtained funds, wrongful gain, and illegal transportation of conscripts across borders" by the TRCs. In addition, the way military medical commissions treated people was "simply amoral". Zelenskyi announced that he had decided to dismiss all the regional TRC heads and replace them with those "who know what war is".⁶ He promised that those guilty of wrongdoing would be held accountable without exception. Although they looked decisive, these measures had not been thought through. Consequently, the positions of military commissars were still being filled at the end of October 2023, which significantly stalled the mobilization process.⁷ In some cases, newly appointed replacements had to be dismissed almost immediately.

On 10 October 2023, the State Bureau of Investigations (SBI) said that it was investigating 260 criminal cases involving the TRCs and military medical commissions. At that time, 21 indictments had been sent to court, involving 35 individuals, and the SBI had officially charged 58 individuals in connection with these cases.⁸ Nonetheless, issues persist regarding the work of the TRCs. On 29 January, Defence Minister Rustem Umerov stated that unplanned inspections of regional TRCs had documented many violations and: "The Ministry of Defence team is working to systematically address all shortcomings. Grateful to the SBU, DBR, and GPU for coordinated cooperation and professional work".

Legislative Remedies

On 19 December 2023, President Zelenskyi told journalists at a press conference that the Ukrainian military had identified a need to mobilize an additional 450–500,000 troops. According to Zelenskyi, that would entail expenditure of 500 billion hryvnias (more than US\$13 billion).⁹ However, the military had failed to provide him with any details on the demobilization and transfers, as well as several other issues. Zelenskyi asked for a more

5 Erin Snodgrass, "The Average Age of Ukrainian Soldier Is 43 Amid Personal Problems", *Business Insider*, 7 November 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/average-age-ukrainian-soldier-43-amid-personnel-problems-2023-11?r=US&IR=T>.

6 «Керувати системою ТЦК мають люди, що таке війна – звернення Володимира Зеленського, *Президент України*, 11 серпня, 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/keruvati-sistemoyu-tck-mayut-lyudi-yaki-tochno-znayut-sho-ta-84825>

7 «У ТЦК триває процес призначення воєнкомів – речник Сухопутних військ ЗСУ, *Укрінформ*, 31 жовтня, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3780937-u-tck-trivae-proces-priznacenna-voenkomiv-recnik-suhoputnih-vijsk-zsu.html>.

8 «ДБР розслідує 260 кримінальних проваджень за фактами порушень у військкоматах та ВЛК», Telegram, 10 October, 2023, <https://t.me/DBRgovua/3895>

9 Роман Романюк і Роман Кравець, «Хто і кого: Що відбувається із законом про мобілізацію, реєстри та депутати», *Українська правда*, 18 січня, 2024, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/01/18/7437724/>.

systemic approach to the issue,¹⁰ and tasked Umerov and Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi with devising a mobilization plan.¹¹

On 25 December, a first version of draft of the law on mobilization (No. 10378) from the Cabinet of Ministers was introduced into the Verkhovna Rada. The draft law made local TRCs organised by village and city councils responsible for carrying out the mobilization. The draft law also significantly expanded eligibility for conscription not only by age, from 27 to 25 years,¹² but also to people with less severe disabilities and by calling up people who had left the country. It also proposed requiring Ukrainian men abroad to have up-to-date military registration, which had to be obtained from draft offices.

To deal with the increasing problem of draft dodging, the draft law proposed new restrictions on travelling abroad, driving, buying or selling certain types of property, credit loan agreements, and state benefits or services.¹³ (Martial Law already prohibits men aged between 18 and 60 from leaving the country except under special circumstances.). Penalties would be applied unilaterally by the TRCs. Furthermore, draft offices would be able to issue online call-ups to people by email or on other electronic platforms. These measures would make it harder to evade the draft offices, which currently issue call-up papers to civilians in the street or send them to people's last known home address.¹⁴

The draft law on mobilization immediately drew criticism from various institutions, as well as from the public and politicians in Ukraine, for including provisions that violated the constitution and increased risks of corruption. Anastasiya Radina, head of the Verkhovna Rada's Anti-Corruption Committee, highlighted the risks of local authorities being overly arbitrary in their decision making. Dmytro Lubinets, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that the regulations on conscription of people with disabilities, the involvement of the military in restricting people's rights and especially granting the authorities the right to restrict people from using their property are direct violations of Ukraine's Constitution. In addition, according to the constitution, powers of arrest or to prevent travel, or to close people's bank accounts should require a decision by the courts not a decision by the military.¹⁵

10 «Військові запропонували мобілізувати додатково 450-500 тисяч людей - Зеленський, *Укрінформ*, 19 грудня, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3802249-vijskovi-zaproponuvali-mobilizuvati-dodatkov-450500-tisac-ludej-zelenskij.html>

11 «Зеленський доручив наступного тижня підготувати комплексний план щодо мобілізації в Україні», *Укрінформ*, 24 листопада, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3791350-zelenskij-doruciv-pidgotuvati-kompleksnij-plan-sodo-mobilizacii-v-ukraini.html>.

12 An attempt to lower mobilization age was made in May 2023, when bill No. 9281 was registered in the Ukrainian parliament. It proposed to reduce the upper age limit for mobilization from 27 to 25 years. A significant number of men of conscription age could not be mobilized because they have not yet reached the age of 27 and do not have the status of "reservist" or "military duty bearer." Men aged 18 to 27 could be mobilized only as volunteers and the Ukrainian military needed a younger demographic. On May 30, 2023, the law was adopted by the Rada and on June 6 it was submitted for the President's signature. However, since then, the law approved by the parliament has not been signed by Volodymyr Zelenskyi.

13 Maryna Shashkova, "Ukraine Rebuffs Mobilization Bill – Here's Why It's So Controversial", *Kyiv Post*, 12 January 2024, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/26623>.

14 Yulia Dysa, "Explainer: Ukraine considers changing mobilisation rules as war with Russia drags on, *Reuters*, 5 January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-considers-changing-mobilisation-rules-war-with-russia-drags-2024-01-04/>.

15 «Катакомбное состояние. Новая мобилизация в Украине», *Радио Свобода*, 28 декабря 2023, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/katakombnoe-sostoyanie-novaya-mobilizatsiya-v-ukraine/32751171.html>.

After lawmakers and experts raised concerns, on 11 January 2024 the Cabinet decided to withdraw the draft law and prepare a new one. The new draft (10449, registered in parliament on 30 January) resolved some of the above issues but remains controversial. For example, TRCs must go to court to take action against draft dodgers and cannot make such decisions unilaterally, which resolves one of the human rights concerns related to the previous bill. However, this procedure risks courts being overwhelmed by TRC cases. The issue of electronic summonses still raises concerns. There is no law obliging Ukrainian citizens to own electronic devices or to be connected to the internet. Critics question whether the government should be able to punish those who do not receive an electronic mobilization notice as draft dodgers.

European Solidarity MP Iryna Fryz argues that draft bill fails to address the issue of demobilization. Although it states that personnel can be demobilized after 36 months of uninterrupted service, Fryz believes the provision is unfair. She argues that 36 months on the frontline is a totally different experience from 36 months somewhere at the rear. In her opinion, a day on the frontline should count as two or even three days in the rear. In addition, the demobilization procedure states that the decision of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief determines the exact date of demobilization, which could lead to demobilization decisions being indefinitely postponed.

Oleksandr Zavitnevych, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, Defence and Intelligence, and a member of the Servant of the People party, criticized the new government draft for lacking provisions on rotation, even though the issue had been discussed extensively. Zavitnevych noted that parliamentarians will probably propose such provisions when the law is debated. He also expressed his opposition to mobilizing convicts, citing the experience of the Soviet Union in the 1950s when former prisoners who had served their sentences joined the Soviet Armed Forces, leading to *dedovshchina* (violent hazing). This idea, however, is supported by the Justice Ministry.

The new draft passed its first reading in the Ukrainian parliament on 7 February amid continuing criticism. Head of Servant of the People David Arakhamia has stated that the Verkhovna Rada would work on amendments before the second reading to balance the interests of the military command, business and citizens. It is difficult to predict when the law will receive final approval as over 4000 amendments have been submitted to the draft before its second reading. The Verkhovna Rada National Security, Defence and Intelligence Committee hopes to finish working on the amendments before 20 March. The law can then be voted on and finalized for the President's signature. The President then has 15 days to sign it and the law stipulates a further month for it to enter into force. However, although technically, the president is supposed to sign the law within 15 days, there is no guarantee he will actually do it.

A bill reducing the age of mobilization from 27 to 25 was passed on 30 May 2023, but President Zelenskyi has not yet signed it. In addition, bill No. 11012 "On amending certain legislative acts of Ukraine regarding the motivation for military service" was introduced to parliament on 13 February by a group of parliamentarians. The bill calls for enhanced obligatory military training and ensuring that those who fail to provide it are held to account. The bill is yet to be reviewed by the National Security, Defence and Intelligence Committee.

Government Communications and Russian Propaganda Efforts

Despite the urgency of the matter, Ukrainian government officials are reluctant to talk to the media about issues related to mobilization. In late December 2023, Ukrainian media outlets reported that the pro-government majority party Servant of the People had been advised not to comment on the draft law on mobilization and to refer journalists to the military. President Zelenskyi when asked about the draft currently being considered by the Verkhovna Rada said that this was something the Rada should work on. Liga.net journalists working on a podcast on the issue had to postpone it many times because they could not find a government spokesperson willing to comment. In the end, the podcast discussed the need to mobilize with three Ukrainian veterans: two men and one woman.

Against this backdrop, the goal of Russian propaganda is to discourage Ukrainians from going to the front. Although active since early 2014, this propaganda significantly intensified after April 2022, following Russia's withdrawal from the north of Ukraine. According to a Ukrainian media watchdog, Detector Media,¹⁶ key Russian anti-mobilization messages are meant to scare potential conscripts by claiming that people are sent to the frontline without training and equipment, and that military commissariats "hunt people in the streets". While there have been individual cases of conscripts being mistreated or not properly trained, the propaganda blows these out of proportion to produce a stronger psychological effect.

Russian propagandists also seek to divide Ukrainian society by claiming that only specific social groups, such as Russian speakers or Ukrainian speakers, are being targeted for mobilization. Another divisive message is that only poor people from rural areas are being mobilized because the rich can bribe their way out of it. Russia also tries to instil feelings of powerlessness, claiming that the enemy is much stronger and resistance is pointless. Russian propaganda also encourages people of conscription age to dodge mobilization by going abroad.

In late 2023, the Russian propaganda campaign intensified again. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (HUR) warned that Russian Telegram channels were spreading fake stories that the Ukrainian government was going to mobilize everybody, including women, as well as men as young as 21. Continuing relatively recent attempts to sow mistrust between Ukrainians and Poles, the propaganda channels also claimed that more people were being mobilized from the western parts of Ukraine than from the east to "cleanse" the territory of those who might resist a Polish encroachment. The Ukrainian authorities expect Russia to intensify its efforts still further by claiming that President Zelenskyi, who was elected president on 20 May 2019, has no legitimate authority after the end of his 5-year term. Lack of clear communication by the government on the need for mobilization risks giving Russian propaganda a disproportionate effect.

Public Opinion

A public opinion poll by Info Sapience published by Texty.org.ua on 27 February showed that among men not currently serving in the army but liable for military service, 15.8 per cent are

16 «Відкриття вісім меседжів російської пропаганди проти мобілізації України», *Disinfo*, 4 серпня 2022, <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/visim-mesedzhiv-rosiiskoi-propahandy-prot-y-mobilizatsii-ukraintsiv>.

fully prepared to serve if called on and 19 per cent are fairly prepared. However, 29.8 per cent were absolutely not ready and 18.3 per cent fairly unready. The remaining 17.1 per cent found it hard to answer the question. Among the reasons that might deter people from joining the army, besides the risk to their lives and health, were insufficient equipment (uniforms, weapons, protective gear and medical kits), lack of proper training and the likelihood of ending up with a “bad commander”. People were also deterred by the indefinite term of service. Bad commanders scare people even more than being captured by the Russians.

An overwhelming majority agreed that mobilization was necessary, but 56.3 per cent strongly agreed that mobilization was necessary but must also be just, and a further 25.5 per cent only slightly agreed with this proposition. In addition, 34.7 per cent strongly agreed that mobilization must be better organized (involving better equipment and people placed in positions for which they are professionally fit) and a further 33.7 per cent slightly agreed with this statement.¹⁷

Digitalization of the Mobilization

In late December 2023, the Ministry of Defence completed work on “Oberih” (amulet), an electronic register of people liable for military service.¹⁸ Initially, it was to be filled with data stored on paper at the TRCs. The data was incomplete, however, as millions of men either had not registered for military service or had not updated their data with the TRCs. A law passed by the Verkhovna Rada on 16 January 2024 allows the creation of a combined register of individuals liable for military service.¹⁹ The bill was sent to the president for signature on 7 February 2024.²⁰

Forming the register will involve transferring data on all conscripts, citizens eligible for military service and reservists aged 18–60, taken from various state registers, such as the Tax Service, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Central Election Commission, State Migration Service and other relevant agencies, to the Ministry of Defence. No consent is needed to collect the data. The information collected will be stored on the territory of Ukraine, as opposed to a cloud service on the territory of a NATO country, although the law provides for the latter possibility. The Ministry of Defence, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine are the entities responsible for maintaining the register. Access will be provided to all TRCs.

A sub register of military service personnel will also be drawn up to allow automatic access to the status of a combatant. The Defence Ministry plans to introduce individual electronic

17 «Мобілізація. Чого бояться чоловіки і що мотивує йти в ЗСУ», *texty.org.ua*, 27 February 2024, https://texty.org.ua/articles/111848/mobilizaciya-sho-vidlyakuye-i-sho-motyvuye-opytuvannya-info-sapiens-na-zamovlennya-textyorgua/?src=read_next&from=111906.

18 Анита Прасад, «Міноборони завершило роботу над реєстром військовозобов'язаних «Оберіг», *Forbes*, 26 грудня 2023, <https://forbes.ua/news/minoboroni-zavershilo-robotu-nad-reestrom-viyskovozobov'yazanih-oberig-detali-26122023-18141>.

19 «Рада підтримала створення електронного реєстру військовозобов'язаних», *Радіо Свобода*, 16 січня 2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-rada-rejestr-viyskovozobov'yazanyh/32776855.html>.

20 «Проект Закону про внесення змін до деяких законодавчих актів України щодо окремих питань проходження військової служби, мобілізації та військового обліку», *Верховна Рада України*, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/43604>.

files that will make it possible for people on the register to update their information online by the second quarter of 2024.

While the register enhances the efficiency of recordkeeping, it has also been heavily criticized for violating personal data regulations as more data will be collected than is absolutely necessary. According to the Law on Protection of Personal Information, a person must know what information is being collected about him or her, and medical records are not supposed to be processed without sufficient privacy guarantees. Legal advisers in the Verkhovna Rada argue that the provisions violate the Constitution, but this has not prevented parliament from adopting it.

Professional Recruitment

Following the example of the Azov Assault Brigade, a unit at the National Guard of Ukraine, the Defence Ministry is introducing professional recruitment. At the end of 2023, it started working with four major Ukrainian Human Resources companies to place adverts to recruit motivated professionals for the Ukrainian military. The ministry reports that as of 4 January 2024, 389 units of the Ukrainian Security and Defence Forces had posted 1847 job vacancies.²¹ By 12 January, 37,500 responses had been received.²² The ministry is working to set up its own recruitment agency and has opened a pilot recruitment office in Lviv in cooperation with the local authorities there. Its job is to consult people about military employment opportunities rather than to issue summonses.

The most popular vacancies are for accountants, business managers, cooks, intelligence officers, drivers, security guards, artillerymen, or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operators, which indicates that professional recruitment alone will not be sufficient to fill all the positions in the military. The government will still need to mobilize people to serve in the infantry and other fighting units.

The Case of the 3rd Assault Brigade

While most units in Ukraine are experiencing manpower shortages, the 3rd Assault Brigade of the Ukrainian ground forces, created by a merger of Azov special operation forces and veterans of the former Azov battalion, has become an exemplar of successful recruitment. The brigade runs an extensive media and billboard advertisement campaign and has an impressive online presence, which includes a website,²³ a YouTube Channel,²⁴ and pages on the most popular social networks. Media posts feature real combat footage, interviews with commanders and soldiers, and discussions. The brigade has several recruitment centres in major Ukrainian cities. Its approach emphasizes soldier camaraderie and mutual support, accessible commanders willing to accept feedback from the soldiers and to learn from

21 «Перші підсумки рекрутингу до Сил оборони України», *Міністерство Оборони України*, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2024/01/04/pershi-pidsumki-rekrutingu-do-sil-oboroni-ukraini/>.

22 Анастасія Дячкіна, «ЗСУ отримали понад 37 тисяч резюме: які військові вакансії найпопулярніші», *Економічна Правда*, 12 січня 2024, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2024/01/12/708670/>.

23 3-тя окрема штурмова бригада, Website, <https://ab3.army/>

24 3-тя окрема штурмова бригада, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/@ab3army>

experience, good training for recruits, real care for a soldier's life and support for the families of killed or wounded soldiers. A potential recruit is given the option of first trying himself or herself out in a simulated combat setting before deciding whether to join. According to the Brigade's command, this approach helps to generate a capable and motivated force.

Balancing Economic and Military Needs

President Zelenskyi has argued that supporting a large force of mobilized service personnel is expensive. The task is even more complicated because Ukraine must use its own funds as aid from partner countries only covers non-military needs. The government has calculated that four or five people must work in the rear to support one soldier on the frontline. The government is currently working on two possible options for developing an "economic reserve", or those who must not go to the frontline to keep the economy running. One is to allow businesses to pay a tax to reserve their workers. The other involves allowing people earning more than a certain amount and paying tax over a certain threshold not to be drafted.²⁵

The first idea is popular with business. The European Business Association proposes reserving employees who do not belong to critically important enterprises but actively work and pay taxes, to create a balance for the proper functioning of the economy. The second option is unpopular due to the level of income inequality in Ukraine. People outside of the larger cities rarely have high incomes, so adopting this approach would be unfair. The government now faces the task of finding and communicating a possible solution.

Conclusions

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine has moved into its third year without an end in sight. It is obvious that Ukraine will have to mobilize hundreds of thousands more soldiers, not only to fill the ranks of units that have suffered casualties in the war, but also to create fresh reserves that can be used for future offensives or to rotate exhausted units. President Zelenskyi has said that he has still not received sufficient detail about what the military is planning to justify the mobilization of 500,000 people. He seems doubtful and the issue concerns not only people's lives, but also the ability to finance such a large mobilization.

Critics of the president say he is unwilling to take political responsibility for the mobilization. The firing of General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi on the 8 February 2024 has not made the matter easier for Zelenskyi, since the general perception in the country seems to be that the popular general was fired for political reasons. The issue is urgent for Ukraine as Russia continues to attack and Ukraine continues to resist. An initial bill on mobilization was heavily criticized for going against the constitution and opening opportunities for corruption, something which the revised version must address.

25 Роман Романюк, «Один воює – четверо працюють. У Зеленського готують економічне бронювання від мобілізації», *Українська Правда*, 14 лютого, 2024, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/02/14/7441744/>..

On a positive note, however, Ukraine has reacted with a wide range of measures and a genuine discussion is ongoing. Even though martial law means that there will be no presidential elections in 2024, the democratic process is still operating in Ukraine. Streamlining the mobilization process is still very much a work in process but there has been an obvious attempt at institutional reform.

Nonetheless, Russia will do everything it can to discredit Ukraine, and President Zelenskyi in particular, for the protracted mobilization process, in an attempt to divide the political and military establishments and to reduce the morale of Ukrainian soldiers at the front, as well as supporters of Ukraine in the West.



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