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### MILITARIZATION OF YOUTH CONSCIOUSNESS IN TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED CRIMEA

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**Abstract.** The article examines the main legislative foundations and highlights the key practices of Russian policies on the militarization of children and youth in the temporarily occupied Crimea. It is demonstrated that the Russian Federation is implementing a targeted, systematic policy of militarizing the consciousness of Crimean children and adolescents in order to impose a Russian identity and cultivate «Russian patriots». The key institutions and other actors involved in the policy of militarization, which are engaged in military-patriotic education of Crimean children, are identified. These institutions aim to encourage Crimean youth to serve in the Russian army and fight in future wars on Russia's side. It is proved that the Russian authorities, alongside the use of several Soviet-era practices of militarizing consciousness, are introducing new ones that have a much greater effect (such as «carnivalization of war», oaths in churches, etc.). It is concluded that Russia's militarization policy on the temporarily occupied territories turns Ukrainian children into Russian hostages, forcing them to become part of the Russian military system.

**Key words:** militarization of consciousness, children, youth, Russia, Crimea, war.

**Introduction.** The problem of the militarization of societies remains relevant for a long time due to armed conflicts occurring in various parts of the world. The period of turbulence in which the world is immersed in the second decade of the 21st century increases the risks of both regional and global conflicts. The militarization of human consciousness has become an inseparable attribute of the policies of aggressive states aimed at achieving a range of goals: mobilizing the population, converting the economy to military tracks, and forming new ideological foundations (such as «a country surrounded by enemies», etc.). Youth has become one of the main targets of militarization policies, as it will replenish the ranks of the armed forces to continue aggressive wars. The militarization of youth consciousness is one of the key directions of Russian policy, which it spreads to the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, violating the norms of international humanitarian law. In the territories of Crimea and Donbas (the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions), the occupying administrations tested a model of militarized education, which, since 2022, has been actively implemented in the occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. Therefore, analyzing Russia's policy of militarizing children's consciousness is crucial both in the context of future punishment for violations of international humanitarian law and for formulating strategies to counter Russian ideological influence in the process of de-occupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

The issue of militarization in socio-political life in contemporary academic discourse is presented from various perspectives. Firstly, researchers emphasize the growing military factor across different spheres due to the gradual destruction of social order and peace, even in stable democratic states, primarily due to the threat of terrorism (the Breivik case in Norway is a striking confirmation of this argument). According to Evans (2017), this can lead to the increased role of militarized ideology

even in societies with a high level of democratic development. Kaucz (2022) suggests viewing the militarization of human behavior through the introduction of social control practices, which allow for a high degree of uniformity in society, the creation of relationships of dependency on the state, and obedience. Finally, a significant number of contemporary studies focus on the socio-cultural dimension of militarization in societies. For example, Shepherd (2018) draws attention to the growing popularity of military-style clothing, which, in her view, signals the normalization of militarism in everyday life. Researchers also highlight the cult of the body as one of the important elements of the militarization process in society, comparing practices of the past and present (Baker, 2020; McSorely, 2013). Western science, de facto, lacks its own case studies for analyzing the militarization of education; therefore, some researchers carefully analyze possible aspects of militarization in society in the context of military education (Woodward et al., 2017).

Therefore, in Western academic discourse, the topic of militarization of society is presented quite fragmentarily due to the absence of real, serious threats to society. At the same time, among Ukrainian researchers, this topic has not yet received widespread attention and is only represented by a few individual studies: Novikova (2023), Marchenko (2024). However, for Ukrainian scholarship, the Russian militarization of the consciousness of Ukrainian children represents a serious challenge and requires thorough research.

**The aim of the study** is to analyze the main methods and practices of Russian militarization of the consciousness of children and youth in the temporarily occupied Crimea. Achieving this aim requires addressing a number of **research tasks**: 1) conducting an analysis of the main normative and legal foundations of Russian youth militarization policy; 2) identifying key practices of militarized education in Russia and temporarily occupied Crimea; 3) analyzing the specifics of using memory politics for the militarization of the consciousness of Crimean children; 4) studying the impact of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on the processes of militarizing the consciousness of Crimean youth.

The main research approach is the **systemic approach**, which allows for the analysis of Russian militarization policy as a systematic process aimed at achieving a range of goals. The **institutional approach** helps analyze the role of key institutions in implementing the militarization policy in temporarily occupied Crimea. Among the **methods**, the following play a key role in our study: document analysis, which helps identify the normative and legal framework of the militarization policy; the narrative method, which enables the identification of key messages of Russian military propaganda presented in the Crimean educational process; and the case study method, which identifies the key practices employed by the occupying authorities in Crimea to spread militaristic ideas among children and youth.

**Basic theoretical and practical provision.** The gradual implementation of militaristic trends in Russia began in the first decade of the 21st century, but systematic work in this direction within the educational sphere started only after the occupation of Crimea, which became a catalyst for Russian militarization across all areas. As early as 2012, during a meeting with representatives of the executive authorities and society on the issue of patriotic education for youth in Krasnodar, Russian President V. Putin emphasized the importance of military-patriotic education for young people. In the «Strategy for the Development of Education in the Russian Federation until 2025», adopted by the Russian government in May 2015 (Strategiya razvitiya vospitaniya v Rossijskoj Federacii na period do 2025 goda, 2015), patriotic education is considered an important component of children's upbringing, with a particular focus on military-patriotic education, which is to be implemented through special state programs.

Thanks to the implementation of the relevant state program «Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Russian Federation for 2011–2015» (Pravitelstvo RF, 2010), a system of defense-sport camps was established, and a network of military-patriotic education centers began operating in almost all regions. Special emphasis was placed on promoting military service and the development of mili-

tary-oriented children's institutions. By the 2014/15 academic year, there were 177 cadet schools in the country, with 61,800 children enrolled.

The new patriotic education program proposed not only to continue but also to expand the relevant trends by «strengthening the prestige of military service» in the Russian army and law enforcement agencies, as well as developing the «practice of military units acting as sponsors for educational organizations». Funding for patriotic education doubled, rising from 777 million rubles (in the previous state program) to 1.7 billion rubles (Pravitelstvo RF, 2015). Thus, at the federal level, the militarization of children becomes one of the directions of Russian state policy, which is reflected in the actions of the occupying administrations in Crimea.

In December 2014, the «Republic of Crimea» (the Russian name for the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea) adopted «The Strategy for the Development of Education in the Russian Federation for the Period Until 2025» (Ministerstvo obrazovanriya, nauki i molodezhi Respubliki Krym, 2014), which defines the main goal as the formation of patriotic feelings and consciousness among the citizens of the Russian Federation in the people of Crimea.

The achievement of this goal, along with the implementation of patriotic values, is proposed through the development of military-patriotic education and increasing motivation for military service, as well as providing the people of Crimea with knowledge about defense and training in the principles of military service. Therefore, in Crimea, the strengthening of the military component of patriotic education can be observed at the normative level even earlier than in Russia. The occupying administration of the peninsula begins actively introducing various Russian militaristic practices into the educational and upbringing system.

In December 2022, patriotic education will receive official legislative recognition in the «Republic of Crimea» («Zakon Respubliki Krym O patrioticheskom i duhovno-nravstvennom vospitanii v Respublike Krym», 2022). An important component of such education is military-patriotic upbringing in the context of involving youth in military service («increasing motivation»).

The main directions of Russian policy on the militarization of children can be summarized as follows: 1) the incorporation of military values from an early age through the family – primarily in the context of implementing a policy of memory; 2) militarization of education at various levels – from kindergarten to military training in schools; 3) the development of the system of secondary military education; 4) the introduction of extracurricular military activities (summer military-sport camps/military camps) and militaristic organizations (Yunarmiya, Cossacks); 5) the militarization of leisure for the people of Crimea (military-themed holidays, military toys, and attractions).

The key structures involved in implementing Russia's policy of militarizing consciousness under the guise of patriotic education are primarily three federal ministries: the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Sports; as well as the Crimean occupation structures: the «Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth», the «Ministry of Sports» and the «State Committee for Youth Policy» through which military-patriotic events (festivals, military-sports games, etc.) are organized. An important role in these processes is played by the Russian Orthodox Church, under whose patronage summer camps are also organized, and its priests participate in the ceremony of dedicating children to the «Cossacks».

Militarization of consciousness in Russia is closely linked to the formation of the cult of the «Great Patriotic War» – the Russian version of World War II, which in September 1939 was initiated by the joint invasion of Poland by Hitler and Stalin. This is why both the Soviet and, later, the Russian government date the beginning of World War II from the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. The appropriation of the joint victory of the Anti-Hitler Coalition by the Russian government allows for the introduction of the notion of «the possibility of repeating» the war for new victory. As a result, war begins to be perceived in Russian, and in some places in Crimean society, as a «holiday». With this purpose in mind, «Victory Day», celebrated on May 9 in Russia, transforms into a show where

both children and adults dress up in military uniforms from that era. Therefore, war is transformed from a tragedy into a carnival, a game, a farce, which, in fact, «can be repeated». Thus, Crimean families take family photos in military uniforms from those times, complete with weapons as props. For many parents, such photos are no different from New Year's photoshoots in a Santa Claus costume. It should be noted that Russian militarization practices have surpassed Soviet practices, where military uniforms were used in a limited format, emphasizing the child's status – honor guards were dressed in school uniforms, not military uniforms (Horiunova, 2024: 195).

The apotheosis of this carnival is the march called the «Immortal Regiment», which quickly transformed from a public initiative to honor the memory of fallen relatives into a propaganda campaign with no connection to the politics of memory. Surprisingly, the carnival essence of this event was aptly demonstrated in 2015 by the Crimean «prosecutor» N. Poklonskaya, who marched at the forefront of the procession carrying an icon of the Russian Emperor Nicholas II (Horiunova, 2024: 193).

Quite often, in these columns, parents march with small children dressed in Soviet military uniforms, who are sit in prams converted into «tanks» or «planes». Undoubtedly, this «carnivalization» causes people to forget the horrific consequences of World War II, while instead, a rather attractive image of war forms in the minds of the youth – one that will inevitably end in victory. «The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the victors cannot lose» – this narrative has dominated Russian, and consequently Crimean, media discourse since 2014. It takes on particular significance after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the quintessence of which is the propagandistic cliché «Kyiv in three days», meaning the quick conquest of Ukraine.

In addition to May 9th, military events in the cities of Crimea took place quite frequently until 2022: during state holidays or even on city days, there were exhibitions of weapons, meetings with military personnel, various military-sport competitions, and so on. Therefore, photos of children on tanks or during gunfire with combat firearms became an integral part of such events (Horiunova, 2024: 197-199).

Militarization of consciousness is promoted through children's entertainment and toys. After the occupation, on playgrounds, car rides are replaced by tanks, and in 2022, in Sevastopol, a tank track opens instead of a children's car track. The number of toy weapons increases in children's stores. Even balloons on the peninsula are turning khaki in color.

Another important component of the militarization of children's consciousness is implemented through educational policy, starting from preschool institutions. In the kindergartens of the peninsula, until February 23 (the day of the Soviet Army in the USSR and Defender of the Fatherland Day in Russia) and May 9, performances were held with children dressed in military uniforms and with mock weapons. Often, «combat veterans» – veterans of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan or participants of the war against Ukraine. All these actions are aimed at instilling certain narratives in young minds and at the heroization of Russian soldiers.

These same traditions continue in secondary schools, where, in addition to various extracurricular theatrical militarized events, significant influence on children's consciousness is exerted during the educational process. In 2014, Russia developed a «unified cultural and historical standard» with the concept of «primordial Russian Crimea». Accordingly, in Russian history textbooks, which were used to teach children in Crimea, the attempt to annex the peninsula is described as the «reunification with Russia» through the «free will of Crimeans», which allegedly occurred as «a result of the change of power in Ukraine after the Maidan, which led to an illegitimate Ukrainian government that threatened Crimeans with oppression». In the methodological recommendations for teachers, these theses were recommended to be supported with quotes from Vladimir Putin, such as «Crimea has always been Russian», or «the Crimean Spring» brought liberation to Crimeans from the «oppression of Ukrainization» (Yaremchuk & Smyrnov, 2023).

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian educational rhetoric becomes more aggressive, which is reflected in a new history textbook of Russia authored by former Minister of Education V. Medinsky. In this textbook, new themes are added to the traditional ones – such as «SVO» (Special Military Operation) and «Ukrainian neo-Nazism», where Russian aggression against Ukraine is justified as a «necessity to protect Russia». The textbook propagates the Russian myth of «the creation of Ukraine as an anti-Russian project by the Austrian General Staff during World War I», and also spreads information about «NATO advisors» who allegedly «prepared Ukrainians to attack Donbas». The text also features claims about «U.S. biolabs» and «Ukraine's desire to acquire nuclear weapons» (Tsentr stratehichnykh komunikatsii, 2023).

Several sections of the textbook have titles where Ukrainians are directly positioned as «Nazis»: «Ukrainian Neonazism» and «Ukraine – an ultranationalist state», with the main reason for the Russian occupation of Crimea being described as «preparation for aggression against Russia and plans to place a NATO base» on the peninsula. «Our fleet was supposed to be expelled from its 250-year-old base city. Sevastopol was meant to become a NATO naval base» (Tsentr stratehichnykh komunikatsii, 2023).

Thus, such theses are aimed at achieving two key objectives: to instill in Crimean children a sense of hatred towards Ukraine as a «Nazi state» and to foster the desire to «defend Russia with arms in hand». With the start of the «Special Military Operation» (SVO), Crimean schoolchildren are involved in supporting the «defenders» – children are forced to bring personal hygiene items, socks, and other «necessary» things for Russian soldiers. A significant part of the educational process becomes regular meetings between students and «heroes of the SVO» – Russian soldiers involved in the aggressive war against Ukraine. During these meetings, in addition to stories about the «heroism of Russian soldiers», high school students are actively encouraged to join the ranks of the Russian armed forces.

Russian aggression against Ukraine is also reflected in the formation of new foundations for the policy of memory: streets are named after the «heroes of the SVO», plaques are placed on the schools where they studied, and schools feature «hero desks». Often, there is an attempt to merge the soldiers of the World War II with the participants of the aggressive war against Ukraine. For example, in a Sevastopol school, alongside the first desk dedicated to Hero of the Soviet Union S. Neustroev, another one was added in honor of the school graduate K. Vitoptov, who was killed in the Kherson region. Sevastopol propagandists created a wonderful legend about a Russian soldier who «fought against Nazism from the first day of the special operation» and «heroically died while covering his comrades and saving the lives of 600 soldiers» (Horiunova, 2024: 200). This approach allows for the merging of the WWII and Russia's current aggressive war against Ukraine, demonstrating a «continuity of generations», as if Russian soldiers are repeating the feats of their ancestors.

Since 2022, «SVO soldiers» have been involved in the educational process in schools – they conduct military training lessons. The central role in this is played by the Crimean Institute of Postgraduate Education, which is responsible for retraining teachers.

A key role in encouraging Crimean children to join the ranks of the Russian military is played by specialized military educational institutions – cadet schools and classes, the number of which is constantly increasing in Crimea. It is worth noting that the first cadet corps, established based on the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's Naval Lyceum, began its educational process in the fall of 2014. It was created under the personal patronage of Putin, who signed the relevant decree on March 20, 2014 – just before the final formalization of Crimea's annexation by the Federation Council. In 2016, it was incorporated as a branch of the Nakhimov Naval School in St. Petersburg (its second name is the Sevastopol Presidential Cadet School), designed for 840 cadets who study for 7 years (starting from the 4th grade).

In the temporarily occupied Crimea, cadet schools and classes have been opened by other law enforcement agencies – the Investigative Committee, the Russian Guard, and others, each with varying durations of training. Some accept students from the 5th grade, while others only admit older students. The occupying administration has even established cadet groups in preschool institutions – one kindergarten already has three such groups where children are taught strict discipline and military drills. In total, 128 cadet classes from various law enforcement agencies have been opened in Crimea, with approximately three thousand children undergoing training (Ukrinform 2023, May 24). This constitutes 1.3% of all students in Crimean general education schools, but a significant portion of graduates from these institutions continue their education at military academies. (Krymska pravozakhysna hrupa, 2020).

An important role in the implementation of militarization policy is played by the Crimean Patriotic Center (Krympatriotcenter), as well as youth movements such as Yunarmiya, the «First Movement», «Orlyata», and others, which are intended to fill the free time of Crimean children with military training. The main task of the Krympatriotcenter is popularizing military service among young people through a variety of activities – ranging from meetings with military personnel to organizing summer camps where children of different ages and genders are taught military skills.

Yunarmiya is a youth movement created in 2016, based on the structure of the Soviet-era organization DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy) and under the patronage of the Russian Ministry of Defense. It unites children and teenagers aged 11 to 18, combining sports, military, and technical training. Since 2022, members of the movement have been involved in drone management. According to Ukrainian researchers, the main goal of the organizers of this movement is to harness the potential of youth for future wars, which has led Ukrainian experts to compare Yunarmiya to the Nazi Hitler Youth. In 2022 Russian Defense Minister S. Shoigu issued an order to monitor the situation regarding the potential human reserve from among the members of Yunarmiya (Yaremenko, 2022).

In July 2022, a new state-sponsored children's movement, «The Movement of the First», was institutionalized in Russia, which can be seen as a revival of the Soviet Pioneer movement («First» is a translation of the word «Pioneer»). The movement is under the patronage of the Russian president and aims to organize the leisure activities of teenagers «based on traditional Russian spiritual and moral values». Notably, in September 2024, the head of the movement was appointed to be A. Orlov, a «hero participant of the special military operation», which reflects the nature of the «values» that this organization will instill in children.

In Crimea, the first chapter of the movement appeared in December 2022 at the secondary school of the international children's camp «Artek». The «First» actively recruits children from newly occupied Ukrainian territories, promising them benefits for admission to Russian universities. In 2024, this organization was sanctioned by the US and the EU for its involvement in the deportation of Ukrainian children and their forced re-education.

Russian Cossack units are also involved in the patriotic upbringing of children in Crimea, having played an important role in the process of the peninsula's occupation. According to Ukrainian researcher Siedova (2020), the initiation into the «Cossacks» combines both secular and religious elements, which is intended to strengthen the emotional impact on the child, preparing them to give their life «for Putin and Russia, as once 'for the Tsar and the Fatherland». When a child becomes a «Cossack» in the church, they are given a uniform and kiss the cross, creating a very strong subconscious impression. «In my opinion, this is even more frightening than 'Yunarmiya», the researcher points out (Siedova, 2020).

Given the recreational potential of the peninsula, Crimea has become a venue for various military-patriotic gatherings, camps, and festivals, which involve local children and youth. During such events participants in the armed aggression against Ukraine speak to the attendees about their «strug-

gle against Ukrainian Nazis to defend the Motherland». The spread of these narratives instills in children's minds rigid concepts dividing the «friends» (Russian soldiers, who are supposedly defending Russia) from the «enemies» – «Ukrainian Nazis» and the «collective West», which «wants to destroy Russia». This creates conditions for the preparation of «ideal soldiers» for Putin's wars.

It should be noted that all of these actions by Russia are violations of international law, primarily the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War: Article 51 prohibits propaganda and coercion to enlist in the army of the occupying country (Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949). The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right to preserve a child's identity, prohibiting the assimilation of culture, interference with the practice of religion, or the imposition of a foreign language (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). However, Russia openly disregards these norms of international law, taking advantage of the weaknesses in the current international system.

The results of the influence of this propaganda are difficult to track in the context of occupation. However, it should be noted that over the course of 10 years, Russia has conducted 18 conscription campaigns, drafting 44,500 young Crimeans into military service (Ukrinform, 2023, December 12). At the same time, the number of those refusing to join the Russian army has been increasing each year. While between 2014 and 2019, 82 criminal cases were opened in Crimea for refusing military service, in 2020, there were 81 cases in one year, and in 2021, 112. As of the end of 2022, the total number of such cases was 423, or approximately 1% of the total number of conscripts (Krymska pravozakhysna hrupa, 2023).

With the onset of the full-scale war against Ukraine, a record number of people left Crimea, which may also indicate the desire of Crimeans to avoid mobilization. In 2022, 32,800 people left Crimea, which is 27–30% higher than the figures of previous years (Krymskij statisticheskij sbornik, 2023). In the absence of data on the number of Crimeans fighting against Ukraine, we use the obituary database from the Krym.Realii portal to understand trends. As of November 2024, 920 people had been buried, of which 130 were under 25 years old (not including career military personnel), accounting for 14% (Krym.Realii, 2024). At the same time, the most active phase of militarization of children's and youth consciousness in Crimea has occurred in recent years, so we will only be able to assess its results in a few years.

**Discussion.** Thus, when considering the impact of militarization on public life within the framework of contemporary academic discourse, one cannot help but agree with Shepherd (2018), who warns that the incorporation of certain military practices into everyday life (fashion, culture) changes people's perception of war – it begins to be seen as a normal occurrence, rather than a tragedy.

However, Russian militarization of the consciousness of both its own citizens and the residents of temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories has a much more serious mental effect. By using a policy of memory, the Russian authorities combine the cult of war and victory, assuring Russians that «as descendants of the victors, they cannot lose». This creates a foundation for Russia's aggressive wars.

The educational format of this policy is particularly dangerous because the Russian authorities use various methods to raise soldiers for future wars. By applying these practices in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine – initially in Crimea and Donbas, and since 2022, in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions – Moscow aims to radically change the consciousness of children, forcing them to abandon their Ukrainian identity and become «true Russians», ready to give their lives for the «new Motherland». Moreover, the implementation of digital technologies in the process of militarizing consciousness deserves attention from researchers, as it could significantly increase the impact of Russian propaganda on children and youth. Investigating all aspects of this process is important not only for holding the Russian authorities accountable for violations of international law but also for understanding the scale of the Kremlin's preparations for new aggressive wars in Europe. Modern Russia poses a threat not only to neighboring countries but to the entire democratic world.

**Conclusions.** The return of Putin to the position of Russian president is accompanied by significant changes in the approaches to educating the younger generation, with particular attention being paid to patriotic upbringing, emphasizing its military component. After the occupation of Crimea, the processes of militarization of children's and youth consciousness accelerate, covering the occupied Ukrainian peninsula as well. The Russian authorities are also changing their tactics, spreading militarization across nearly all stages and aspects of a child's life – from the family and preschool institutions to schools and extracurricular activities. This policy has a systematic character, with a number of state institutions involved in its implementation, which will receive significant government funding. The main goal of this policy for all of Russia becomes the active promotion of military service among children and adolescents, while in the occupied territories, it aims at re-educating Ukrainian children into «patriots of Russia» and erasing their Ukrainian identity.

With the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian policies of militarizing children's consciousness have become more aggressive and all-encompassing. Educational institutions are being used as platforms for spreading Russian narratives, in which Ukraine is presented as a «Nazi state», and Western democracies are portrayed as «enemies of Russia». The educational work in schools focuses on promoting Russian propaganda stereotypes aimed at engaging children and youth in paramilitary groups and participation in military-sporting events (training camps, military-patriotic games, etc.). A number of public organizations also play an important role in this process, actively recruiting young people into their ranks (Yunarmiya, «First»).

Thus, the Russian authorities use certain Soviet practices of militarizing consciousness (such as the glorification of «heroes of the SVO», the incorporation of military elements into the educational process, and the militarization of sports activities), while also implementing new forms that have a cognitive impact on consciousness and prepare children for war from birth. All of this has an extremely negative effect on children in the temporarily occupied territories, who become hostages of Putin's regime.

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