

MIDDLE CLASS IN UKRAINE: GOVERNMENT OR OPPOSITION?

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Abstract. *The purpose* of this article is to define the middle class as the representative of the public interest and the social foundation of democracy in Ukraine. Throughout the history of Ukraine, the middle class has always been oppressed by Russian and Soviet colonialism. The revival of the middle class is slowed down by the fact that the middle class is "hanging" in the gravitational field between the government and the opposition. In Ukraine there are no bourgeois party(s) independent of the oligarchy. One condition must be met for the introduction of political and economic democracy. The middle class should have full parliamentary representation. There are still no parties in the Ukrainian parliament that represent the interests of the middle class. This applies to both the government and the opposition. The middle class actively supported opposition politicians during the revolutionary events of 2004 and 2013–2014. In modern conditions, it is a class of volunteers, activists and volunteers who are defending Ukraine against a large-scale military invasion. A new social contract, aimed at implementing Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration on the basis of democratic values and institutions, is impossible without the active political participation of the middle class. This is precisely why the middle class needs full parliamentary representation. *Methodology.* Class analysis was used to examine the position of the middle class in the political space between the government and the opposition. This makes it possible to identify the different worldviews and values of large groups of people who occupy different social positions and whose interests are expressed in politics. In order to determine the need to redistribute public goods in favour of the middle class through parliamentary representation, the authors turn to the theory of economic democracy. The data from empirical sociological research on the high level of consolidation of the Ukrainian middle class during the war and the results of the middle class' choice in the 2014 and 2019 election campaigns are presented. According to the sociological research data, support for democracy is growing in Ukraine, and the middle class is opting for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. *Results.* According to objective indicators of income, education, employment and consumer behaviour, the middle class consists of residents of large cities who have (or are in the process of obtaining) higher education. Given the differences between the Ukrainian middle class and the middle class in democratic countries in terms of objective income levels, subjective indicators should also be used to determine it. The self-identification of the middle class is determined by the desire for democratic changes, the awareness of the need to overcome corruption, the deconstruction of the oligarchic regime and the introduction of market reforms. The middle class is a social group that is most interested in political and economic competition, because it is the middle class that benefits from democracy and the market economy. The lack of parliamentary representation of a large social group, the middle class, hinders the democratisation of Ukraine. The social weight of the middle class is constantly growing. It is proven that the fragmentary reforms in Ukraine after the events of 2004 and 2013–2014 were carried out by the oligarchic regime under the pressure of the middle class. At the same time, the constitutional reversals regarding the form of government (presidential and parliament-presidential), the changes in the electoral system (from a majority to a mixed system, the passage of the proportional model in the parliamentary elections of 2006 and 2007) can be explained by the manipulations of the oligarchy, which captured the parliament in order to prevent

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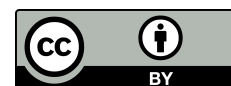
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the middle class from coming to power. The factors that prevent the Ukrainian middle class from gaining parliamentary representation are identified: 1) Oligarchy, as a political regime of economic monopolists. The oligarchic forces have not only privatised the branches of the national economy, but have also created effective systems of political control over the parliament and the "oligarch-lumpen alliance", which influences the political decisions of Ukrainian citizens with the help of the mass media and oligarchic parties (electoral projects); 2) the mediatisation of politics, caused by the monopoly of financial and industrial groups on television channels; 3) the formation of the "party of power" as an "internal" party, which retains its influence through the formation of a majority in the Ukrainian parliament; 4) the social pathologies of post-Soviet society (paternalism, ambivalence of mass consciousness, atomisation of society, conformism, nihilism, deprofessionalisation, deactualisation of universal democratic values, etc.). It was noted that during the war they were partially overcome in the public consciousness; 5) indoctrination in the educational system, which causes problems of manipulative distortion of collective memory, reproduction of "post-Soviet" identity and regimes of truth. Overcoming the mediatisation of politics, populism and indoctrination will contribute to the rationalisation of political interaction and the growth of the influence of the middle class. In the process of rationalisation of political interaction, the main role belongs to the middle class as a class of individuals who have completed secondary or higher education. This enables them to check facts on the basis of media literacy, to distinguish truth from lies, rational argumentation from populism. As part of the modern "new" middle class, public intellectuals are the first to play a role in the rationalisation of politics. *Practical implications.* The results of the study can be used in the process of further democratisation, European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, as well as in the development of middle class political parties. They will contribute to increasing the weight of the middle class in politics and to raising the awareness of middle class representatives of the need for parliamentary representation. Overall, the authors hope that all the results of the study will contribute to the overcoming of the oligarchic regime in Ukraine and the establishment of a democratic system of redistribution of public resources. *Value/originality.* This study of the role of the middle class in Ukrainian politics allows for a better understanding of the need for parliamentary representation of the middle class. It also reveals the reasons for the dominance of the oligarchy. The focus is on the devastating consequences of this dominance for the middle class. The need to ensure the parliamentary representation of the middle class in order to overcome the oligarchy and further democratise Ukraine has been identified.

Key words: middle class, power, opposition, government, parliamentary representation, elections, political parties, political democracy, oligarchy.

JEL Classification: H11, D72

I. Introduction

Democracy is impossible without a strong middle class. The history of Ukraine over several centuries has convincingly demonstrated this. The middle class has always been oppressed by imperial and Soviet colonialism. The repressions of Soviet totalitarianism were aimed at destroying the middle class in both cities and villages. After Ukraine's independence in 1991, the middle class rightly hoped for a revival thanks to democracy and a market economy. But this did not happen as expected. By actively opposing the government during the revolutionary events of 2004 and 2013–2014, the representatives of the middle class failed to secure full parliamentary representation. "The post-Soviet transformations that began with 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' really 'rebuilt' the middle class in Ukraine and deconstructed the kitchen democracy of the 1980s. Later, the revolutionary events changed the political course of the state towards electoral democracy. At the same time, the middle class has not been able to secure

political representation in parliament and has been pushed out of the public policy space twice since the revolutions" (Yakovlev, Borovyk & Diachenko, 2022).

During the elections, the votes of the middle class were scattered among the "big" parties, but there is no party (or rather several parties) of the middle class in Ukraine.

During the war caused by the Russian aggression in 2014 and the large-scale armed invasion on February 24, 2022, it was the middle class that came to the defence of Ukraine as volunteers and activists. During the "Orange Revolution" and EuroMaidan, the phenomenon of the growing weight of the middle class and its political activity was observed, which is very important for the democratisation of Ukraine. The middle class became the base of protest movements in Ukraine and supported the opposition in its struggle with power (Onuch, 2014).

In the conditions of war, the middle class, like the whole of Ukrainian society, is "on the march" (Yakovlev, 2015). Even in the "shadows", hiding from

the repressive economic measures of the oligarchic state in the wholesale markets, the voice of the middle class was amplified at the bifurcation points of social development. This requires a rethinking of the role of the middle class in politics and in all social relations. The middle class, in whose structure the military and the volunteers now have their proper place, resists armed aggression, changes and transforms the country. It should be noted that the middle class in Ukraine "... went from the impoverished intelligentsia of Soviet times to the semi-criminal business of the first years of independence, from the "servants of the oligarchs" to the driving force of democratic transformations" (Yakovlev, 2023).

For the further progress of democracy in Ukraine, the middle class must emerge from the shadow of the oligarchic regime and ensure parliamentary representation. One or more parties in parliament should represent the interests of the middle class, not the oligarchy. The middle class is caught between the government and the opposition. It reacts situationally to current political events, sometimes gravitating towards power, sometimes supporting opposition leaders.

During the campaigns for the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections, certain developments took place. The Samopomich and Holos parties, which positioned themselves as representatives of the middle class, entered the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. But this is not enough.

Global crises of democracy are always linked to the decline of the middle class. Even the entrenchment of an active middle class does not guarantee the development of democracy. This is emphasized in "Democracy in Retreat: The Revolt of the Middle Class and the Worldwide Decline of Representative Government": "Where democratisation has failed or regressed, the blame has been placed on aberrations: Islamism, authoritarian Chinese influence, or perhaps the rise of local autocrats. But what if the failures of democracy are not the exception? In this thought-provoking study of democratisation, Joshua Kurlantzick suggests that the spate of democratic setbacks over the past two decades is not just a series of exceptions. Instead, they reflect a new and disturbing trend: democracy in global decline. The author examines the state of democracy in a variety of countries, why the middle class has turned against democracy in some cases, and whether the decline in global democratisation is reversible" (Kurlantzick, 2013).

So the decline of democracy is linked to the middle class turning away from it and not supporting democratic politicians. The Ukrainian middle class needs to protect itself from populism and oligarchic rule.

The political influence of the middle class is not only determined by economic factors. Despite significant

differences within the middle class itself, which can be divided into "higher" and "lower", "old" and "new", the representatives of the middle class are characterised by the appropriate level of education (secondary, higher or university education), the specifics of consumer behaviour, the culture of recreation and leisure. Most importantly, the middle class believes in the values of freedom and free competition in the economy and politics. The middle class represents the public interest.

The opposition of the middle class to the oligarchy has an explanation. The post-Soviet nomenclature entrusted the state with its provision, and the oligarchs, thanks to uncontrolled access to the budget, monopolised entire sectors of the economy. At the same time, the middle class, which consists of active, educated and enterprising individuals, benefits most from systems of political and economic competition – democracy and the market economy.

The constant fluctuations in the pre-war political course between periods of relative freedom of economic and political activity (1991–1994, 2005–2006, 2014) and Kuchma's model of authoritarian rule (1994–2004, 2006–2013) can also be explained by the oligarchy's concessions to the demands of the middle class. Thanks to the political activity of the middle class, which became the driving force behind the struggle for independence, the "Orange Revolution" and the "Revolution of Dignity", the oligarchy was forced to resort to piecemeal reforms.

It is worth emphasising that the "ascent of the middle class to the Olympus" of political representation in parliament and support for local democracy continues. The time of the middle class has come, but its voice in politics is still weak. The strengthening of the middle class is taking place at the level of economic institutions, but the final political choice in favour of democracy, as the rule of the middle class, requires constitutional changes (Yakovlev, 2023, p. 36).

A new social contract, aimed at implementing Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration on the basis of democratic values and institutions, is impossible without the active political participation of the middle class. This is precisely why the middle class needs full parliamentary representation.

2. Middle Class And Democracy in Ukraine

The middle class became the basis of political stability and the guarantor of the irreversibility of democratic transformations in post-Maidan Ukraine. However, the parliamentary coalition and several governments formed after the 2014 elections used the middle class to push it out of the political field again. After 2014, there were no large-scale reforms in

the interests of the middle class. The oligarch-lumpen alliance was restored in the elections. It should be noted: "The large-scale programme of social transformations announced by the Ukrainian government (62 reforms) could not be implemented due to the lack of necessary resources, Russian aggression in Donbass and an acute crisis of public confidence in power. The national middle class responded with quantitative reductions and qualitative changes in its composition... [the decline of the middle class was influenced by] the extreme concentration of large financial capital genetically linked to power; the preservation of essential state regulation of the economy; an increase in the share of state social spending to support the lower classes; an increase in the migratory activity of Ukrainians after obtaining a visa-free regime from the EU; social mobility in the labour market, precarisation; the reduction of the working age population in rural areas; the influence of the informal (shadow) economy; the decentralisation of power; socio-political factors. It can be concluded that the middle class of post-Maidan Ukraine has already realised its 'social self', but has not yet been able to realise its active structural potential" (Aleksandrova, Dodonov & Vinnikova, 2019).

It is necessary to add another reason. This is the unwillingness of the middle class to create its own political force independent of the oligarchy, its political ambivalence. Why has this happened? It is worth trying to determine the nature of the Ukrainian middle class and its role in the process of democratisation.

The definition of the middle class in Ukraine has two components: objective (income level, education, presence of social and cultural capital) and subjective (self-identification of representatives of the middle class). The Ukrainian middle class has been called an "undefined" class (Zanuda, 2013, June 4), "national bourgeoisie" (Vikhrov, 2018), "golden mean", "double brother of the state, its mirror", "helpless giant" (Kramar, 2017).

It should be noted that class analysis does not negate other research perspectives. On the contrary, according to O. Kutsenko, "class analysis makes it possible to identify significant differences in interests, peculiarities of perception, attitudes and values of large groups of people who occupy different positions in the sphere of social opportunities, have different life chances and social perspectives, and whose interests can be expressed by political means and presented at the level of public policy" (Kutsenko, 2006). At this stage, it is necessary to implement a model of economic democracy, which involves the redistribution of public goods in the interests of the middle class, using the mechanism of parliamentary representation.

According to objective indicators of income, education, employment and consumer behaviour, the middle class consists of residents of large cities who have (or are in the process of obtaining) higher education. Given the differences between the Ukrainian middle class and the middle class in democratic countries in terms of objective income levels, subjective indicators should also be used to determine it. The self-identification of the middle class is determined by the desire for democratic changes, the awareness of the need to overcome corruption, the deconstruction of the oligarchic regime and the introduction of market reforms.

O. Salo emphasises the differences between the Ukrainian and European middle classes: "The results of the survey show that the middle class is critically small for the stable functioning of Ukraine's modern economy. One of the main problems for the development of the middle class is the lack of state support for small and medium-sized enterprises. The government in Ukraine was formed with the repressive model of the economy in terms of business-oriented monopolisation. The spread of the 'shadow' model of social and economic relations leads to the restriction of legal opportunities for employment and income. It also hampers the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. As a result, the number of entrepreneurs and small business owners is constantly increasing, but the lack of a favourable business climate has forced a significant number of small businesses to move into the shadows. The peculiarity of the formation of the middle class in Ukraine is that, in contrast to Western Europe, its social base is not the owners, but the employees" (Salo, 2016).

After the collapse of the USSR, the post-Soviet bureaucracy, which held power and property, became the main beneficiary of all economic and political transformations. Institutional interactions were distorted by efforts to prevent the middle class from gaining power. "Instead, the post-Soviet institutions are resisting change. They are prepared to throw the baby out with the bathwater in order to retain power and property. Media manipulation, speculation on the issue of armed conflict, deprofessionalisation of government and ignoring social policy are all used to compromise democratic reform. All this calls for a study of institutional interaction through the lens of political choice theory. One of the factors hindering this transition is the lack of a tradition of institutional interaction. In fact, in the Soviet era there were no branches of power independent of the CPSU party leadership – legislative, executive, judiciary, etc., and therefore no legal and public interaction between them" (Yakovleva & Yakovlev, 2020). The vicissitudes of political unrest in Ukraine are due to many factors, both external and internal.

One of the main factors is the lack of political representation of the middle class in parliament and local government. Artificially, outside the rules of political and economic competition, a small layer of "new owners" – the oligarchy – has emerged. The consequences of its rule have become destructive not only for parliamentarism and democracy, but also for the economy and the social sphere. "The wealth of the 'oligarchs' – or influential and extremely wealthy businessmen – and 'family' in relation to Ukraine's total GDP and population is staggering. With a Ukrainian population of 46 million, an estimated 100 individuals represented by the 'oligarchs' and 'family' – or 0.00003% – of the total population control 80-85% of Ukraine's GDP/wealth. Over 45 million individual Ukrainians, or over 99.9999% of the population, are left with only 15%-20% of the GDP/wealth pie" (Holoyda, 2013).

With the help of mass media, political mobilisation technologies and corruption, they actively provoke regional divisions in the elections and win the support of the poorest sections of the population. It is common in the Ukrainian media to aptly call such an alliance the "oligarch-lumpen alliance" (Kramar, 2021). Moreover, in order to preserve power and property, the oligarchy used post-Soviet social pathologies that characterised Ukrainian society before the war. It is a matter of such political pathologies as populism and paternalism, which contribute to the rule of the oligarchy and the formation of the ruling party (Iakovlev, 2015). Overcoming these pathologies is an important condition for the growth of the political weight of the middle class. It is also necessary to note the presence of social pathologies in post-Soviet society, such as the ambivalence of mass consciousness, atomisation of society, conformism, nihilism, deprofessionalisation (when, due to artificially created conditions, the middle class turned into a class of small market traders who suffered from organised criminal groups), de-realisation of universal, democratic values, etc. All these pathologies manifested themselves during the Soviet perestroika and hindered democratisation (Yakovlev, 2015).

In the conditions of the war, significant changes are taking place in the "portrait of Ukrainians". They are as follows: "The desire for support, a sense of justice and mutual benefit are increasingly developing in Ukrainian society. According to sociologists, this is a consequence of the war, which has become a unifying factor, bringing out the best in people. In the future we can expect even greater unity among Ukrainians and a demand for 'progressive' social reforms... After the experience of the war, a sense of common catastrophe and common victory is formed in people. What we call social consolidation, social support and mutual help..." (Kitral, 2022). Special emphasis should be placed on the disappearance of

regional divisions, which were part of the electoral manipulations and the agenda of the oligarchic media. All this creates the conditions for the future political development of the middle class and increases the ability of the middle class to resist the manipulation of the oligarchs.

The constant constitutional reversals in the form of government (presidential and parliamentary-presidential) and the changes in the electoral system (from a majoritarian to a mixed system, after the passage of the proportional model in the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections) can therefore be explained by the manipulations of the oligarchy, which has captured parliament in order to prevent the middle class from becoming a power class. The "hybrid" political regime is advantageous for the oligarchy. It should be noted: "For example, contemporary Ukrainian politics has identified the following political choice dilemmas regarding institutional interaction: 1) authoritarianism vs. democracy; 2) presidential vs. parliamentary forms of government; 3) proportional vs. majoritarian electoral models. Choosing the best institutional interaction model is impossible without addressing these global dilemmas. For more than twenty-nine years, Ukrainian political elites have been trying to make this choice, but have been limited to 'hybrid' models: the parliamentary-presidential form of government, a mixed electoral system, democracy, and the remnants of Soviet authoritarianism" (Yakovleva & Yakovlev, 2020).

One of the reasons for the weakening of the middle class is the mediatisation of politics and the formation of a media-political system. The mediatisation of politics leads to the emergence of mediocracy and the rise of populist politicians and parties, which become one of the main threats to democracy. In post-Soviet conditions, another threat should be added – the "party of power" (Yakovlev, 2014). It is worth noting that this is not just a party that won the elections and formed the government. On the contrary, it is the result of agreements between politicians and oligarchs and the formation of an "internal party". The following should be noted: "One of the characteristics that contributes to the formation of the so-called 'internal party' is the ambivalence of the Ukrainian government and society, and the main principle of the 'party of power' is the preservation of power and property. Therefore, the configurations of the 'party of power' can be very diverse and unexpected, as well as the ideological component. The 'party of power' positions itself as a 'centrist' political force, which in the negative sense means 'neither right nor left'" (Yakovlev, 2014). The answer to these and other challenges from the bourgeoisie should be to rationalise political interaction. Specifically, in the conditions of Ukraine's

democratisation, this means abandoning the format of media shows and media scandals in the process of political choice and returning to rational parliamentary debates. It has been argued that: "Under the conditions of mediatisation, which makes politics (in two senses: both public policy and the struggle for votes during the election campaign) part of the media process, the challenges for rational political communication are increasing. The legitimacy of government requires politicians to participate in talk shows rather than rely on rational argumentation. The fate of individual politicians, political institutions and the reforms needed by society are not decided in rational political debates, but in political talk shows. In recent decades, media scandals have convincingly demonstrated their ability to create the conditions for revolutions and journalistic investigations to delegitimise governments... One of the centres of rationality in modern society is the association of public intellectuals.... At the same time, we are talking about the influence of institutionalised groups of public intellectuals, and not just individual representatives of the field of intellectual production... – 'the Ukrainian branch of the International PEN Club (PEN Ukraine)' and the initiative group 'Persoho hrudnia'" (Yakovlev & Yakovleva, 2022).

In the process of rationalising political interaction, the main role is played by the middle class, a class of people who have a complete secondary or higher education, which, based on media literacy, allows them to check facts and distinguish truth from lies, rational argumentation from populism. As part of the modern "new" middle class, public intellectuals are the first to play a role in the rationalisation of politics.

The need to overcome indoctrination in education in order to increase the political role of the middle class should also be emphasised. This problem affects a complex of issues related to the past and the future: collective memory, identity and the regimes of truth; it is determined that indoctrination permeates the entire space of interaction in secondary education – a student – a textbook – a teacher (Kroytor, Yakovlev & Aleksentseva-Timchenko, 2019). Overcoming indoctrination will certainly contribute to the democratisation and development of the middle class. According to the results of the research of the Polish researcher Petr Długosz (Długosz, 2016), it is the representatives of the middle class (those with higher education, better economic status, higher cultural capital) who strive to take extra paid lessons for their children (62% of Polish students and 69% of Ukrainian students) in order to participate in the struggle for high social positions.

Oligarchy, as a system of political interaction of economic monopolists, not only privatised the branches of the national economy, but also created

effective systems of political control, influencing the political choices of Ukrainian citizens with the help of mass media and oligarchic parties (electoral projects). As Olha Holoyda points out, "After Ukraine's independence, the oligarchs took majority control of huge state enterprises in basic industries: metallurgy, chemicals, oil and gas, power engineering, machine-building – manipulating the supply chain from raw materials out of the ground to the final processed product shipped overseas. Ukraine now has kings of steel, fertiliser, titanium and chocolate. In recent years, the oligarchs have extended their business tentacles into finance and banking, the relatively new insurance business, and media – including television and internet portals. Most oligarchs have created a tangled web of companies registered not only in Ukraine but also in Switzerland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Russia, the UK and the British Virgin Islands" (Holoyda, 2013).

Thus, the oligarchic regime makes full parliamentary representation of the middle class impossible. Instead, the middle class is showing a willingness to increase its political influence. Although there is still no party that would defend the democratic interests of the middle class, there have been attempts, which are discussed below.

3. Political Representation of the Middle Class: From Opposition to Government

In the parliament elected in 2014 there were 90 official millionaires among 423 deputies. As for the next composition of the parliament (IX convocation), representatives of mass media, show business and culture ("creative class") dominate (Ukrainska Pravda, 2019, July 23). The political parties that declared support for the middle class and identified it as a target group in the elections include "Team of the Winter Generation", "Viche", "Self Reliance", "Voice", and others. In the VIIIth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada, "Self Reliance" was represented by 33 deputies (Early parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 26 October 2014), and in the IXth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada, the "Voice" party faction initially consisted of 20 deputies (Early parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 21 July 2019).

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the middle class supported the "Servant of the People", "European Solidarity", and "Voice" to the greatest extent. As the sociologists note: "In the regional centres, the 'Servant of the People' party won the most votes (40.8%), followed by 'European Solidarity' (13.0%), 'Opposition Platform – For Life' (10.0%), 'Voice' (8.9%) and 'Fatherland' (5.5%)... 'Fatherland' achieved its best result in the villages (9.8%), where it came second." (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2019, July 10) An important indicator of the middle

class's choice is the voting of groups with different levels of education. Here are the data of the National Exit Poll on the voting of representatives of different educational groups for parties and blocs that were elected to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: "Servant of the People" is the leader in all educational groups, especially among voters with incomplete higher education (actually, these are students). In the group of voters with higher education, 'Servant of the People' received 40.3% of the votes, 'European Solidarity' received 12.8%, 'Opposition Platform – For Life' received 9.6%, and 'Holos' received 8.8%, 'Fatherland' – 6.1%. Among voters with incomplete higher education, 'Servant of the People' received 52.9% of the vote, 'Opposition Platform – For Life' – 7.6%, 'Voice' – 7%, 'European Solidarity' – 6.6%, 'Fatherland' – 5.5%... Among voters with secondary specialised education, 'Servant of the People' is also leading with 6.8%, 'Opposition Platform – For Life' – 13.8%, 'Fatherland' – 8.1%, 'European Solidarity' – 6.5%, and 'Voice' – 5.1%. In the group of voters with complete secondary education, 'Servant of the People' received 45.7% of the vote, 'Opposition Platform – For Life' – 11.5%, 'Fatherland' – 9.7%, 'European Solidarity' – 6.4%, and 'Voice' – only 4.5%... Finally, in the group of voters with incomplete secondary education, 'Servant of the People' received 41.9% of the vote, 'Opposition Platform – For Life' – 13.3%, 'Fatherland' – 9.3%. 'European Solidarity' (4.3%) and 'Voice' (3.7%) did not pass the threshold in this educational group..." (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2019, July 10).

In the course of the electoral odyssey, the Ukrainian middle class has opted for integration with the EU. Here are the numbers: "...26% of the poor would vote for Ukraine's accession to the EU, 55% of the relative (Ukrainian) middle class and 61% of the absolute (European) class."

During the war, significant changes took place in Ukrainian politics. New rules of social relations, of interaction between the government and the opposition are being formed. A new environment of institutional interaction is emerging. The state is concentrating on countering large-scale armed aggression. The main thing is that Ukrainian society is changing, the weight of the middle class is growing, and its representatives are becoming the heart of the military resistance and the volunteer movement.

The following changes in public opinion during the war should also be noted:

- the disappearance of regional divisions, which were part of the electoral manipulation and hindered the consolidation of the middle class;
- the restructuring of opposition activities;
- the significant increase in support for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Overall, these shifts in public consciousness suggest that the middle class has a unique opportunity to gain political advantage and secure representation in power. Here are the sociologists' data: "Despite the deterioration of material conditions, the impossibility of planning life and income, Ukrainians are proud of their country, have become more united, believe in victory and a better future, and have a high vitality index. They trust the armed forces (97%) and the president (90%)... And the Euro-Atlantic vector of sentiment has reached its highest levels in the country's history! One of the immediate consequences of the Russian invasion has been the growth of Euro-Atlantic sentiment among Ukrainians, which has reached its highest levels in the country's history. Today, 87% support Ukraine's accession to the European Union and 86% support NATO" (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023, February 22).

Since the start of the large-scale armed invasion, citizens' self-confidence and confidence in the strength of their country has increased significantly. "If before the rating that characterises our state in relation to others was at the level of 3.0 – slightly above average: for example, there were opinions that "we are a little worse than the Europeans", now it has increased to 4.6 – this is one of the top indicators. In the same way, the confidence of citizens has increased by 1.5 times – from 4.5 to 6.4" (Ukrinform, 2022, November 24).

These indicators show that the middle class has new opportunities to increase its political influence, because it is the representatives of the middle class who are on the "front line" of social change during the war. The middle class has demonstrated its capacity for self-organisation at critical moments. Another piece of good news for the middle class is that support for democracy is growing among all citizens. Even during the war, democratic tendencies are on the rise. So if in 2017 almost 80% of Ukrainian citizens supported a political system with a strong leader independent of elections and parliament, today 68% do. Mykhailo Mishchenko, deputy director of the sociological service of the Razumkov Centre, points out: "It seems that during the war this indicator should have increased even more, but it decreased. Today, only 68% think that such a system is good" (Ukrinform, 2022, November 24). Another good news for the middle class is that Ukrainians trust the government, the army and volunteers. The middle class is represented in all three categories, especially in the volunteer movement. In addition, Ukrainians prefer to keep President Zelensky for a second term, but they are "more dissatisfied (54%) than satisfied (37%) with the work of the Verkhovna Rada". If elections were to be held in the near future, almost half would look for an alternative among the new parties (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023, February 22).

This is a chance for the middle class to finally get full parliamentary representation. In addition, during the war, the parliamentary opposition has significantly restructured its activities. First of all, this applies to the largest opposition faction, "European Solidarity". From now on, instead of fighting for narrow party interests or the rating of their leader (P. Poroshenko), they use the principle of popular representation and stand up for the interests of their own voters. There is a significant number of middle class representatives among them. In turn, the middle class was one of the first to defend the interests of the democratic opposition during the student revolution "on granite" (1990), the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014). However, the oligarchs and the bureaucracy have always seized the initiative and become the real beneficiaries of middle-class uprisings. As N. Penkovska notes, "...in the process of political competition with the government, the opposition can rely not only on its own strength, forming a shadow government or criticising the government. The experience of post-communist transformations in Ukraine has shown that the "third sector" (public organisations, mass media, business), the 'oligarchic' part of parliament and local councils are on the side of the 'constructive' opposition, and at the end of the 'government versus opposition' confrontation, a significant part of the bureaucracy also joins the potential winners. It is then that a new coalition is formed in parliament, the 'party of power' is restarted, and the countdown begins in the process of the transition of the part of the 'old' government to the opposition, its institutionalisation as an opposition..." (Penkovska, 2014).

The rating of those political forces that position themselves as representing the middle class is growing significantly. In August 2022, the situation was as follows: "...it was not easy for the opposition parties, which were at the top of the rating tables in February, to fit into the current agenda... So far we see that there are now three passing parties. Servant of the People' leads with around 50%, followed by the Prytula project and 'European Solidarity'. Others are not visible. But this is the current situation" (Bezpalko, 2022, August 24).

European integration is an important factor in the growing role of the middle class in politics, as it was during the "parliamentary landings" to Ukraine's democratic coalition partners and joint meetings of the Ukrainian parliament with MEPs (12 April 2023) that a group of MPs who became representatives of the middle class crystallised.

4. Conclusions

According to objective indicators of income, education, employment and consumer behaviour,

the middle class consists of residents of large cities who have (or are in the process of obtaining) higher education. The self-identification of the middle class is determined by the desire for democratic changes, awareness of the need to overcome corruption, deconstruct the oligarchic regime and implement market reforms. The middle class is the social group most interested in political and economic competition, because it is the middle class that benefits from democracy and the market economy. The lack of parliamentary representation of such a large social group as the middle class hinders the democratisation of Ukraine. It should be noted that the social weight of the middle class is constantly growing. It is proved that the fragmentary reforms in Ukraine after the events of 2004 and 2013–2014 were carried out by the oligarchic regime under the pressure of the middle class. At the same time, the constitutional reversals in the form of government (presidential and parliamentary-presidential) and the changes in the electoral system (from a majoritarian to a mixed electoral system, with the passage of the proportional model in the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections) can be explained by the manipulations of the oligarchy, which captured parliament in order to prevent the middle class from coming to power.

The article identifies the factors that prevent the Ukrainian middle class from gaining parliamentary representation:

- oligarchic political regime as the rule of economic monopolists who privatised certain sectors of the national economy. The oligarchs have created effective systems of political control over the parliament and, through the media and party projects, have established an "oligarchic-Lumpen" system. This allows them to manipulate the choice of Ukrainians and gain control over the parliament;
- the mediatisation of politics, which presents the political struggle between the government and the opposition in the format of a continuous and meaningless talk show interspersed with media scandals;
- the formation of a "party of power" as a result of a conspiracy of oligarchic electoral projects, which retains its influence through the artificial formation of a majority in the Ukrainian parliament;
- social pathologies of post-Soviet society (paternalism, ambivalence of mass consciousness, atomisation of society, conformism, nihilism, deprofessionalisation, de-actualisation of universal democratic values, etc.) It should be emphasised that, according to sociological research, these pathologies have been partially overcome.

Thus, after a large-scale armed invasion, Ukrainian society acquired all the signs of a consolidated and united society, and regional divisions disappeared. Overcoming the mediatisation of politics, populism

and indoctrination is a necessary condition for the rationalisation of political interaction and the growth of the influence of the middle class. In the process of rationalising political interaction, the main role belongs to the middle class, i.e., citizens who have completed secondary or higher education and who, on the basis of media literacy, are able to check facts,

distinguish truth from lies and oppose populism. As part of the modern "new" middle class, public intellectuals are the first to play a role in the rationalisation of politics.

The middle class in Ukraine has every chance of coming to power through the creation of a middle-class party (one or more) and ensuring parliamentary representation.

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