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# The impact of Russian military aggression on the establishment of a new Ukrainian political nation

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## Abstract

The open Russian invasion of Ukraine forced the Ukrainian society to defend its right to a unique and consolidated national identity. The aspiration of Ukrainians to preserve their own identity implied, later, the establishment of a new Ukrainian nation. The aim of the study was to analyze the factors influencing the establishment of the Ukrainian political nation in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The method of comparative analysis was used to identify a high level of legal awareness of the constitutional military duty to defend the Fatherland and preserve the Ukrainian nation. It is concluded that in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, a new Ukrainian political nation is being established under the influence of ensuring equal rights to culture, language, territory, religion, justice, economy and ethnicity. It was found that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine forced Ukrainians to unite for the sake of their own preservation as a single Ukrainian political nation. A new Ukrainian political nation, which was established during the Russo-Ukrainian war, is a sovereign community of citizens who have the political subjectivity to put up national resistance to the occupiers.

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**Keywords:** Russian military aggression; Ukraine and Russia; sovereignty of the nation; new national identity; resistance.

## El impacto de la agresión militar rusa en el establecimiento de una nueva nación política ucraniana

### Resumen

La abierta invasión rusa de Ucrania obligó a la sociedad ucraniana a defender su derecho a una identidad nacional única y consolidada. La aspiración de los ucranianos de preservar su propia identidad implica, **más tarde**, el establecimiento de una nueva nación ucraniana. El objetivo del estudio fue analizar los factores que influyeron en el establecimiento de la nación política ucraniana en el contexto de la invasión rusa de Ucrania. El método de análisis comparativo se utilizó para identificar un alto nivel de conciencia legal del deber militar constitucional de defender la Patria y preservar la nación ucraniana. Se concluye que en el contexto del conflicto militar ruso-ucraniano, se está estableciendo una nueva nación política ucraniana bajo la influencia de garantizar la igualdad de derechos a la cultura, el idioma, el territorio, la religión, la justicia, la economía y el origen étnico. Se descubrió que la agresión militar de Rusia contra Ucrania obligó a los ucranianos a unirse por el bien de su propia conservación como una sola nación política ucraniana. Una nueva nación política ucraniana, que se estableció durante la guerra ruso-ucraniana, es una comunidad soberana de ciudadanos que tienen la subjetividad política para oponer resistencia nacional a los ocupantes.

**Palabras clave:** agresión militar rusa; Ucrania y Rusia; soberanía de la nación; nueva identidad nacional; resistencia.

### Introduction

The standard of living of Ukrainians has significantly decreased as a result of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Residents of Ukraine faced many problems related to rising prices for foodstuffs and goods, constant interruption of electricity and heat supply, mass unemployment, and reduction of jobs. Paradoxically, all this forces Ukrainian citizens to believe and hope for a better future and victory for Ukraine. In 2022, almost every third citizen of Ukraine believed that their standard of living would improve in the next year. For comparison, only every fifth resident of Ukraine believed so in 2021 (Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2023).

Despite the heavy losses of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukrainians seek the continuation of the war with Russia until the complete victory of Ukraine and the return of all the territory of Ukraine captured by Russia, including Crimea. Ukrainians' defence of the right to live in a democratic independent legal state forced them to resist numerous war crimes and fight for their right to exist against the Russian invasion. Preservation of the Ukrainian identity forced Ukrainians to resist and mobilize as citizens for the right of their democratic nation-state to exist. The Ukrainian nation has always struggled with arbitrariness and lawlessness.

In 2014, it defended the territory of Donbas. In 2013-2014, it protested on the Euromaidan for dignity and against corruption. In 2004, during the Orange Revolution, it rallied for free and fair elections for the president of Ukraine. So even now Ukrainians are mobilizing against Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order to defend their Motherland and protect their families and homes. So, all this undoubtedly proves the relevance of the chosen research topic.

The aim of this study is to analyse the open military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and to determine the main factors for the establishment of a new Ukrainian political nation in the context of the military conflict.

The aim of the article was achieved through the fulfilment of the following research objectives:

- consider the provisions of the national legislation of Ukraine on the national resistance to the Russian occupiers as a manifestation of the establishment of a new political nation of Ukrainians;
- identify the components of the identity of the Ukrainian nation and describe their constituent components in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine;
- determine the standard of living of Ukrainians in the context of the Russian invasion and identify the level of their trust in the Ukrainian authorities regarding the resolution of the issue of ending the military conflict;
- carry out an analysis of the provisions of international standards on human rights and determine the state of their violation during the military conflict.

## **1. Literature review**

Kuzio (2022) and Knott (2022) carried out a nationalist analysis of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. In their opinion, the military

conflict forced Ukrainians to unite in order to preserve their nationality and defend the independence of Ukraine. Mälksoo (2022) analysed the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of Russian imperialism and came to the conclusion that Russia's open denial of the political sovereignty of Ukraine strengthens Ukrainians' awareness of their right to exist as an independent political nation.

Bureiko and Moga (2019) and Kulyk (2019) studied the Ukrainian-Russian linguistic dyad and its impact on national identity in Ukraine, noting that the issue of choosing free communication is an integral element of the gained freedom. Ciuriak (2022) analysed Russia's military aggression against Ukraine through the prism of ensuring information security, claiming that social networks in Russia's war against Ukraine are an effective tool for forming nationalist ideas and maintaining the connection of many families.

Hunter (2018) analysed the Ukrainian government's involvement of volunteer battalions in response to Russian aggression in Donbas. In his opinion, the creation of volunteer battalions is a conscious manifestation of self-preservation of the Ukrainian nation. Therefore, the active position of the Ukrainian nation in the political life of the country contributed to stabilizing the situation in Donbas in 2014 through the participation of volunteer battalions in an anti-terrorist operation together with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Haran *et al.* (2019) and Dzutsati (2021) explored the public sentiments in Donbas, which is not controlled by Ukraine and stated that, contrary to Russia's expectations, the military invasion of Ukraine only strengthened the Ukrainian civil nation.

Harris (2020) and Bojcun (2015) examined the Russian-Ukrainian crisis of 2014 in the context of nationalism, emphasizing the proportional relationship between Russia's determination to control Ukraine's political future and Ukraine's determination to free itself from Russian influence. They also emphasize the incompatibility between Russian and Ukrainian nationalist ideas, which became the basis for the establishment of a new Ukrainian political nation during Russia's military invasion of Ukraine.

The unity of the political and cultural space of Ukraine has been strengthening after the Euromaidan and the Russian military aggression. This is stated by Kuzyk (2019) and Dembińska and Smith (2021) who studied the issue of national integration of Ukraine before and after 2014. The political and cultural identity of Ukrainian citizens is not fixed, it currently has an ever-growing convergence of Ukrainian society with Russia's military aggression (Sydorova *et al.*, 2022). Analysing the impact of Russian military aggression on the attitude of Ukrainians to Russia and Ukrainian national identity, Oliinyk and Kuzio (2021) and Kasianov (2023) reached the same conclusion.

Matveeva (2022) and Voronovici (2022) studied Russia's military aggression against Ukraine since 2014 and came to the conclusion that the Ukrainians who remained living in the Donbas, which is not controlled by the Ukrainian government, sought unity with Ukraine despite the continuation of military operations and the economic blockade. They also note that Ukrainians strive for national unity, even those who were forced to accept the terms of integration with Russia because of the lack of food security.

Sasse and Lackner (2018) supports this position when studying the issue of preserving the identity of Ukrainians in the context of a military conflict. The researcher believes during the military conflict, every citizen of Ukraine did not leave the political life of their country aside, which contributed to the creation of a new Ukrainian political nation.

Petryna (2023) and Veselov (2023) study Russia's war against Ukraine and argue that the wave of war crimes committed in Ukraine is a genocide of the Ukrainian people. Therefore, Ukrainians unite trying to oppose these crimes, forming a special kind of resistance that strikes against impunity.

However, despite a rather wide spectrum of research on this issue by researchers, the issues of establishing a new Ukrainian political nation in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine remain fragmented, which determines the relevance of the chosen research topic.

## **2. Methods and materials**

The analysis procedure of this study included three stages. The first stage provided for the analysis of academic literature to determine the content of Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and its consequences for the establishment of a new Ukrainian nation. The provisions of the national legislation regarding national resistance to the Russian occupiers were selected. International human rights standards established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights were reviewed. The material of sociological surveys on public opinion on the state of war and its consequences for the future of Ukraine was selected.

The second stage involved theoretical and experimental research conducted by comparing their results and analysing discrepancies. The provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance" and the Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the Introduction of Martial Law in Ukraine" were considered in order to determine the criteria for assessing the legal awareness of Ukrainians before putting up national resistance to the Russian occupiers.

The state of violation of human rights in Ukraine was assessed according to international standards by comparing the norms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights for the violation of the rights of Ukrainians during the military conflict. War crimes committed by Russia against Ukrainians were assessed through the analysis of the practice of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the parliamentary decisions of the leading countries. The analysis of the survey was the basis for an assessment of Ukrainians' trust in the state authorities and the strength of military personnel during the military conflict.

The third stage provided for systematization of the criteria for evaluating public opinion on the state of war in Ukraine and the identity of the Ukrainian nation using Microsoft Office capabilities. A scientific discussion on the prerequisites and grounds for Russia's open military conflict in Ukraine was systematized. The processed materials were analysed for the assigned tasks, and the results of the conducted research were formalized.

A comparative analysis was used to analyse scientific, legal, statistical and practical information about the open military invasion of Russia into Ukraine and its consequences on the formation of the legal consciousness of Ukrainians regarding the desire to defend their own state and preserve the nation.

The system-logical method was applied to analyse the results of the survey of the leading sociological organizations of Ukraine regarding the public opinion about the war, victory, and the future of Ukraine in terms of the formation of a new Ukrainian political nation.

The combination of empirical and theoretical methods was used to carry out an empirical interpretation of the theory and theoretical interpretation of empirical data. The legal framework of national resistance to the Russian occupiers was also determined as a conscious manifestation of the preservation of Ukrainian identity. The doctrinal analysis of academic works on the problematic issues of the survival of Ukrainians during the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict enabled determining the imperfection of the existing legal mechanisms in the field of national resistance and social security of Ukrainians in martial law.

The sample was the following:

- the general characteristics of the observance of human rights and its components for the protection of the identity of the Ukrainian nation;
- the standard of living of Ukrainians in the context of the Russian-military conflict;
- the level of trust of Ukrainians in the state authorities regarding the resolution of the issue of ending the military conflict;

- provisions of the Ukrainian legislation of Ukraine in the field of national resistance through the prism of the establishment of a new political nation of Ukrainians;
- factors in the establishment of a new Ukrainian political nation through the prism of Russia's open military attack on Ukraine;
- practical recommendations for assessing the state of military aggression of Russia against Ukraine on the life of Ukrainians and their desire to preserve Ukrainian identity.

The totality of the study of these objects revealed the content of the problems of forming the legal consciousness of Ukrainians and preserving their identity in the context of an open Russian conflict in Ukraine.

The main materials being the basis for the research were the norms of national legislation in the field of defence, the introduction of martial law, and the commission of national resistance, and the norms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. These were also the practice of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, territorial defence and volunteer units, as well as studies on the problems of preserving the identity of the Ukrainian nation in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

They also included the survey results of the Razumkov Centre as part of the MATRA Programme funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ukraine and the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. The practice of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the assessment of war crimes committed by the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian nation was also used.

### **3. Results**

Russia's encroachment on the territory of Ukraine and Russia's failure to recognize the legal sovereignty of Ukraine led to a massive violation of the rights of Ukrainians to preserve their lives. The lawlessness and arbitrariness of the Russian occupiers contributed to the formation of the legal consciousness of Ukrainians to put up national resistance in order to preserve their nation. The total resistance of Ukrainians against Russian military aggression proves the willingness of Ukrainian citizens to fight and win for the sake of preserving an identical Ukrainian nation.

The willingness to fight and win is evidenced by a certain political agreement of the population with the demands of the state power as socially legitimate, regardless of their relationship to the Ukrainian political power and the assessment of its effectiveness. Democracy manifests itself in the

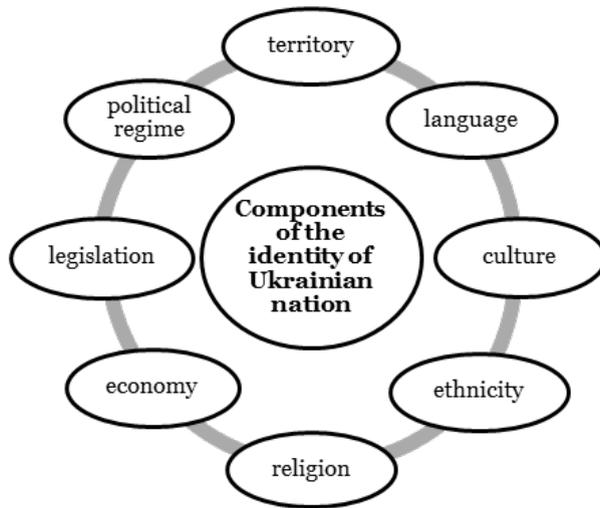
conscious will of the public to fulfil the established requirements of the state authorities without excessive use of coercive means. So, after the declaration of martial law in Ukraine after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainians with combat experience began to actively enrol in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 64/2022, 2022).

Ukrainians immediately began to create volunteer units, carry out volunteer activities aimed at helping the military and refugees, and also actively participate in the territorial defence (Law of Ukraine No. 1702-IX, 1991).

The territorial defence is a conscious desire of Ukrainians, mostly without combat experience, to participate in the defence of the country by fulfilling the constitutional duty to protect Ukraine, its independence, and territorial integrity.

The massive territorial defence units indicate the desire of Ukrainians to put up national resistance to the Russian occupiers. Therefore, the total national resistance of Ukrainians to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine proves to be the formation of new values in Ukrainians. They began to value more their state, the territory on which their families live, and identify themselves more as a new Ukrainian political nation.

Ukrainians were massively subjected to violations of their rights related to their identity during the last nine years of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Ukrainian national identity consists of a number of interconnected and interdependent components (Figure 1). A particular component is dominant for each region of Ukraine, which characterizes the differences of individual regions among different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. However, regardless of the conflict between different communities of Ukrainians due to linguistic, religious or political issues, the military aggression of Ukraine united them for the sake of their self-preservation as a single Ukrainian nation.



**Figure 1. The structure of the identity of Ukrainian nation.**  
 Source: author's own development.

The desire to survive and preserve the united Ukrainian nation proves the colossal trust of Ukrainians in state power and the strength of the military. Ukrainians became more optimistic During Russia's open military aggression against Ukraine and felt the value of the state and the importance of the authorities, which were traditionally treated with distrust (Table 1). The absolute majority of Ukrainians hope for the end of the war and the complete liberation of the territory of Ukraine, including the occupied territory of Crimea, in the coming year, or even sooner.

**Table 1. Public opinion about Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.**

The opinion of the Ukrainian nation	2023	2022
Faith in the victory of Ukraine		
Yes	93%	93%
No	4%	3%
Difficult to answer	3%	4%
The period in which the military conflict will end		
Current year	32%	50%
1-2 years	34%	26%

3-5 years	7%	7%
More than 5 years	4%	2%
Difficult to answer	23%	15%
Resistance to Russian aggression in Ukraine is put up in the right or wrong direction		
In the right direction	61%	59%
In the wrong direction	21%	24%
Difficult to answer	18%	17%
Will Ukraine be able to overcome the difficulties associated with the military conflict		
Will be able to overcome in the near future	50%	50%
Will be able to overcome, but at an indefinite time	36%	37%
Will not be able	3%	5%
Difficult to answer	11%	8%

Source: author's own development based on Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (2023), Razumkov Center (2023).

In general, the level of optimism in Ukraine's free and independent future is improving. More than three-quarters of Ukrainians believe in this, whereas in the pre-war period, only every tenth citizen of Ukraine was an optimist. The majority of Ukrainians are convinced that the Ukrainian authorities are doing a very good job of solving problems in the field of defence (Table 2). Ukrainians take an active part in the life of the state by committing national resistance to Russian military aggression.

They express a high level of trust in the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine, military personnel, and defence officials. They testify to a high level of mistrust of state officials. Such dissatisfaction with the work of politicians and civil servants indicates their inefficiency in ensuring the proper functioning of all state authorities during martial law.

**Table 2. Level of public trust in government officials of Ukraine**

Social institutions	2023		2022		2021	
	Trust	Do not trust	Trust	Do not trust	Trust	Do not trust
Armed Forces of Ukraine	95%	5%	94%	6%	68%	32%
Volunteer organizations	88%	12%	85%	15%	54%	45%
Volunteer units	88%	12%	81%	11%	54%	45%

National Guard of Ukraine	86%	14%	88%	12%	54%	45%
State Emergency Service of Ukraine	86%	14%	88%	12%	62%	38%
President of Ukraine	83%	17%	80%	20%	36%	64%
State Border Service of Ukraine	83%	17%	84%	16%	55%	45%
Security Service of Ukraine	75%	25%	60%	40%	36%	64%
National Police of Ukraine	72%	28%	65%	35%	39%	61%
Religious organizations	70%	30%	62%	38%	64%	36%
NGOs	66%	34%	65%	35%	47%	53%
Local government	63%	37%	64%	36%	58%	42%
National Bank of Ukraine	57%	43%	35%	65%	30%	70%
Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine	50%	50%	40%	60%	22%	78%
Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	41%	59%	35%	65%	19%	81%
State officials	26%	74%	20%	80%	15%	85%
Courts	25%	75%	19%	81%	16%	84%
Politicians	22%	78%	15%	85%	16%	84%

Source: author's own development based on Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (2023), Razumkov Center (2023).

The high level of trust of Ukrainians in the President of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine indicates the legal awareness and assessment of mass war crimes committed by Russia against the civilian population. Ireland, Estonia, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic recognized the genocide of the Ukrainian nation committed by the Russian military.

The Parliament of Ukraine recognized the mass war crimes committed by the Russian occupiers against Ukrainians as genocide of the Ukrainian nation (Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine No. 2188-IX, 2022). The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recognized the genocide of Ukrainians because of the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to the territory of the Russian Federation.

The desire of Ukrainians to preserve their own nation and win the Russian-Ukrainian war indicates the desire of Ukrainians to fight lawlessness and arbitrariness by recognizing their right to life. The recognition of the right of Ukrainians to their nation will testify to the restoration of Ukraine as a legal state that complies with the guarantees of international human rights standards established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(United Nations, 1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (European Commission of Human Rights, 1950). Therefore, Ukrainians deliberately try to restore their equality of rights and freedoms as citizens of Ukraine by committing national resistance to the Russian occupation.

#### 4. Discussion

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine contributed to the unification of Ukrainian citizens for the purpose of their self-preservation. Russia's non-recognition of Ukraine's legal sovereignty forces Ukrainians to defend their nation and state. Russia's aggression directed at the destruction of Ukrainian nationality forced the residents of Ukraine to actively fight against lawlessness and defend their own rights to life and freedom of choice.

Russia's aggression directed at the destruction of Ukrainian nationality forced the residents of Ukraine to actively fight against lawlessness and defend their rights to life and freedom of choice.

Flockhart and Korosteleva (2022) noted that Russia's military aggression changed the view on the value of life and self-existence not only among Ukrainians, but also among Europeans. Hunter (2018) supports this position, claiming that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine activated Ukrainians to participate in the country's political life by establishing volunteer battalions.

Ukrainians have repeatedly participated in military operations consciously and actively under such conditions (Donbas, 2014 and Ukraine as a whole from 2022 to the present) or actively involved in volunteering and aid to the military at the front. Russia's military invasion of Ukraine contributed to the strengthening of the Ukrainian nation and the shaping the opinion of Ukrainians regarding their identity as citizens of Ukraine (Haran *et al.*, 2019; Dzutsati, 2021).

Moreover, nine years of occupation of the citizens of Donbas indicates the desire of these Ukrainians for compromises on the part of the Ukrainian authorities to settle the issue of the military conflict. Pakhomenko *et al.* (2018) and Kamyanets (2022) noted that the military aggression of Russia with the partial occupation of the territory of Ukraine feeds a persistent desire of Ukrainians in the occupied territories to preserve their national identity as citizens of Ukraine (Yunin *et al.*, 2022).

But despite the incessant military conflict, a new Ukrainian political nation is being established in parallel in different parts of the population of Ukraine in particular: those who live in territories not occupied by Russia; those who live in the territories occupied by Russia; those who live in self-

proclaimed republics; internally displaced persons; those who accepted the integration of Russia (Sasse and Lackner, 2018; D’Anieri, 2022).

According to Harris (2020), the Russian-Ukrainian crisis is not an ethnic conflict, but nationalism in it contributed to the instigation of this conflict, and remains an actual obstacle to its resolution. Kuzio (2022) and Knott (2022) claim that existential nationalism motivates Russia to continue the war at any cost, and Ukraine — to fight with everything it has. According to Mälksoo (2022) Russian imperialism contributed to building Ukrainians’ awareness of their self-preservation by defending their rights to exist as an independent nation.

Internal divisions in Ukraine related to national belonging and linguistic issues are actively used by Russia in the war with Ukraine. However, all these problems also have a positive element, they have a significant impact on the establishment of a new political nation in Ukraine (Bureiko and Moga, 2019). At the same time, Akaliyski and Reeskens (2023) and Bosse (2022) believe that Ukraine is a branched state, but its regional differences within the state are quite minimal.

The doctrinal analysis of the outlined issues of the analysis of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine with a view to the establishment of a new Ukrainian nation revealed that researchers consider it appropriate to further study the military conflict, which in general adjusts the content and directions of development of observance of the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The Ukrainian political nation established as a result of Russian military aggression in Ukraine is a sovereign community of citizens who have the political subjectivity to put up national resistance to the occupiers. In other words, it is a collection of politically united residents of Ukraine, who pursue collective national interests through the mechanism of their own political organization — the state. Most members of the political community are characterized by patriotism and responsibility for the fate of the country.

Therefore, citizens of Ukraine massively joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine during the Russian invasion of Ukraine to fulfil their constitutional duty to protect Ukraine, its independence, and territorial integrity.

So, the total national resistance of Ukrainians to Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine testifies to the formation of new values in Ukrainians. They began to value more their own state, the territory on which their families live, and identify themselves more as a new Ukrainian political nation.

The prospects for further research are the development of practical recommendations for improving the observance of rights and freedoms in Ukraine through world recognition of the Ukrainian nation and Ukraine as a legal state. Therefore, we see a further perspective in the empirical study, theoretical and methodological substantiation of effective mechanisms for compliance with international standards for the observance of human rights and freedoms and an effective system of measures of responsibility for violations of these rights and freedoms.

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