

# Ukraine: Act, the new student union zine

Friday 16 February 2024, by [LE TRÉHONDAT Patrick](#) (Date first published: 15 February 2024).

**One year after its founding, February 2023, the Ukrainian student union Direct Action (Priama Diia) has just published the first issue of Act, the union's zine. A few weeks earlier, Direct Action had held its first congress and adopted a manifesto "Students are the strength of the university". Over the past year, Direct Action has organized several mobilizations, most often victorious, in defense of the rights and interests of Ukrainian students.**

## A year of student struggles

At the beginning of January 2024, Direct Action took stock of its activities in 2023 and cited among them:

"We organized a demonstration entitled 'A week against fascism', during which we recalled that opposition to hateful ideologies is still relevant today. We came together for cleanups [in parks] to show that environmental protection is an issue that should concern all social groups, including students. Together with the student council of the psychology department of Karazin University, we have published a brochure against psychological violence from teachers. We launched an action demanding the requisition of the empty Russian embassy to turn it into a youth center accessible to all. We participated in demonstrations against the seizure of the KNUKiT university building [in Kyiv, given over to real estate speculation by developers] by looters which ended in a victory for the students. We helped establish the "October 11 Student Committee" to inspect the installation of windows and doors at Lviv National University, and then we inspected university shelters [1]. We participated in protests against the chauvinist Iryna Farion, demanding her dismissal from her professorship at the Lviv Polytechnic. We organized a demonstration at KIMA against the administration's decision to charge students for their absences from classes".

## Manifest

At its congress, the union adopted a manifesto "Students are the strength of the university". In this document Direct Action reviews the situation of students during the war and sets out its objectives and union strategy.

"In the context of war, where students are involved in the fight against imperialism, including at the front, the University is more vulnerable than ever. We, Priama Diia, an independent student union, unite students in the fight for free and quality education. Students are the lifeblood of the University and we feel responsible for its future... As part of a research university, we can have free access to knowledge, go beyond the hierarchical structures of the university and learn from the start to practice research and become creators of knowledge, and not become consumers of knowledge. In this system, knowledge is an effective tool for the liberation struggle, and in our response to authoritarianism and imperialism," explains the union. "Since the 1990s, students have been fighting for a better future, a new education system and decent living and studying conditions. Students faced ruthless neoliberal policies, criminal privatization with cuts in education spending. All

attempts by market fundamentalists to improve the educational situation have ended in failure, worsening the crisis,” the manifesto accuses.

Concerning its means of action, the union indicates the different forms that struggles can take in a country at war and under martial law:

**“Protection and defense of rights.** The student union defends the interests and rights of its members and other students in difficult situations. In particular, we use legal defense tools when the situation requires it. We ensure that union members are not subject to reprisals for their activism. Petitions are also one of the ways the union can influence the action of administrations and government officials.

**Organization of sections.** For effective work in the field, we create branches in cities and universities. The sections are autonomous and operate on the basis of the specific situation that exists in their university and the will of its members. (...)

**Solidarity with independent unions and support for progressive initiatives.** To address specific issues, the union cooperates with other movements that share values and objectives similar to ours: fighting against discrimination, against the commercialization of education, etc. Because we believe that the student movement is part of the broader labor movement, Priama Diia pays particular attention to cooperation with independent unions and worker collectives.

**Demonstrations, pickets, strikes, occupation of student spaces and other methods of struggle.** In situations where the methods mentioned above do not allow the achievement of these objectives, the union turns to direct action, the mobilization of students for the collective defense of their interests.

## **Act, the zine**

The zine, which runs to over 80 pages, is beautifully illustrated by Katya Gritseva, a student trade unionist in Lviv, who explains in the editorial, “This year’s zine is dedicated to the theme of how students live and find the strength to fight in times of war. It contains a variety of experience texts, so perhaps you’ll find yourself in one of them. It’s not easy to live through everything that’s happening in our country. On the one hand, the bombings, the occupation, the deportations, and the other reductions in benefits, evictions from dormitories, the revolting attitude of administration”. In the next pages, an interview with unionists from Direct Action discusses the current student struggles and the union orientation of Direct Action. Artem Remizovski, student, recounts “How I encountered the war, I was disappointed at the university, and I started to build a utopia”. “What really irritated me during the first months of the war was my helplessness. I hated myself for not being able to shoot, drive a car, bring help or even donate blood (because of my health)... One thing that saved me from the fear of war and powerlessness at university was activism... To be honest, I decided to become a member of the organization not out of simple altruism. It was precisely a political choice... At some point, I got tired of being a lone utopian, so I found other utopians... War is chaos and unpredictability, and that’s why it’s even more important not to forget your own dreams and influence the world around you. Everything we create today will make life easier after the war. This is what motivates me, despite all the psychological discomfort and ambient cynicism, to fight for better, affordable education for all.” explains the student in a moving testimony. Other student testimonies occupy many pages of the zine, in particular an interview with a student from Kherson, deported to Russia. The zine also asks its readers : “Many people consider Russia to be a fascist state. What do you think?”. Poems run through the following pages, before Mykhailo Samsonenko proposes “Rebellion 2023: summary of the year’s mobilizations”. “In a situation of war, which has placed the majority of students in an even more vulnerable social position than before, and in the

face of constant efforts by the authorities and administrations to economise on the backs of students, to sell off university buildings and land, and to ignore the poor conditions in which students study and live in dormitories, student protest is often almost the only way of conveying the views of education users to those in power and to society in general. More and more often, students are refusing to tolerate the arbitrariness of administrations, gathering in front of university buildings and authorities with bold posters and slogans, proving again and again that social rights are not simply given - they are won through struggle." Maria Sokolova with her "A few words about the University" explains for her part that "As you can see, you've entered an amazing place: the University. There are a lot of problems here, but what he, and rather we, students, teachers, professors and researchers, can give each other is worth time, effort and a common fight for better conditions... Simple images have no place at university, but it's no place for complexities." Finally, Maksym Schumakov, with his "Note on the role of higher education in successful post-war reconstruction" advocates "radical reform" of the university. He explains that "it is thanks to it that we can draw the silhouette of a prosperous post-war Ukraine, but also offer the world a model of a new and more democratic society. And at the epicenter of its development is the student body. »

Act also offers free access to a video game on the problems that a student encounters in their university career, "The threat of commercialization and commodification weighs on free and accessible higher education. It is pushed by oligarchs and university administrations, convinced that knowledge should be a commodity accessible only to selected members of society. But will students accept such rules of the game? ".

" The first print run of the zine will be printed within a month, so everyone can get their hard copy for free. We will tell you how to get a zine printed in future publications, so keep a close eye on the activities of Ukraine's only independent student union: Direct Action! » concludes the union

The download link for the pdf of the zine:

<http://www.priama-diia.org/materials>

On the Ukrainian student movement

Commons has produced a video (10 min) on the recent history of the Ukrainian student union movement.

- On the mobilizations of 2009-2010 and the founding of Priama Diia (Direct Action).
- On its ( re )foundation in February 2023 and the recent fight against the real estate speculation operation on the land of a university in Kyiv.

Subtitled in English - choose the language with the gear-parameters then subtitles

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**Patrick Le Tréhondat**

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## Footnotes

[1] In Lviv, the broken windows of university dormitories in July 2023 during Russian bombings had not been replaced in October and with winter approaching, the union demanded their replacement and organized a check on the smooth progress of the work. On the issue of shelters,

the union conducted an audit of shelters at universities and published reports on their condition.