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Free Cossacks – Voluntary Public Militia Organisation of 1917–1921 in Ukraine

The launch of Free Cossacks in Ukraine as one of the voluntary public militia organisations has been researched. The reasons of mass free Cossacks movement development have been shown, the structure and activity of Free Cossacks organizations during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 has been described, and their functions have been outlined. The attitude of the Ukrainian Government to Free Cossacks and its consequences have been marked out.

In particular, it is mentioned in the article that the first Free Cossacks' units appeared in Zvenyhorodka district of Kyiv region and spread to the whole territory of Ukraine quite rapidly. One of the reasons for mass Free Cossacks movement was strengthening of historical memory of Ukrainians and increasing of national consciousness in revolutionary conditions, the necessity to organize public order locally and inability of state authorities to provide for the social security.

It has been defined that organizational units were formed by Cossack traditions, and the functions of Free Cossacks ranged from public safeguard assurance and fighting against criminality to defending the Ukrainian statehood as they were determined not

only documentarily but also by historic and political circumstances of that time.

The author has pointed out that the Ukrainian government in most respects supported people's initiative, very cautiously however. As a result, it had led to the degradation of the reputation of some Ukrainian leaders among Cossacks and the majority of population, to the lack of coordination of Ukrainian Government's course of action and that of the insurrected peasants.

Keywords: Free Cossacks; Free Cossacks' Movement; peasantry; revolution; public order safeguard; government; Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR); struggle for Ukrainian statehood.