

“Amulet” (2015)

During my childhood spent in the USSR, totally militarised country, I was able to assemble AK-74 (aka Kalashnikov rifle) with my eyes closed at the age of 12. I had excellent marks in shooting and was fond of all types of weaponry. It made children excited and we could spend hours playing war games and discussing military machinery. It is different in the modern Ukraine. Children, particularly young ones, do not pay any attention to the firearm at home. When I first saw it, I was surprised. But then it happened again and again. On one occasion, I even saw an armed father with three of his children around and none of them seemed to have the slightest interest in his rifle as if he was holding a mop not a rifle. Currently weapon has become something usual and ordinary in the hands of Ukrainians. But just last year none of those, who bought rifles and shotguns now, could imagine they would have firearm in their homes. Now they are all in support of the gun trade in a legal way.

Ukraine is the only country in Europe with no law regulation for the civilian firearm ownership. During the whole period of independence, the government of Ukraine tried to propose more than dozen laws but none of them have been accepted. It is strictly prohibited to buy and bear arms for self-defense. Even traumatic weapon is available only for limited persons like judges and national deputies. The only way to own a firearm legally is to purchase a rifle or a shotgun for hunting. It's absolutely legal to purchase any modifications of non-automatic army weapon (such as AK or M16), but owning the handgun is prohibited by the law. Though these guns are the most suitable for self-defence.

In 2014, during the tragic events in Ukraine (Maydan, Crimea annexation, the war in Donbass), sales of hunting weapons increased by several times. It happened because people couldn't trust and rely on the government that do nothing to protect rights and freedom of citizens. According to the official statistics by the end of 2014 there were 558033 registered owners of rifles and shotguns already. By March 2016 the number of weapon's owners increased to 888047. Founder and Chairman of the Board Ukrainian Gun Owners Association Georgiy Uchaykin thinks that this amount is not actually real: “In fact police does not know how many gun owners there are in the country. The reason is that the register of guns was not kept properly for a long time. With so many weapons in the country, the question of its use for self-defense should be regulated by law. But now, about 95% of people who use guns for self-defense, get prison term. For example, if you was attacked with a knife and you shot the attacker, the probability it will be treated by the court as exceeding the limits of necessary defense is very high. At the same time prosecutors, judges, and even their relatives, in contrast to ordinary citizens have a right to defend themselves with arms.”

The number of illegal weapons increases every day. The cases when law-abiding citizens are buying illegal weapons from the zone of the fighting in the East of Ukraine become more frequent. Illegal weapons are cheaper and not registered in the police files. In the case of use of such weapons is impossible to identify the owner. Besides, the acquisition of legal weapons is regulated only by order of the Interior Ministry, which at any moment can be changed. It seems highly likely that should the state of war be declared, all privately owned weaponry will be seized. And people are afraid to leave their families and property without protection. They understand that the storage and use of such weapons is prohibited by the law, but safety of their families is above all for them.

Nowadays, shotguns are in high demand. Future owners of firearms are to learn how to handle it safely. Quite often, they would also learn how to take part in military actions, in many cases as a part of a small mobile team. Russian hidden aggression to Ukraine makes the prospect of the military conflict being expanded from the East of the country to the central regions quite realistic and motivates Ukrainians to be prepared for the war in the future. However, the main reason for the firearm to be legalised is not to convert civilians into the army, but to protect one's family and belongings. It looks like firearm is a modern version of the amulet, giving its owner an extra power. Not everyone is comfortable to point it at the aggressor and shoot but everyone feels safer having one.