

Ukrainians Crowdfund 'People's Drone' to Patrol Russian Border

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The "people's drone" will have modest specs compared to modern military unmanned craft.

Combine a cash-strapped army and a supportive, tech-savvy population, and something like this was bound to happen: Ukrainians have turned to online crowdfunding to raise money for a "people's drone" to help the military patrol their country's borders.

The People's Project website said it had collected 426,579 hryvnas (\$36,000) — some 8,000 hryvnas (\$675) more than it had sought — to build a drone to help boost Ukrainian government defenses against pro-Russian separatists in the east.

But the work is far from complete, organizers said on their website, adding that they were aiming to procure at least 10 drones in the "first batch," but that hundreds more would probably be needed.

In the communal spirit of the Euromaidan public protests that toppled former Ukrainian

President Viktor Yanukovych earlier this year, Ukrainians have also been donating cash to the military to help procure food, bulletproof vests, binoculars and painkilling medicines, and — perhaps concerned about corruption — have been personally delivering the supplies to soldiers.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry — whose budget totaled \$1.9 billion last year, according to military magazine Jane's Defense Weekly — asked Ukrainians for money earlier this year, and announced in late May that 126.4 million hryvnas (about \$10.7 million) had been raised under its "Support the Ukrainian Army" project. To compare, Russia's defense budget for 2013 stood at \$68.9 billion, according to Jane's Defense Weekly.

The donated money would be used to buy supplies such as uniforms and sleeping bags for government soldiers, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said.

The military also expressed a need for reconnaissance drones in spring when People's Project activists delivered much-needed communication radios, fundraising organizers said.

The "people's drone" will have modest specs compared to modern military unmanned craft, with a speed of 120 kilometers per hour and an endurance of one hour, according to the People's Project website.

"It's imperfect. In many ways," organizers said. But Ukrainian engineers do not have the time or technologies to build a better drone quickly, and "this craft will be fighting right away," the website said.

The People's Project had also raised more than 1 million hryvnas (\$84,500) by late May to help field the "first people's paratrooper battalion," and is collecting funds for a second one and for the "first people's sniper" unit.

"Snipers are very efficient in an anti-terrorist zone as they help to prevent big losses. That's why we started equipping them," David Arakhania, an IT executive from Kiev who founded the site in March, told Britain's The Guardian.

Pro-Russian separatists claimed earlier this month to have shot down a government drone near the eastern town of Horlivka, the Voice of Russia reported. Two weeks earlier, the Ukrainian Security Service released pictures of what it said was a Russian drone that it had captured.

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