

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Institute of Political Studies  
Department of International Relations

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**Oleksandr Lutsenko**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Institute of Political Studies  
Department of International Relations

**Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine:  
the Annexation of Crimea and the Donbas War**

Master's thesis

Author: Oleksandr Lutsenko

Study programme: International Relations

Supervisor: PhDr. Mgr. Magdalena Baštář Leichtová, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2021

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 3.05.2021

Oleksandr Lutsenko

## References

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the work is to analyze the hybrid strategy of Russia against Ukraine. The thesis works with the notion of the socio-cultural concept of the Russian world in the context of a hybrid war. Information campaigns and narratives based on identity change can be used for military purposes. Propaganda and historical paradigms are used in planning hybrid operations. During the military operation in Crimea and the war in Donbass, certain parts of society are radicalized and used in the active part of the conflict.

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem práce je analyzovat hybridní strategii Ruska proti Ukrajině. Práce pracuje s pojmem sociokulturního konceptu ruského světa v kontextu hybridní války. Informační kampaně a příběhy založené na změně identity lze použít pro vojenské účely. Při plánování hybridních operací se používá propaganda a historická paradigmata. Během vojenské operace na Krymu a války na Donbasu byly určité části společnosti radikalizovány a využívány v aktivní části konfliktu.

## **Keywords**

Crimea, Donbas, Hybrid warfare, Russia, Russian World, Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Ukraine.

## **Klíčová slova**

Donbas, hybridní válka, Krym, Rusko, rusko-ukrajinský konflikt, ruský svět, Ukrajina.

## **Title**

Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine: the Annexation of Crimea and the Donbas War.

## **Název práce**

Ruské hybridní válčení na Ukrajině: Anexe Krymu a válka na Donbasu.

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# Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. ROOTS OF RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1.1 <i>“Russian World” and the place of Ukraine in it</i> .....	9
1.2 <i>Socio-historical analysis of Crimea</i> .....	13
1.3 <i>President Yanukovich and socio-historical analysis of Donbas</i> .....	20
<b>2. ANALYSIS OF THE CONFLICT</b> .....	<b>24</b>
2.1 <i>Euromaidan as a clash of two different sociocultural models</i> .....	24
2.2 <i>Annexation of the Crimea</i> .....	27
2.3 <i>The war on Donbass</i> .....	31
2.4 <i>Anatomy of the Russian hybrid warfare</i> .....	36
<b>3. WEAPONIZATION OF THE IDENTITY AS A PART OF HYBRID STRATEGY</b> .....	<b>40</b>
3.1 <i>Constructivism and the hybrid warfare</i> .....	40
3.2 <i>Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a war of identities</i> .....	43
3.3 <i>Weaponization of the Russian world identity</i> .....	45
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>57</b>

## **Introduction**

After gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine began to build its path to democracy. One of the most difficult tasks for the Ukrainian elite was the creation of a new political nation and the unification of a huge country, where more than 45 million people lived. Thus, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large number of different nationalities lived in the hotel regions of Ukraine, with their own culture, with a certain perception of history and political views. Over the 23 years of its independence, Ukraine until 2014 did not manage to clearly define its geopolitical vector, being in a strategically important geographical position between the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states, and Russia.

After the Orange Revolution in 2004, Ukrainian society split into two parts: the western and central regions support integration with the EU and NATO, and the eastern regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea voted for pro-Russian parties. Thus, it became obvious that the identity of the population of the regions of Ukraine differed due to their socio-cultural characteristics. Gradually, the Ukrainian political elite formed its own vision of the Ukrainian identity. However, due to inconsistent cultural and socio-economic policies, a population with a so-called double identity was formed, which depended primarily on the political agenda in the country.

In the fall of 2013, another revolution took place in the country, which mobilized most of the Ukrainian population. The decision of prime minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the EU was precepted as a turnout from pro-Europe course of the government back to pro-Russia. The peaceful Euromaidan started on 21st of November and the main demand was to re-start the initial process of the signing the association agreement with the EU. However, President Viktor



Yanukovych, despite popular discontent and opposition, left for Moscow, where he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The result of the meeting was the signing of the so-called action plan and the receipt of financial assistance to Ukraine. It was a 180-degree turn in the country's foreign policy.

Protests against the government continued and expanded across all regions of the country. In parallel, there were also rallies against the pro-European course, which were organized mainly by pro-Russian political parties and organizations. Yanukovych and the government decided to disperse the protesters in Kiev by force. As a result of the violence in the main square of the country, more than a hundred people were killed. Despite the bloody crackdown on protests, people continued to take to the streets. Yanukovych had to make concessions, sign an agreement with the opposition and agree to early elections. However, the next day, Yanukovych left Ukraine and flew to Russia.

After the escape of the fourth Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovych, Russia occupied Crimea and intervened Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The military operation of the Russian special services surprised the whole world. In the course of the analysis of military operations, a huge number of relevantly new methods of warfare have been identified. It was a complex of military and non-military methods of warfare, which can be called hybrid warfare.

Most researchers believe that the Russian-Ukrainian war began in February 2014, when the military, without insignia, captured the Crimean Peninsula without firing a single shot. However, the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine began long before the start of the real conflict. One of the components of hybrid warfare is the active manipulation of the perception of the local population and information campaigns against the enemy, which cannot be effective without a pre-identified and prepared target audience.

When planning information campaigns, the Russian leadership used many narratives that are based on a common cultural, religious, linguistic and social context. The perception of reality by the population played a key role in information campaigns. Analyzing the causes and history of the conflict, we can notice that the ideas, norms and the identity of the citizens played an important role in the hybrid warfare strategy. Weaponization of linguistic, cultural and religious issues has become the basis for Russia's information campaigns.

The annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass have shown that hybrid warfare can be effective in a globalized world. The rapid development of modern technologies makes it possible to change the intensity of individual stages of hostilities. Multiple communication channels allow you to weaken the target using very limited military capabilities or achieve strategic military goals without the use of direct military force at all.

The socio-cultural concept of the Russian world has been actively promoted by Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Soon the concept was institutionalized, and during the time of President Putin, the Russian World became practically a state ideology. The church, the media and pro-Russian organizations around the world have become effective tools for promoting the ideas of the Russian world. Important regions where the ideas of the Russian world were promoted were the neighboring countries of Russia and former members of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was no exception, especially given the high percentage of Russians who lived in certain regions of Ukraine.

The concept of the Russian World thus changed the identities of people and became an effective political tool, providing support for pro-Russian parties in certain regions of the country. And in 2013-2014, the narratives of the Russian World became the basis for information campaigns, which became one of the tools of the Russian hybrid strategy during military operations in Crimea and Donbas. Russian newsmakers in the information

campaigns used many narratives that are part of the socio-cultural concept of the Russian World (complex of the certain cultural, religious, linguistic and social ideas and norms). The perception of reality by the population plays a key role in information campaigns. Analyzing the roots of the conflict, we can notice that the ideas and norms of the two neighboring states played an important role in escalating the conflict.

The relevance of this work lies in the fact that a deeper analysis of the process of turning ideas and norms into weapons in the future can help to better understand the crisis of democratic institutions and predict the possibility of future conflicts that may be similar to the Russian-Ukrainian war. This analysis will be especially relevant for states where the concept of the Russian world has been actively promoted for many years among a large number of Russians who live abroad, for example, in the Baltic states.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the use of the socio-cultural concept of the Russian world as one of the instruments of hybrid war on the example of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The research question is if the active promotion of certain socio-cultural concepts can change the identity of the target audience and subsequently become an effective instrument of hybrid war. Also, in the process of analysis, several additional research questions will be formed for each of the parts of the thesis.

The main hypothesis of the thesis is the assumption that the manipulation of the identity of the target audience can be used as an effective tool for waging a hybrid war. The second hypothesis is that the promotion of the socio-cultural concept of the Russian world was part of Russia's hybrid strategy against Ukraine. The independent variable in the analysis is the strategic political and military goals of the governments of Russia and Ukraine, and the dependent variables are cultural, historical and religious norms that have been used as methods of waging hybrid warfare.

In this dissertation, the author mainly uses secondary sources of information. However, this thesis also used primary sources (laws or international agreements) to analyze the roots of the conflict. To answer the main research question, the author used the literature of American, European, Russian and Ukrainian authors.

One of the most sophisticated analyzes of the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine was written by the Czech author at Charles University Jan Sir and collective in a publication titled "Russian Aggression against Ukraine." The second part of the book analyzes in detail the Russian military operations: in the Crimea and in the east of Ukraine. The authors of the publication especially focus on the non-military methods of waging hybrid warfare.

Another important source of information is the collective monograph "World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Front", which was written by the director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies of Ukraine, Volodymyr Gorbulin. This book provides a comprehensive analysis of Russia's hybrid operations in Ukraine and a very detailed description of the causes of the conflict and Russia's long preparations for invading Ukraine. The monograph also contains a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of hybrid war. The author makes several important conclusions regarding the role of discourse and identity in hybrid strategies that will help test hypotheses at work.

The book "Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands" by professor of Russian and European Politics, who teaches at the University of Kent and is an honorary professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Moscow State University, Richard Sakwa is also a very important source that was used in writing this thesis ... In particular, Chapter 6 "When History Calls" provides us with many arguments about the connection between cultural, social and religious norms and the relatively successful Russian information campaign. This book can be especially helpful in formulating the answer to a research dissertation

question. Moreover, the publication contains a detailed analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war with quotes from people who directly took part in the events in the role of decision-makers.

Information about the historical roots of the conflict was found in the book “Ukrainian Crisis. What does this mean for the West” from the American professor of Ukrainian Studies at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Andrew Wilson. In this book, the author presents the modern history of Russia, including the cornerstones of its policy towards the post-Soviet republics. In the fifth and sixth chapters, Wilson describes the events that took place in Ukraine in 2013–2014, including Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in Donbas. One of the features of the publication is the ethno-social analysis of the South-Eastern population of Ukraine.

In this thesis author uses a method of qualitative analyses of two conflicts: Crimea and Donbas, to explore the weaponization of the socio-cultural norms and historical narratives as a part of unconventional methods supporting the military operation. The thesis works with constructivist theory of International Relations: author analyses how one of the sides of the conflict use and adjust convenient narratives to weaken their opponent or gain support for their actions. The research is framed within broader concept of hybrid warfare and implemented on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

The thesis has 5 main parts: Introduction; Roots of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict; Analysis of the conflict; Weaponization of the identity as a part of hybrid strategy and Conclusion. The introduction section outlines the topic of the research; formulates its main goal and hypotheses; methodology; and provide a reader with the sources review. The first part is devoted to the historical, ethno-social and political aspects that were the catalysts of the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine. In this part, the author describes in detail the development of the socio-cultural concept of the Russian world, and its propagation on the

territory of Ukraine. Also in this part, a detailed historical and political analysis of the Crimean Peninsula and an ethno-social analysis of Donetsk and Luhansk regions are presented. The main purpose of the second part of the dissertation is to describe military action focusing on the complexity of Russian hybrid warfare methods and in particular on the non-conventional means of warfare.

The core of the research is the third part of the thesis, which describes the process of weaponization of the target audience's identities during a conflict. In this part, the author focuses on describing hybrid warfare from a constructivist point of view and the role of ideas, norms and values in hybrid warfare. An example of such a process is the use of the socio-cultural project of the Russian World during the hybrid war of Russia against Ukraine. The last part of the dissertation is the conclusion, in which the author provides answers to research questions, tests hypotheses and concludes about the use of target audience identity manipulation in the context of a hybrid war.

# 1. Roots of Russo-Ukrainian conflict

The purpose of this part is to analyze the causes of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the use of the concept of the Russian world in certain regions of Ukraine to mobilize the target audience during the active phase of military operations. This part describes in detail the ethno-social and political situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and in the Autonomous Republic (AR) of Crimea before the events in 2014. In this part, the socio-cultural concept of the so-called Russian world is presented in detail, which became the basis for information campaigns against Ukraine. The research question of this part is why the citizens of these regions have become a convenient target audience for promoting the concept of the Russian world?

## 1.1 “Russian World” and the place of Ukraine in it

Russian researchers suggest that the concept of the Russian world has ancient roots. They are often inclined to believe that the concept of the Russian world has its roots in the traditions of Kievan Rus. On the contrary, Ukrainian historiography asserts that the state formation of Kievan Rus is directly related to Ukraine and has nothing to do with Russian culture.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the Russian world became popular among Russian intellectuals in the 90s. The Russian world has become a sociocultural concept based on cultural, religious and linguistic identity. The Russian world is traditionally described as a civilization based on the imperial narrative of Moscow as the third Rome.

In 2001, at the First World Congress of Russian Compatriots, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the concept of the Russian world goes beyond the legal framework

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<sup>1</sup> KUZIO, Taras. Five reasons why Ukraine rejected Vladimir Putin’s “Russian World”. In: *atlanticcouncil.org* [online]. 26.03.2021. Available online (opened 02.04.2021): <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/five-reasons-why-ukraine-rejected-vladimir-putins-russian-world/?fbclid=IwAR24uYNeGhDOYHNTEZIOoCgtCYRv8tjrt5QMeIQPGZSTKroDxEsTgURwEc>

and even beyond the framework of the Russian ethnos.<sup>2</sup> There was also an attempt to legalize the concept of the Russian world in 2008, when “Russkiy Mir” foundation was created. The goal of this project was to support the Russian-speaking population around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, a former concept of intellectuals of the Russian World became a part of Russian foreign policy, an ideological tool for the propagation of Russian culture and a missionary vision. The basis for this doctrine was the Russian language, the Russian Orthodox Church and the common historical memory of victories and defeats.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Russian world is simultaneously a cultural, religious and political project.<sup>5</sup> Due to its versatility, the concept of the Russian world can be used for completely different purposes.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has also become one of the main propagators of the ideas of the Russian world. The ROC has repeatedly declared its apoliticality, but in spite of this it cooperates with the authorities, because their goals are intertwined. The ROC in Ukraine oversaw the functioning of various religious organizations such as "Orthodox Choice" or "United Fatherland". In 2012, the ROC organized a collection of signatures for a referendum to unite Belarus and Ukraine with the Russian Federation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vsemirnyy koordinatsionnyy sovet rossiyskikh sootchestvennikov, prozhivayushchikh za rubezhom. Vystupleniye Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina na Pervom Vsemirnom kongresse rossiyskikh sootchestvennikov [online]. 11.10.2001. Available online (opened 04.02.2021):

<https://vksrs.com/publications/vystuplenie-prezidenta-rossii-vladimira/>

<sup>3</sup> KRYLOV, Vladimir. Russian World: Qualitative analysis in paradigm object-oriented design. *Tekhnicheskije Nauki*. 2016. 4 (25), 74-77. ISSN: 22276017. Available online (opened 29.03.2021):

<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/russkiy-mir-kachestvennyy-analiz-v-paradigme-obektno-orientirovannogo-proektirovaniya/viewer>

<sup>4</sup> ŠÍR, Jan; BUCHAR, Jan; EMLER, David; FJODOROV; Jurij, HAMATOVÁ, Kateřina; KARASOVÁ, Nikola; KUČERA, Jakub; LEBDUŠKA, Michal; LÍDL, Václav; LUKEŠOVÁ, Olga; PONDĚLÍČEK, Jiří; RAIMAN, Vojtěch; SAMUS, Mychajlo; SVITÁK, Matěj; SVOBODA, Karel; ŠVEC, Luboš. *Ruská agrese proti Ukrajině*. Prague: Karolinum, 2017. ISBN: 9788024637112. p. 83

<sup>5</sup> ZDIORUK, Serhiy; YABLONSKYI, Vasyl. *Ukrayina ta proekt «russkoho mira»: analitychna dopovid!*. Kyiv: NISD, 2014. ISBN: 9789665542261. p. 21

<sup>6</sup> KULINICH, Il'ya. V Moskve startoval sbor podpisov za vossoyedineniye Rossii, Ukrainy i Belarusi. In: *zn.ua* [online]. 24.09.2012. Available online (opened 04.04.2021): [https://zn.ua/POLITICS/v\\_moskve\\_startoval\\_sbor\\_podpisey\\_za\\_vossoedinenie\\_rossii\\_ukrainy\\_i\\_belarusi\\_.html](https://zn.ua/POLITICS/v_moskve_startoval_sbor_podpisey_za_vossoedinenie_rossii_ukrainy_i_belarusi_.html)



Also, a wide network of Russian cultural centres was deployed in Ukraine. 12 centres were founded mainly in the south-eastern cities: in Horlivka, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Kiev, Kryvyi Rih, Lugansk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Rivne, Kharkiv, Kherson. Cultural centres actively promoted the narratives of the Russian world. Television and radio also became an effective instrument of propaganda. In 2013, 50.3% of the programs were in Russian, and only 31.8% in Ukrainian. In book publishing the situation was very similar, where the percentage of books in Ukrainian was low. The local population of the Southern and Eastern regions for a long time was under information pressure from Russia, which was especially active in promoting the ideas of the Russian world among the Russian-speaking population.<sup>7</sup>

The next stage in the institutionalization of the Russian world was the founding of the Institute of the CIS countries. The purpose of this institution, among other things, was the organization in Ukraine of pro-Russian organizations, movements and parties, such as the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine, the People's Front Sevastopol - Crimea - Russia or the Russian Movement of Sevastopol. The People's Front on their website openly called their goal to achieve the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. According to their website, the Popular Front project was created with this sole purpose. The site of this organization is an example of how similar projects to create the fifth column work. Articles of the alternative history of the peninsula are published here and all the components of the Russian world are aggressively promoted.<sup>8</sup>

The direct organizer of the "fifth column" was also personally the former mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov. Luzhkov was one of the organizers of the separatist congress in Severodonetsk in 2004, where the slogans of the creation of "Novorossiia" were promoted

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<sup>7</sup> ZDIORUK, Serhiy; et al., 2014. p. 43 - 45

<sup>8</sup> Narodnyy Front «SEVASTOPOL'-KRYM-ROSSIYA» [online]. © 2007. Available online (opened 11.04.2021): <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru>

on the territory of the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine. Also, Luzhkov, as mayor of the capital of Russia, began to publicly finance infrastructure facilities under the slogans «Russia is with you» Thus, it can be stated that it was Sevastopol that became the center of consolidation of the concept of the Russian world in Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of the Russian world has become practically state ideology for President Vladimir Putin.<sup>10</sup> Historical, cultural, linguistic and religious norms have become an integral part of the soft power of the Russian state. The ideology of the Russian world is also mentioned in the concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation, which was adopted in 2008.<sup>11</sup> Also, Russia uses different narratives of the Russian world to attract neighboring countries to integrate into geopolitical projects, such as the Customs Union.

The place of Ukraine in the concept of the Russian world is of great importance for the existence of this project in general, because the existence of independent Ukraine is one of the biggest obstacles to the restoration of the Russian imperial identity. However, Ukrainian society have repeatedly proved that they are not ready for deep integration with a neighbour. Ukraine has been part of various empires over the course of many years of its history. And unlike Russia, it has no imperial ambitions. The Ukrainian society, albeit with difficulties, but supports the democratic system. The next factor of the denial of the Russian world by Ukraine is another religion, more precisely the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. And finally, a different attitude to history, especially of the period of the USSR.<sup>12</sup>

Most sympathizers of the ideas of the Russian world live in the South and East of Ukraine. According to a social survey in 2009, 74.6% of Ukrainians and Russians who

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<sup>9</sup> RUSHCHENKO, Ihor. *Rosiy's'ko-ukrayins'ka hibrydna viyna: pohlyad sotsiolooha: monohrafiya*. Kharkiv: FOP Paylenko O. H., 2015. ISBN: 9789662901184. p. 50

<sup>10</sup> ŠÍR, Jan; et al., 2017. p. 85 - 86

<sup>11</sup> Ofitsial'nyye setevyye resursy Prezidenta Rossii. *Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii*. [online]. 15.07.2008. Available online (opened 04.04.2021): <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/785>

<sup>12</sup> KUZIO, Taras., 2021.

lived in Crimea consider themselves to be a Russian cultural and linguistic identity; 65.7% believe that Russians and Ukrainians are one people; and 44.2% do not even feel like they are members of the Ukrainian nation.<sup>13</sup> Thus, these regions became the center of Russian influence in Ukraine, this was also proved more than once in the presidential and parliamentary elections. Pro-Russian parties have traditionally led the elections in these regions.

## 1.2 Socio-historical analysis of Crimea

After the decline of the Golden Horde, the indigenous population of the peninsula, with the support of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, founded the first independent state entity on the peninsula - the Crimean Khanate. A protectorate by the Ottoman Empire was established over the Crimean Khanate, which existed for several centuries.<sup>14</sup> The Crimean Khanate gained independence from the Ottoman Empire after the end of the Russian-Turkish war. The independence of the Crimean Khanate did not last long, and soon the peninsula was annexed by the Russian Empire. Catherine the Great signed a decree on the annexation of the Crimea in 1783. Soon in 1796, Crimea, together with the territories of modern Ukraine, became part of the huge New Russia Governorate.<sup>15</sup> This was a long-standing goal of the Russian tsars, because, Crimea was the last territory of the Golden Horde, which for a long time could not be joined to Russian empire. To this day, one of the largest museums in Russia, the Hermitage, has in its collection the Medal Commemorating

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<sup>13</sup> ZDIORUK, Serhiy; et al., 2014. p. 62

<sup>14</sup> SMOLIY, Valeriy; KUL'CHYTS'KYY, Stanislav; YAKUBOVA, Larysa. *Donbas i Krym v ekonomichnomu, suspil'no-politychnomu ta etnokul'turnomu prostori Ukrainy: istorychnyy dosvid, moderni vyklyky, perspektyvy (Analychna dopovid')*. Kyiv: Instytut istoriyi Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2016. ISBN: 9789660281974. p. 313 - 318

<sup>15</sup> KRAVCHENKO, Valeriy. Aneksiya 1783 roku. Yak Rosiys'ka imperiya zakhopyla Krym. In: *istpravda.com.ua* [online]. 27.02.2014. Available online (opened 20.03.2021): <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2014/02/27/141669>

of Joining Crimea and Taman to Russia, which was minted in 1797.<sup>16</sup> An interesting fact is that after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in February 2014, Russia's central bank also unveiled a commemorative coin depicting the newly built Crimean Bridge.<sup>17</sup>

The Sultan soon categorically demanded from Russia to return Crimea immediately, claiming Russia severely violated the ceasefire conditions, but received a decisive refusal. In reaction to this, the Turkish fleet attacked the positions of the Russian Empire, thereby starting a new war. The Ottoman Empire was defeated and, under the terms of a new peace treaty, pledged to recognize the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Empire. Catherine's expansion enabled Russia to establish a Black Sea fleet.<sup>18</sup> Crimean Tatars began protesting in Crimea, and many of them had to leave the territory of the peninsula. Representatives of other ethnic groups, such as Greeks, Armenians or Georgians were resettled from the peninsula by a special decree of the empress.<sup>19</sup>

In general, after the annexation, the peninsula lost about three quarters of its population. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, only 140,000 remained of the indigenous population.<sup>20</sup> New population came to the region as a result of building military bases and ports. The demographic situation was aggravated by the Crimean War, which almost completely destroyed the capital Sevastopol and many large cities.<sup>21</sup> From

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<sup>16</sup> The State Hermitage Museum. *Medal Commemorating of Joining Crimea and Taman to Russia. Reverse* [online]. Available online (opened 11.03.2021): <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/17.%20orders,%20medals/3472667/монета>

<sup>17</sup> ALLINSON, Tom. Russia releases coin commemorating annexation of Crime. In: *dw.com* [online]. 13.03.2019. Available online (opened 29.03.2021): <https://p.dw.com/p/3EsrX>

<sup>18</sup> HARRIS, Carolyn. When Catherine the Great Invaded the Crimea and Put the Rest of the World on Edge. In: *smithsonianmag.com* [online]. 04.03.2014. Available online (opened 20.02.2021): <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-catherine-great-invaded-crimea-and-put-rest-world-edge-180949969/?no-ist>

<sup>19</sup> SEKIZYAN, Lusik. *Pereseleniye armyan s Kryma na Don*. Rostov-na-Donu: MP Kniga, 1999. Available online (opened 10.03.2021): [http://www.chaltlib.ru/articles/resurs/jubilei\\_goda/235\\_let\\_pereseleniya\\_armyan\\_s\\_krim армяне](http://www.chaltlib.ru/articles/resurs/jubilei_goda/235_let_pereseleniya_armyan_s_krim_armяне)

<sup>20</sup> ANDREYEV, Aleksandr. *Istoriya Kryma*. Moskva: Belyy volk, 2002. Available online (opened 12.03.2021): <http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/ulib/item/UKR0003692>. p. 89 - 90

<sup>21</sup> VERMENYCH, Yaroslava. *Pivdenna Ukrayina na tsivylyzatsynomu pohranychi*. Kyiv: Instytut Istoriyi Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2015. Available online (downloaded 18.03.2021): <http://history.org.ua/LiberUA/978-966-02-7809-7/978-966-02-7809-7.pdf>. p. 233 - 234, 244 - 245

1802 Crimea and the southern regions of Ukraine were part of the Taurida Governorate until the collapse of the Russian Empire, which eased settlement of Ukrainians on the peninsula.

After World War I, Crimea became one of the epicentres of the Russian Civil War. It long remained a reliable base for the anti-communist movement. Only in 1920, the red army, together with the army of Nestor Makhno, defeated the remnants of the army under the leadership of General Pyotr Wrangel. In 1921, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created, which soon became part of the Russian SSR. In the territory of the republic, the Soviet authorities launched the so-called *korenizatsiya*. According to this, the Crimean Tatar and Crimean Karaites were called indigenous nations.

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During the Second World War, the occupying troops of the German Reich created a general district of Crimea on the territory of the peninsula. Also, in 1941, a policy was launched to exterminate local Jews and Krymchaks. The question of the elimination of the Crimean Tatars was postponed by the Reich for the post-war period. After the liberation of the Crimea by the Red Army, in 1944, Joseph Stalin signed a decree on the deportation of the Crimean Tatars for allegedly collaborating with the occupants. The Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was abolished in 1946, turning it into the Crimean region. In a very short period of time, about 190 thousand people were resettled. Representatives of other ethnic groups, including Greeks and Armenians, in the amount of

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<sup>22</sup> NARODNYI KOMISSARIAT VNUTRENNIKH DEL. *Territorial'noye i Administrativnoye Deleniye Soyuzna SSR na I-ye yanvarya 1926 g.* Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Glavnogo Upravleniya Kommunal'nogo Khozyaystva NKVD, 1926. Available online (opened 21.03.2021): <http://ndkt.org/download/4.html>. p. 12

almost 42 thousand, were also resettled. Most of them were sent to the Far East.<sup>23</sup> Also, the Kremlin issued a decree to rename geographical objects that had Crimean Tatar names.<sup>24</sup>

Until 1950, the Crimea continued to lose population and the authorities began to solve this by relocating people from other regions to the peninsula, including from the Ukrainian SSR and the Russian SSR. During a trip to the peninsula, Nikita Khrushchev met with displaced families, who were primarily dissatisfied with the other conditions of farming. Then Khrushchev ordered a more thoughtful approach to the issue of choosing families who moved to the peninsula.<sup>25</sup> In 1954, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Council of Ministers ordered the transfer of the Crimean region to the Ukrainian SSR. At that time, it was more of a formality, since both republics were part of the USSR. In this way, Khrushchev wanted to solve the problem of Ukrainian nationalism by changing the composition of the republic's population by Russian settlers.<sup>26</sup>

Due to the planned resettlement and other factors, the population of Crimea increased from 1,201,500 in 1959 to 2,430,500 in 1989. It is also important that before the collapse of the USSR, Crimea was inhabited by 67% of Russians and 25.6% of Ukrainians. It is noteworthy that until 1989, data on the number of Crimean Tatars during the overwhelming population were not published at all. In 1989, the population census recorded that 38,356 Crimean Tatars lived on the peninsula.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> BUGAY, Nikolay. *Deportatsiya narodov Kryma (dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii)*. Moskva: Insan 2002. ISBN: 9785858403043. p. 88 - 89

<sup>24</sup> SEITOVA, El'vina. Kak zaselyali Krym (1). In: *milli-firka.org* [online]. 05.03.2013. Available online (opened 21.03.2021): <http://milli-firka.org/как-заселяли-крым-1/#%20sthash.o2ig91aP.dpuf>

<sup>25</sup> HRABOVSKYY, Serhiy. Tverezi rishennya «p'yanoho Mykyty»: kryms'kyy vymir. In: *krymr.com* [online]. 30.12.2016. Available online (opened 02.03.2021): <https://ua.krymr.com/a/28204470.html>

<sup>26</sup> KRAMER, Mark. Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago? In: *Wilsoncenter.org* [online]. 22.03.2014. Available online (opened 15.02.2021): <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>

<sup>27</sup> PANCHUK, May; MAYBORODA, Oleksandr, YEVTUKH; Volodymyr; KURAS, Ivan. *Krym v etnopolitychnomu vymiri*. Kyiv: Svitohlyad, 2005. ISBN: 9669636086. Available online (opened 02.03.2021): <https://web.archive.org/web/20140201211444/http://cidct.info/uk/publications/Etnopolitika/13.html>. p. 336 – 343

After the collapse of the USSR, the territory of the Crimea passed to Ukraine. The Russian Federation and other former republics of the Soviet Union signed the Belovezhskaya Pushcha accords in December 1991. The countries have pledged to mutually recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of existing borders.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, regardless of how the transfer was carried out expressly accepted Ukraine's 1991 borders both in the December 1991 Belovezhskaya Pushcha accords and in the December 1994 Budapest Memorandum that finalized Ukraine's status as a non-nuclear weapons state.

However, the Russian government has officially expressed its judgement regarding the Crimea as the territory of Ukraine. The State Duma of the Russian Federation in 1992 adopted Resolution No. 2809-1 "On the Legal Assessment of the Decisions of the State Power of the RSFSR to Change the Status of Crimea, Adopted in 1954." This document recognized that the transfer of Crimea by Khrushchev in 1954 had no legal force from the moment of its adoption. The State Duma also adopted a resolution on the status of the city of Sevastopol and gave it the status of a federal one. However, the UN Security Council intervened in the situation, which legally denied this decision by satisfying Complaint by Ukraine regarding the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation concerning Sevastopol.<sup>29</sup>

In 1992, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted a law on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, where the boundaries of self-government of Crimea were clearly spelled out. Crimea got the opportunity to form its own parliament. However, the Crimean parliament, in response to that, announced independence and adopted the constitution of the Republic of Crimea. The only state language was Russian, and the authorities of the

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<sup>28</sup> [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/997\\_077#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/997_077#Text)

<sup>29</sup> Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council. *Complaint by Ukraine regarding the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation concerning Sevastopol* [online]. 20.07.1993. Available online (opened 11.04.2021): [https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/93-95/Chapter%208/EUROPE/93-95\\_8-22-UKRAINE.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/93-95/Chapter%208/EUROPE/93-95_8-22-UKRAINE.pdf)

peninsula prescribed the right to conduct an independent foreign policy. The Crimean parliament also began active preparations for the referendum, which was supposed to legalize these laws. Ukraine had to make concessions and a new Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was created, where Crimea was called a country within Ukraine. In 1993, the Supreme Council of Crimea established the function of the President of the ARC. In 1994, the peninsula was preparing for the presidential elections. The winner was the head of the pro-Russian Republican Party, Yuri Meshkov. Soon his party also won the parliamentary elections.<sup>30</sup>

Meshkov and his team began to quickly implement their plans. They announced the change of the national currency of the Crimea to the Russian ruble. Also, the clock was changed throughout the territory of the peninsula - they began to live according to the Moscow time-zone. The troops of the Black Sea Fleet even tried to attack one of the Ukrainian military bases, but the Ukrainian army fought it back in time. Such events caused a flurry of indignation in Kiev. Russia has its own internal problems to solve and was not ready to be responsible for these events and to support Meshkov's aspirations. Also, personally, President Boris Yeltsin did not support the border change initiative. Russian politicians hoped for the integration of the countries of the former Soviet Union in the form of cooperation in the CIS and still believed in the revival of the USSR. <sup>31</sup>

The problem of separatism in Crimea was solved by the newly elected President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, who found a compromise with the ARC parliament and abolished the function of the President of Crimea. Meshkov and his party, due to the lack of the enthusiasm from the Russian political elites, quickly lost the support of voters. The most active group opposition were the Crimean Tatars. In 1995, the Ukrainian parliament

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<sup>30</sup> SHEVCHENKO, Oleksandra; DOROHAN', Aleksina. Krym Myeshkova: vid obozhnyuvannya do zabuttya. In: *krymr.com* [online]. 05.10.2019. Available online (opened 02.03.2021): <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/meshkova-pokhovaly-v-krymu/30200793.html>

<sup>31</sup> SMOLIY, Valeriy; et al., 2016. p. 485 - 486



passed a new law on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which overturned Crimea's 1992 constitution.

However, the problem of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol remained unresolved. In 1994, the delegations of Ukraine and Russia signed the Massandra Accords, which settled the problem of the division of the Black Sea fleet. The agreement clearly states that "the entire Black Sea Fleet with all its infrastructure in Crimea is used by Russia and receives Russian symbols."<sup>32</sup> Many politicians in Ukraine, especially the opposition ones, reacted negatively to the results of the negotiations in Massandra. The reason for such an unfavorable outcome for Ukraine is considered to be large debts to Russia for gas supplies. Although according to the article of the ex-commander of the Ukrainian naval forces, Volodymyr Bezkorovaynyy, most of the fleet was ready to serve Ukraine and was only waiting for clear instructions from the government.<sup>33</sup>

According to the 2001 census of the Ukrainian population, Russians continued to be the dominant ethnic group on the peninsula. 58.5 percent of the Crimean population were Russian, 24.4 percent were Ukrainians and 12.1 percent were Crimean Tatars. However, it should be noted that 59.5 percent of Ukrainians who lived in Crimea considered Russian to be their mother tongue. This fact made the population of the peninsula a target audience for information campaigns in Russia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Official web-portal of the Parliament of Ukraine. *Protokol pro vrehulyvannya problem Chornomors'koho flotu* [online]. 03.09.1993. Available online (opened 06.03.2021): [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643\\_054?lang=en#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_054?lang=en#Text)

<sup>33</sup> BEZKOROVAYNYI, Volodymyr. MASANDRIVS'KYI PROTOKOL. DZHERELA I NASLIDKY. [online]. *Universum*. Lviv: PAT AKB «Lviv», 2011, 3 - 4, 209 - 210. Available online (opened 28.03.2021): <https://universum.lviv.ua/magazines/universum/2011/2/bezkor.html>

<sup>34</sup> State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. *About number and composition population of Autonomous Republic of Crimea by data All-Ukrainian population census* [online]. 2001. Available online (opened 11.04.2021): <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/Crimea/>

### **1.3 President Yanukovich and socio-historical analysis of Donbas**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large number of ethnic Russians lived on the territory of Ukraine. Especially many were traditionally located in the regions bordering with Russia, as well as in the Crimea. Also, the Russian language in this area was used as the main one by the majority of the population. According to the data of the last population census, in the South-Eastern regions and in the Crimea, a historically ethnic situation has formed, where the share of Russia in the population significantly exceeded the average Ukrainian indicators. So, in the Zaporizhzhya region, Russians make up 24.7% of the total population region, in Kharkiv region - 25.6%, in Donetsk region - 38%, in Luhansk region - 39% and in Crimea - 58.5%.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that in these regions, Ukrainians in total make up 56.9%, it is only 7.3% of their total number in the country.<sup>36</sup>

According to the latest census, 4,825.6 thousand people lived in the Donetsk region, which is about 10% of the inhabitants of Ukraine. Moreover, most of them were Ukrainians - 56.9% (2 744.1 thousand people). However, 74.9% of the region's population named Russian as their native language. In the Luhansk region, the entire population numbered 2,540.2 thousand. Despite the fact that the Luhansk region is located closer to the border with Russia, 58% of Ukrainians lived in the region. More than half of the population named Ukrainian as their native language. It is noteworthy that in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions there was also a high level of urbanization, more than 85% of the population of the regions lived in cities.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. *General results of the census* [online]. 2001. Available online (opened 11.04.2021): <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/>

<sup>36</sup> SMOLIY, Valeriy; et al., 2016. p. 250

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 245

It should also be noted that in general despite the fact that 79% of the population of Ukraine are Ukrainians, Russian is widely used in the daily life of most Ukrainians. Approximately 43% speak Ukrainian at home, 39% - Russian. In 2011, the 8 most popular TV channels released only 22% of their primetime content in Ukrainian.<sup>38</sup> Regional television channels in Donetsk and Luhansk regions used on average 45% of the state language and 55% Russian on their air. The situation is similar with the press, only 30 percent of the total circulation of newspapers was in the Ukrainian language. For example, 990 periodicals were registered in the Donetsk region, of which only 18 were issued exclusively in Ukrainian.<sup>39</sup>

Historically, the Donbass competition between Ukrainian and Russian identity is a determining factor in its ethno-demographic life. This became more obvious after Ukraine gained independence. And despite the fact that Ukrainians are in the majority in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the issue of feeling of Ukrainian identity remains one of the most annoying. Thus, the key role in slowing down the promotion of all nationally oriented programs in Donbass is the problem of dual identity among the population. Thus, the political situation in the country directly influenced the attitude of the majority of the population towards the sovereignty of Ukraine and towards their identity.<sup>40</sup>

Taking into account the situation in the field of television broadcasting and the press in the South-East of the country, it can be argued that for a long time the inhabitants of the region lived in a certain information environment. This made the population of these regions more vulnerable to the political situation in the country and, to a large extent, paved the way for the development and popularization of the ideas of the Russian world, manipulating their identity. It should also be borne in mind that Russian propaganda used

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<sup>38</sup> WILSON, Andrew. *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780300212921. p. 148

<sup>39</sup> SMOLIY, Valeriy; et al., 2016. p. 254

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* p. 247

not only the media, but also feature films, serials and television shows to promote the narratives of the Russian world.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the use of the information field in regions with so-called dual identity played an important role in the perception of political events by people.

Hence, the political situation in the country directly influenced the attitude of the majority of the population towards the sovereignty of Ukraine and towards their identity. An important element in the political life of Donbass was the founding of the “Party of Regions”, which was soon headed by the most known politician from the Donetsk region and the future president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. In the program of the “Party of Regions”, the desire to achieve the status of the state language of Russian was spelled out, and one of main goal was proclaimed the protection of the rights of Russian speakers in Ukraine. In the parliamentary elections in 2007, the “Party of Regions” won in 10 regions and received almost 35% of all votes. It is worth noting that in the Crimea the “Party of Regions” gained more than 60%, in the Donetsk region more than 72%, and in the Luhansk region more than 73%.<sup>42</sup>

An important event that polarized the population of the whole of Ukraine was the Orange Revolution. The Orange Revolution began after the announcement of the preliminary results of the presidential elections by the Central Election Commission (CEC), according to which Viktor Yanukovich won. The protests were organized and carried out by supporters of the center-right presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko and opponents of his pro-Russian rival Yanukovich. Subsequently, the Supreme Court of Ukraine overturned the CEC's decision on the election results and ordered to establish a re-vote. As a result of the repeat voting of the second round Viktor Yushchenko won. The

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<sup>41</sup> MELYKH, Olha; KORBUT, Anna. Entertainment media in the context of hybrid war in the post-Soviet countries: the case of Ukraine. *Economic Annals-XXI*. 2020. **182**(3-4), 25 - 33. ISSN 17286239. Available online (downloaded 11.04.2021): <https://doi.org/10.21003/ea.V182-03>

<sup>42</sup> Central Election Commission of Ukraine. *The Elections of People's Deputies 30.09.2007*. [online]. Available online (opened 20.04.2021): <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2007/w6p001.html>

Orange Revolution made it clear that the opinions of the Ukrainian society about the future geopolitical course were divided, which gave Russia the advantage in polarizing the population. The western and central regions were predominantly pro-European, while the eastern regions and Crimea were pro-Russian.<sup>43</sup>

In the presidential elections in 2010, the representative of the “Party of Regions” Viktor Yanukovich won in fair elections. Traditionally, the overwhelming majority of votes for Yanukovich were cast by residents of Crimea (78%) and Donbass (Donetsk region 90% and Luhansk region almost 89%).<sup>44</sup> During the presidency of Yanukovich, Ukraine continued to develop relations with Europe and government officials publicly declared a course towards rapprochement with the EU. However, a deeper analysis of the period of his presidency makes it clear that Yanukovich's presidency can be characterized by a high level of corruption, kleptocracy, as well as an almost collapse of the Ukrainian army. Also, his team played a huge role in supporting the promotion of the ideas of the Russian world and the course towards the division of Ukraine. The tools of this process were the same methods used by the Russian propaganda, such as speculation on the language and history which were especially alarmingly perceived in Crimea and Donbass. All these processes had a direct impact on preparation for the Russian hybrid aggression towards Ukraine.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> SAKWA, Richard. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2015. eISBN: 9780857738042. p. 111

<sup>44</sup> Central Election Commission of Ukraine. Re-election of the President of Ukraine on February 7, 2010. [online]. Available online (opened 21.04.2021): <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2010/WP0011.html>

<sup>45</sup> HORBULIN, Volodymyr. *Svitova hibrydna viyna: ukrajins'kyi front: monohrafiya*. Kyiv: NISD, 2017. ISBN: 9789665542735. p. 261 - 264

## **2. Analysis of the conflict**

The purpose of this part of the thesis is to analyze the Russian-Ukrainian war. The events on the Independence Square, Crimea and Donbas are analyzed with a focus on unconventional methods of warfare. There are research questions for this part: how can this type of Russian war be called and what is its peculiarity? By answering this question, it will be possible to explain the process of weaponization of the ideas of the Russian world in the context of hybrid war.

### **2.1 Euromaidan as a clash of two different sociocultural models**

A week before when the Ukraine-EU summit had to take place in Vilnius, President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich had announced his intention not to sign an association agreement with the European Union on November 21, 2013. On the same evening, protesters against his decision gathered on the main square of Kiev, the Independence Square<sup>46</sup>. Three days later on the weekend, 300 thousand people gathered. The protest, which people began to call Euromaidan, originally was a peaceful protest, that lasted for several days. On the night of November 29-30, the police tried to violently disperse the protesters. In reaction to the brutal crackdown, more than 500,000 people gathered in the main square the next day.<sup>47</sup>

The protesters soon ennobled the tent town in the centre of the city. The protesters also occupied the building of the Kiev City Council and set up a headquarters there. Throughout the entire protests, leaders of the opposition to President established a scene and demanded arguments from the authorities and immediately called on to declare the resumption of the European integration process. Instead of starting a constructive dialog

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<sup>46</sup> in Ukrainian *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*

<sup>47</sup> SAKWA, Richard., 2015. p. 116

with the Ukrainian opposition, President Yanukovich flew to Moscow for talks with President Putin. As a result of the meeting the so-called "Action Plan" was signed on December 17th. According to this agreement, the Russian National Wealth Fund pledged to buy Ukrainian Eurobonds in the amount of \$ 15 billion, and also the price of gas imports for Ukraine was reduced by three times.<sup>48</sup>

The turning point happened on 16th of January, when the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine passed a law that introduced a lot of bans for citizens. For example, there was a ban on the constructing of tents, disconnection of the Internet for disobedience to the authorities, as well as restrictions on the functioning of the media.<sup>49</sup> In response to this authoritarian law, the opposition once again gathered people to protest on the Maidan.

The peaceful protest turned into a hot phase at the end of January. The protests culminated when more than 100 people were murdered on February 20, and thousands were injured. Representatives of the opposition, the European Union and Russia held talks personally with Yanukovich. During the meeting, an agreement was signed in which, among other things, the parties agreed to restore the Constitution from 2005 and to hold parliamentary elections in December 2014.<sup>50</sup> But this did not take place, because Yanukovich left Ukraine the next day.<sup>51</sup>

Protests against the European integration, that started to be called the Anti-Maidan, were organized by the government and pro-Russian parties such as the Party of Regions and the Communist Party of Ukraine. The Anti-Maidan movement was especially popular in the South-East of the country. These protests promoted closed cooperation with Russia

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<sup>48</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 72 - 73, 79 - 80

<sup>49</sup> CHERVONENKO, Vitaliy. Shcho zaboronyly ta obmezhyly ukrayintsyam novym zakonom? In: [bbc.com \[online\]. 16.01.2014. Available online \(opened 22.02.2021\): https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/01/140116\\_rada\\_law\\_rights\\_vc](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/01/140116_rada_law_rights_vc)

<sup>50</sup> Federal Foreign Office. *Agreement on the solution of the crisis in Ukraine*. [online]. 21.02.2014. Available online (opened 21.02.2021): <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/140221-ukr/260128>

<sup>51</sup> SAKWA, Richard., 2015. p. 121 - 125

and joining the Customs Union. An important element of the protests was the paid-for gangs, so-called Titushki. Their task was to create the illusion of support for the politics of the government. Most often they were men with a criminal records, athletes or policemen dressed as civilians. The titushki came to Kiev from all over the country and often acted as provocateurs and several times attacked journalists at peaceful rallies. For executing orders, men received from 17 to 41 US dollars a day, in January the amount increased to 100 US dollars.<sup>52</sup>

The protests in the Ukrainian and world media were covered in great detail. Horrific footage of clashes between police and protesters spread around the world. Ukrainian journalists named the victims of the protests - the Heavenly Hundred. Actions in support of Euromaidan were held throughout the country. Solidarity actions were held in all big cities, including traditionally pro-Russian cities like Donetsk, Lugansk and Simferopol. Russian media also covered events in Ukraine in detail. Major Russian news services, which are mostly state-owned, devoted a large amount of airtime to events in Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> However, the interpretation of events in Ukraine in the Russian media was very different from the interpretations of the world media.

Mass protests in Ukraine have been compared to the marches of the fascists and Nazis. And the removal of President Yanukovich from power by the decree of the Supreme Council of Ukraine was interpreted as an anti-constitutional coup d'etat. Also, the integration processes of Ukraine and the EU were portrayed as a geopolitical expansion of the West to Russia's sphere of influence. Such interpretations directly influenced the political views of the people and created a certain discourse from the first days of the

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<sup>52</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 78 - 79

<sup>53</sup> LANGE-IONATAMIŠVILI, Elīna; BĒRZIŅŠ, Jānis; JAESKI, Aivar; LAITY, Mark; MALIUKEVIČIUS, Nerijus; NAVYS, Aurimas; OSBORNE, Gerry; PSZCZEL, Robert; TATHAM, Stephen. Analysis of Russia's information campaign against Ukraine. Riga: NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, 2015. Available online (opened 04.02.2021): [https://issuu.com/natostratcomcoe/docs/ukraine\\_research\\_natostratcomcoe\\_02](https://issuu.com/natostratcomcoe/docs/ukraine_research_natostratcomcoe_02). p. 11 - 15



protests.<sup>54</sup> For example, the organizers of the Euromaidan in Crimea admitted that they often faced the aggression of people who were afraid of the "new fascist power in Ukraine" referring to what they saw on TV.<sup>55</sup>

## 2.2 Annexation of the Crimea

From the first days of the protest, residents of Crimea supported President Yanukovich, where he gained more than 78% of the votes in the second round of the presidential elections in 2010. The Anti-Maidan movement has become very popular among the residents of Crimea. According to some reports, many Crimeans were even taken to protests against European integration in Kiev in an organized manner.<sup>56</sup>

After Yanukovich's escape to Russia, a new wave of protests began in Crimea. Participants of the Anti-Maidan rallies did not want to recognize the new Ukrainian government, while others showed solidarity to the Euromaidan, led by the Crimean Tatars, called for the protection of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. During the numerous rallies, self-defence militias were organized. The main component of these groups was local pro-Russian organizations such as, for example, Oplot and the Kuban Cossack Host.<sup>57</sup>

According to one of the leaders of the Crimean Tatars, Mustafa Dzhemilev, on 25th of February he got informed that the Supreme Council of Crimea would organize an extraordinary meeting, where the main issue was a discussion about the parliament appeal

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<sup>54</sup> PYNŃÖNIEMI, Katri a RÁCZ, András. *Fog of Falsehood. Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*. Helsinki: FIIA, 2016. ISBN: 9789517694865. Available online (downloaded 11.02.2021): [https://www.fia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport45\\_fogoffalsehood.pdf](https://www.fia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport45_fogoffalsehood.pdf). p. 79 - 90

<sup>55</sup> NEKRECHAYA, Katerina; IBRAGIMOV, Taras. Yevromaydan i Krym: proukrainskiye mitingi, titushki i dela o rasstrelakh. In: *krymr.com* [online]. 20.02.2020. Available online (opened 14.03.2021): <https://ru.krymr.com/a/evromaidan-i-krym-proevropeyskie-mitingi-titushki-i-dela-o-rasstrelah/30444963.html>

<sup>56</sup> VOSKRESENSKAYA, Anastasiya. «U Krymskoy vesny ottsov stol'ko, chto prosto ne schest'». In: *lenta.ru* [online]. 8.03.2015. Available online (opened 06.03.2021): <https://lenta.ru/articles/2017/03/18/berkut>

<sup>57</sup> FEDOROV, Yuriy. «HYBRID» WAR À LA RUSSE: «Gibridnaya» voyna po-russki. Kiev: TOV «Biznespoligraf», 2016. ISBN 9789661645898. Available online (downloaded 14.03.2021): <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>. p. 48 - 49

to President Putin with a request to allow Crimea to join Russia. In response to this fact, the Crimean Tatars on 26<sup>th</sup> of February went to mass protests in order to prevent the session of the Supreme Council of the Crimea. The pro-Russian forces also organized their own demonstration. The pro-Ukrainian forces managed to gather more than 10 thousand people.<sup>58</sup> The actions were generally peaceful, apart from a few street clashes. The session of the Supreme Council did not take place due to the lack of deputies for a quorum. On the same day, after the protests, the leader of the Russian Unity party, Sergei Aksyonov, said that there were provocateurs at the rallies who considered themselves as "professional Russians."<sup>59</sup>

On the night of 27<sup>th</sup> of February, the buildings of the Supreme Soviet and the government of Crimea were seized by an armed group of people in green military uniforms without insignias. In total, about 110 people took part in the seizure of buildings. Russian flags were raised over the buildings, and barricades appeared at the entrance.<sup>60</sup> The group had a military uniform with an ERM camouflage pattern, 6B7 and 6B7-1 protective helmets, were armed with Russian AK-74M, AKMS assault rifles with PBS-1 silencers and VSS Vintorez sniper rifles.<sup>61</sup>

On the same day, the Supreme Council of Crimea gathered for a meeting, where, in the presence of more than 100 armed soldiers, the deputies voted to remove Prime Minister Alexei Mogilev and to hold a referendum on the status of Crimea. According to this meeting, the date of the referendum was set for May 25 and Sergei Aksenov became the new head of government. Soon the date of the referendum was moved to a much earlier

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<sup>58</sup> SMOLIY, Valeriy; et al., 2016. p. 541

<sup>59</sup> TSENTR ZHURNALISTSKIKH RASSLEDOVANIY. Sergey AKSENOV: Mitingi 26 fevralya sprovotsirovali «professional'nyye russkiye». In: *investigator.org.ua* [online]. 21.01.2016. Available online (opened 02.03.2021): <https://investigator.org.ua/news/172343/>

<sup>60</sup> KARPYAK, Oleg. Chubarov: "God nazad my byli uvereny, chto spasli Krym". In: *Bbc.com* [online]. 26.02.2015. Available online (opened 14.03.2021):

[https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2015/02/150226\\_ru\\_s\\_chubarov\\_crimea](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/02/150226_ru_s_chubarov_crimea)

<sup>61</sup> ŠÍR, Jan; et al., 2017. p. 102

date – to the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, Aksenov officially addressed President Putin in order to “provide assistance in ensuring peace and tranquillity on Crimea’s territory”.

By the same principle, other important buildings and objects of critical infrastructure were captured without a single shot. Firstly, an administrative buildings, television and radio communication towers, as well as important transport hubs and airports were captured. Also, armed soldiers without insignias blocked Ukrainian military bases. Military units of the Black Sea Fleet, the “East” Chechen battalion, the 31st Guard’s brigade and the 22nd brigade of special GRU took part in this military operation. Entirely in the military campaign took part from 30 to 35 thousand soldiers.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the Russian military almost completely blocked communication between the peninsula and official Kiev. Thanks to the seizure of information infrastructure facilities, the Russian Federation turned off the broadcasting of Ukrainian television channels and gained a monopoly on the dissemination of information on the peninsula. In the same moment, there was a permanent threat of full-scale intervention by the Russian army. The Russian military conducted military exercises near the borders. In general, more than 155 thousand people took part in the exercises.<sup>63</sup>

The entire military operation of the Russian special forces was actively supported in the information and diplomatic field. The media, radio and Internet communities have been actively spreading misinformation and creating new narratives to cover up the work of the military. Throughout the military operation, soldiers with a professional equipment told reporters that they were members of the ‘resistance’ or self-defence militias who defend the interests of the residents of Crimea.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 111

<sup>63</sup> ŠÍR, Jan; et al., 2017. p. 103 - 14

<sup>64</sup> RÁCZ, András., 2015. p. 60

Pro-Russian media actively supported the narrative about the "green men" and denied that the troops were from the Russian Federation. Moscow's official statements also denied any affiliation of Russian troops. The residents of Crimea found themselves in an information vacuum, when the true facts were replaced by interpretations. The entire military campaign was informally supported by the slogans "Crimea is ours", "Returning back to the homeland" and a lot of narratives about Ukraine as "a failed state".<sup>65</sup>

The final phase of the annexation was an attempt to legalize the annexation of the peninsula. The Crimean parliament announced its independence on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, a so-called referendum was held about the Crimean's accession to the Russian Federation. Referendum was held without the participation of international observers, without coordination with the Ukrainian authorities, and also Crimean Tatars boycotted the referendum. The organizers of the referendum reported that more than 95% of the participants of the referendum voted in favour of joining the Russian Federation. The organizers of the referendum also announced a high turnout (83%).<sup>66</sup> Although sociological studies indicated much lower results of the opinion poll - about 30-40% of Crimeans supported joining Russia.<sup>67</sup>

A treaty of accession of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation about was signed in the Georgievsky Hall of the Kremlin on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. The referendum and the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation were not recognized by the UN and the international community. The majority of members of the UN in the world do not recognize Crimea as part of the Russian territory.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> PYNŃÖNIEMI, Katri; et al., 2016. p. 257 - 258

<sup>66</sup> RÁCZ, András., 2015. p. 64

<sup>67</sup> Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. How relations between ukraine and russia should look like? Public opinion polls' results. [online]. 4.3.2014. Available online (opened 13.02.2021): <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236&page=1>

<sup>68</sup> BĒRZIŅŠ, Jānis. *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*. Policy Paper, No. 2. Riga: National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research, 2014.

## 2.3 The war on Donbass

After the departure of Yanukovych and the restart of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, protests against the new government continued in many Ukrainians cities. especially actively protested in the South-East of the country: in Zaporozhye, Dnepropetrovsk (former Dnipro), Donetsk, Lugansk, Nikolaev, Odessa, Kharkov and Kherson. After the annexation of Crimea, the Russian leadership began to actively implement a similar scenario in areas where the cult of the Russian world had long been cultivated. On April 6, protesters, among whom were specially trained people, seized the buildings of regional state administrations in Donetsk and Kharkiv. On the same day, the building of the Directorate of the Security Service of Ukraine in Lugansk was seized. The flags of the Russian Federation were hung on the administrative buildings.<sup>69</sup>

On April 7, in Kharkov and Donetsk, the creation of the so-called "people's republics" was announced. The leaders of the "republics" called for the federalization of Ukraine and the status of the state language for the Russian language. In Kharkiv, Ukrainian special forces worked quickly, and 70 anti-Maidan activists were arrested. This operation made it possible to end attempts at radical separatism in the second largest city in Ukraine.<sup>70</sup> Events in Donbass developed more rapidly. Armed formations of the separatists began to build block posts and refused to recognize the new Ukrainian government. On April 27, the creation of the Luhansk People's Republic was announced. Also, in the newly formed "republics" the so-called people's armies were created.

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Available online (downloaded 19.02.2021): <https://sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/New-Generation-Warfare.pdf>. p. 3

<sup>69</sup> NATSIONAL'NYI INSTYTUT STRATEHICHNYKH DOSLIDZHEN'. *Do druhoyi richnytsi ahresiyi Rosiyi proty Ukrayiny*. Kyiv: PP. Fenix, 2016. ISBN: 9789665542583. Available online (downloaded 11.02.2021): [http://old2.niss.gov.ua/public/File/2016\\_book/Verstka\\_RNBO.indd.pdf](http://old2.niss.gov.ua/public/File/2016_book/Verstka_RNBO.indd.pdf). p. 30

<sup>70</sup> SAKWA, Richard., 2015. p. 194

Igor Girkin-Strelkov, a former FSB officer and participant in hostilities in Yugoslavia and Chechnya, personally led and developed military operations to seize the administrative buildings of Gorlovka and Slavyansk in the Donetsk region in the spring of 2014. Strelkov arrived in Donbas from Crimea, where he also took an active part in the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. As Strelkov himself said, he came to Donbas with about 20 people and in a short period of time he managed to create an army of 2,500 fighters. The Girkin-Strelkov detachment managed to capture several cities in the Donetsk region at once.<sup>71</sup>

In response to the seizure of the building in Slavyansk, a detachment of the anti-terrorist unit of the SBU was sent there. On April 13 and 14, the Ukrainian military came under fire from Strelkov's militants. Captain of the SBU Gennady Bilichenko was killed in the scene of the clash. In response to this, the Council of National Security and Defense announced the beginning of an anti-terrorist operation in the territory of Kharkiv, Donetsk and Lugansk regions. The corresponding decree was signed by the acting President of Ukraine Turchynov.<sup>72</sup>

In April, on the territory of the Donetsk region, the Ukrainian army fought primarily against the Girkin-Strelkov detachment. In other regions, Ukrainian army have managed to bring the situation back under their control. On the territories of the regions, similar military groups were formed, which consisted of pro-Russian radicals and Russians who came en masse from the nearest regions.<sup>73</sup> By the end of the month, the military from the so-called LPR became more active. By the end of the month, they also managed to conquer several cities in the region.

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p. 196 - 198

<sup>72</sup> BALABAN, Mykola; VOLYANYUK, Olga; DOBROVOLSKA, Christina; BALABAN, Bohdan; MAIOROV, Maksym. *Donbas In Flames. Guide to the conflict zone*. Lviv: "Prometheus" NGO, 2017. Available online (downloaded 04.04.2021): <https://prometheus.ngo/works/donbas-v-ogni>. p. 36

<sup>73</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 128 - 130

The self-proclaimed leaders of the republics hoped for the help of the Russian Federation and often in their statements provoked the Russian Federation to a full-scale intervention. Obviously, they were sure that in the Donbas, the military and political leadership of Russia would repeat the Crimean scenario of events.<sup>74</sup> On May 11, referendums on independence from Ukraine were organized in the so-called republics. According to the organizers, 89% of citizens voted for independence. The referendum was held without any consultations with official Kiev and without the participation of international observers.<sup>75</sup>

The escalation of the conflict and the active advance of the troops of the ATO forces happened after the election of Petro Poroshenko as president. As a result of successful offensives in July, the Ukrainian army liberated strategically important towns such as Mariupol and Shchastya. Also, there were long battles for airports. In early July, the Ukrainian army liberated Slavyansk and thus the epicentre of the fighting moved closer to Donetsk. The Ukrainian military in the region began to actively use aviation. The soldiers of the armies of the DPR and LPR shot down several Ukrainian helicopters and aircraft with high-precision guns. On July 17, separatists shot down a Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777 passenger airliner, which was performing passenger flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. As a result of the plane crash, 298 people were killed in the crash. A special international commission stated that the plane was shot down by the Russian Buk system, which was brought from the Russian Federation.

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<sup>74</sup> CHEVTAYEVA, Irina. DNR i LNR zayavili o zhelanii voyti v sostav Rossii. In: *dw.com* [online]. 10.06.2015. Available online (opened 17.02.2021): <https://p.dw.com/p/1FeWw>

<sup>75</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 132 - 133

Soon, the Ukrainian military found Russian passports and military equipment, which proved Russia's active participation in the conflict.<sup>76</sup> The Russian side most often exported weapons and troops under the guise of so-called humanitarian convoys, which are starting to regularly come to Donbass from the Russian Federation. In the process of analysing the hostilities in August and September, it becomes obvious that the balance of power in the conflict has changed dramatically.<sup>77</sup>

In August, Ukrainian forces suffered their first major defeat in the battle for the most important strategic logistics hub, the city of Ilovaïsk. After this defeat, the separatists also took control of the city near the border of Novoazovsk. In September, the first Minsk ceasefire agreement was signed, which temporarily suspended the active offensives of the parties. In late November, separatist's troops and individual Russian units attacked the positions of the Ukrainian army near the Donetsk airport. The fighting dragged on for several months until the end of January, when the Ukrainian leadership decided to withdraw its troops from the airport. At the same time, the offensive of separatists and regular units of the Russian army began near Debaltseve. The battles for Debaltseve continued until February 20, where 2,500 Ukrainian soldiers, a total of 15-17 thousand militants of the armies of the unrecognized republics and the forces of the Russian army were deployed. Even the ceasefire signed in Minsk, the so-called Minsk-2, did not stop the offensive of the separatists.<sup>78</sup>

In an interview with BBC, Russian military man Dmitry Sapozhnikov described in detail his involvement in the conflict in Donbas. Sapozhnikov said that the operation in Debaltseve was led by Russian generals and colonels and that during the battle the Russian

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<sup>76</sup> REISINGER, Heidi; GOLTS, Alexander. *Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence*. Rome: NATO Defense College, 2014, No. 105. ISSN: 20760957. Available online (downloaded 11.03.2021): [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/185744/rp\\_105.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/185744/rp_105.pdf). p. 3

<sup>77</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 142

<sup>78</sup> BALABAN, Mykola; et al., 2017. p. 41 - 44



army and Russian equipment was used. Specifically, Sapozhnikov reported that an army unit from the republic of Buryatia was fighting near Debaltseve. According to him, the Buryat soldiers were delivered at night by train. The leadership ordered them to keep secret the information where they were going and to inform everyone that they were going to military exercises.<sup>79</sup>

The battles for Debaltseve were the last large-scale clashes in the conflict in Donbass. From February 2015 to 2021, there were only relatively minor clashes along the front lines. The boundaries of the controlled territories have not changed for several years. Also, regular meetings are held at the level of the Trilateral Contact Group, which includes representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE.

The Russian media actively supported the operations of the military units. First of all, old narratives were used, which interpreted the new government in Ukraine as Nazis who would aggravate the situation of the Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine. After the annexation of Crimea, the narratives were localized and directed specifically at the population of Donbass. Narratives about the civil war, which Kiev unleashed against ordinary workers and protesters in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, were actively promoted. Russian political talk shows actively promoted the thesis that Donbass had never been a primordially Ukrainian territory and that this territory was often called “Little Russia” (“Malorossiya”). President Putin has also used this narrative several times in his speeches.<sup>80</sup>

In the Russian media, the population of Donbass was shown as a victim of the current political situation. The words "compatriots", "Russian citizens in Ukraine", "humanitarian catastrophe" were often used. In the media space, an assertion was actively

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<sup>79</sup> GORYANOV, Andrey; IVSHINA, Olga. Boyets "spetsnaza DNR": pomoshch' Rossii byla reshayushchey. In: Bbc.com [online]. 31.03.2015. Available online (opened 21.02.2021): [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/03/150325\\_donetsk\\_rebel\\_interview](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/03/150325_donetsk_rebel_interview)

<sup>80</sup> PYNNÖNIEMI, Katri; et al., 2016. p. 105 - 109

formed that the new Ukrainian government was Russophobic and Russia should save the people of Donbass. For this, the Russian side, starting in August 2014, began to form the so-called humanitarian convoys. As reported in official statements, there was humanitarian assistance for local residents. Also, the Russian side reported that humanitarian convoys crossed the border coordinated with the International Red Cross and Ukraine. However, International Red Cross and Ukraine stated that there was no coordination on their part. Observers later reported that the Russian side was transporting military groups and Russian regular troops with weapons and ammunition in trucks of a humanitarian convoy.<sup>81</sup>

## 2.4 Anatomy of the Russian hybrid warfare

Many researchers use a lot of different formulations in order to answer how can we describe Russian methods of warfare during the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass. However, in order to answer this question, we should pay attention to the article wrote by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, which was published in February 2013 in a journal "Voennyi Kurier". General Gerasimov described in detail the role of non-conventional methods of warfare. He claims that asymmetric actions such as the role of special forces and information operations are able to neutralize the enemy's superiority in battle. General Gerasimov referred to non-military methods: political, economic and diplomatic pressure, the formation of a political opposition, the action of the opposition forces, information confrontation. Gerasimov empathises that traditional methods of warfare must be improved through the use of a combination of military force and non-military measures.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> PYNŃONIEMI, Katri; et al., 2016. p. 75 - 78, 98 - 105

<sup>82</sup> GERASIMOV, Valeriy. *Tsennost nauki v predvidenii*. Voenno-promyshlennyy kur'yer, 26.03.2013. Available online (downloaded 16.01.2021): <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>

Method of warfare described in the Gerasimov's article does not fully agree with the famous definition of hybrid warfare by the American researcher Frank Hoffman, who called such warfare: "... a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorism acts, including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder." (Hoffman, 31) However, Hoffman also stressed that in the future all methods of warfare will have regular and irregular components.<sup>83</sup> Another definition of hybrid warfare is formulated by Andrew Radin from the RAND think tank: "covert or deniable activities, supported by conventional or nuclear forces, to influence the domestic politics of target countries." This description of hybrid war is more in line with the described set of measures by Gerasimov. Jānis Bērziņš in his analysis of the conflict argues that Russia had a good understanding of the roles of target audiences and foresaw their behavior. The key elements of the effective use of non-conventional methods were stable internal communication, psychological and deceptive operations, and well-planned external communication.<sup>84</sup>

Researcher András Rácz divided Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine into three phases: preparatory, active and final. During the preparatory phase, the weak areas of the enemy are identified, the information space is prepared for effective impact on the international community. Also, contacts are established with local criminal groups. Then comes the attacking phase of the hybrid intervention. In Crimea and Donbass, the scenarios were the same. People in military uniforms without insignias begin to conquer administrative buildings, establish checkpoints and block the garrisons of the Ukrainian army. Also, in addition to politically important objects, television and radio towers are seized too, in order to establish a monopoly on broadcasting. The final stage of the attack phase is the creation

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<sup>83</sup> HOFFMAN, Frank. *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007. Available online (downloaded 02.03.2021):

[https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf). p. 31

<sup>84</sup> BĒRZIŅŠ, Jānis., 2014. p. 3 - 7

of an alternative government with its own administration. The last phase of the hybrid intervention is the stabilization of the results obtained. The scenarios with the so-called referendums in Crimea and in the self-proclaimed republics were an attempt to legitimize the actions of special forces.<sup>85</sup>

However, the hybrid war of Russia against Ukraine also showed how the old methods of warfare are being implemented in the modern world. The old Soviet method of "*maskirovka*", which was used during the interventions in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Afghanistan in 1979. The method of "*maskirovka*" in Western literature is better known as a method of military deception. The main element of this tactic is the use of tools of camouflage measures, imitation, demonstration manoeuvres and disinformation.<sup>86</sup> The effect of surprise is also an important part of the high efficiency of this tactic. All these elements of Soviet "*maskirovka*" were modernized and used during the annexation of the Crimea and military operations in Donbass.<sup>87</sup>

The next important element of Russian hybrid warfare is the effective use of tactic called strategic denial and deception. During the entire military operation in Crimea and Donbass, Russia refused to acknowledge the fact that it had directly invaded Ukraine. Russia followed all the rules of successful denial and deception: all government bodies follow the same pre-planned strategy; Russian government has a good understanding of the cultural and social context of the population of Crimea and Donbass; controls a necessary number of information channels and also has a possibility to provide a live analysis of the

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<sup>85</sup> RÁCZ, András. Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. Helsinki: FIIA, 2015. ISBN: 9789517694537. Available online (downloaded 25.02.2021): <https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiia-report43.pdf>. p. 57 - 67

<sup>86</sup> HAMILTON, David L.. Deception in Soviet military doctrine and operations. Monterey, California, 1986. Master's Thesis. Naval Postgraduate School. Thesis advisor: Jiri VALENTA. Available online (downloaded 20.03.2021): <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36714992.pdf>. p. 68 - 70

<sup>87</sup> LASCONJARIAS, Guillaume; LARSEN, Jeffrey A.. NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats. Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015. ISBN: 9788896898123. Available online (downloaded 29.03.2021): [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/195405/fp\\_24.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/195405/fp_24.pdf). p. 64 - 65

perception of local residents.<sup>88</sup> Thanks to the successful application of the denial tactics, the Russian military leadership gained time and blocked the possibility of an adequate response from the Ukrainian authorities and the West.<sup>89</sup>

Information warfare is one of the main parts of Russia's hybrid strategy. The active imposition of various narratives by the Russian media about the situation in Ukraine was intended to create the illusion of the weakness of the Ukrainian government and to disinform the West and people about the real situation. The purpose of propaganda is not just to hide the presence of troops, but in general to destroy support for Ukraine's political and economic independence from Russia. This scenario in the longer term may also entail internal political risks for the Russian political elite.<sup>90</sup>

However, it should be noted that despite all of the above non-conventional methods of warfare, a feature of the Russian hybrid war was the use of regular military personnel. Large-scale Russia's military exercises near Ukraine's borders have played a key role in shaping the permanent threat of a full-scale invasion. During the unannounced military exercise at the border 30 000 – 40 000 troops were deployed.<sup>91</sup> Western countries urged Ukraine not to react to provocations in order to avoid direct confrontation with Russia. The direct participation of special forces and individual units of the Russian army carried out instructions for the capture of strategically important objects in the Crimea, and also directly participated in battles with the Ukrainian army.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> GODSON, Roy; WIRTZ, James J.. Strategic Denial and Deception. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*. 2000. 4 (13), 424-437. ISSN: 15210561. Available online (downloaded 21.03.2021): <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36735473.pdf>. p. 425 - 428

<sup>89</sup> RÁCZ, András., 2015. p. 61

<sup>90</sup> POMERANTSEV, Peter. Brave New War. A new form of conflict emerged in 2015 - from the Islamic State to the South China Sea. In: *theatlantic.com* [online]. 29.12.2015. Available online (opened 04.02.2021): <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/war-2015-china-russia-isis/422085>

<sup>91</sup> REISINGER, Heidi; et al. 2014. p. 3

<sup>92</sup> RÁCZ, András., 2015. p. 61 - 62

### **3. Weaponization of the identity as a part of hybrid strategy**

The purpose of this section is to analyze the concept of hybrid war from a constructivist point of view. Hybrid war thus becomes a war of discourses. The research question is how Russia was able to use the concept of the Russian world for military purposes.

#### **3.1 Constructivism and the hybrid warfare**

The constructivist theory of international relations stands between realism and liberalism. One of the main principles of constructivism is the assumption that the structure of society is determined not by material concepts, but by general ideas. According to one of the most famous representatives of constructivists Alexander Wendt, social structures, when interacting, construct the identities and interests of the subjects. And that these common ideas construct the identity and interests of society.

Constructivists believe that reality is the result of perception. The subject and his ability to self-organize is determined by the components of his integral social-cognitive complex. This complex consists of factors such as political will, perception, collective memory, social imagination and social intelligence. According to a certain configuration of these components, a national model of the world is formed, which sets the rules for constructing its domestic and foreign policy discourse.<sup>93</sup>

The process of perception and conceptualization of values opens up possibilities for analyzing the methods of hybrid warfare. Throughout all phases of hybrid warfare, ideas and values are redefined. The purpose of such operations is most often to get closer to the

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<sup>93</sup> PARAKHONSKYY, Borys; YAVORSKA, Halyna. *Ontolohiya viyny i myru: bezpeka, stratehiya, smysl: monohrafiya*. Kyiv: NISD, 2019. ISBN: 9789665543114. Available online (downloaded 14.02.2021): [https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2019-07/Monografiya\\_Ontologiya\\_print.pdf](https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2019-07/Monografiya_Ontologiya_print.pdf). p. 95

target audience in order to gain a more advantageous position. The tool for this is the non-military methods such as diplomatic, economic, political and informational.<sup>94</sup>

Values, ideas and knowledge are formed through a certain discourse and perception. The identification of the concept "we" is formed in opposition to the concept of "them". Interaction with "them" is an integral process of identity formation. A set of certain historical, linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics often form the basis for negative perceptions of those who fall into the "they" category.<sup>95</sup> The certain set of the characteristics bring states closer together. However, if these values differ between actors, hostility will arise. In this case, actors can interpret values to their advantage.<sup>96</sup> This idea is also significant to the analysis of the phenomenon of hybrid war. Especially for understanding the effectiveness of military deception and information warfare operations.<sup>97</sup>

In the context of hybrid war, it is important to separate the concepts of war as a physical reality and war as a discursive construct. The discourse is shaped by the attacker through the interpretation of reality. The target audience forms certain idea of reality, which subsequently changes its identity. For hybrid warfare, the issue of understanding and perception has a key role, because the conflict of interpretations is then used as a kind of weapon. The complex of non-conventional methods of hybrid warfare creates the most convenient value-semantic model of the world for the attacking side. This model of the

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<sup>94</sup> FILIPEC, Ondřej. Hybrid Warfare: Between Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. *Central European Journal of Politics*. 2019; 5 (2). Available online (downloaded 17.02.2021): [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338867894\\_Hybrid\\_Warfare\\_Between\\_Realism\\_Liberalism\\_and\\_Constructivism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338867894_Hybrid_Warfare_Between_Realism_Liberalism_and_Constructivism). p. 64 - 65

<sup>95</sup> PARAKHONSKYY, Borys; et al., 2019. p. 140 - 143

<sup>96</sup> ZVEREV, Aleksandr. *Competing approaches: Neorealism versus constructivism On the Ukrainian crisis*. Working Papers 2015-02. Bielefeld / St. Petersburg: Centre for German and European Studies, 2015. ISSN: 18605680. Available online (downloaded 22.04.2021):

[https://zdes.spbu.ru/images/working\\_papers/wp\\_2015/WP2\\_Zverev\\_Competing-approaches.pdf](https://zdes.spbu.ru/images/working_papers/wp_2015/WP2_Zverev_Competing-approaches.pdf). p. 5 - 6

<sup>97</sup> FILIPEC, Ondřej., 2019. p. 63 - 65

world is created from a set of facts and phenomena with adding a certain assessment of their significance.<sup>98</sup>

An important element in the analysis of the phenomenon of hybrid war is the concept of collective memory. In other words, it is a certain form of storage of meaningful information, symbols, images and normative stereotypes. The condition for the formation of the identity of a social group is common memories (traditions) that form a common historical memory. The past and history thus become one of the components of self-awareness and form the image of history and historical culture. It is worth noting that history is discursive in nature. Very often, the grievances of ancestors in historical events serve as ethical justifications for their actions in the present.<sup>99</sup> The control of the state over the historical narrative consists of various mechanisms for manipulating forms of collective memory. The cultural identity of a society is formed on the basis of a common historical heritage, a common religion and a common language.<sup>100</sup>

We can state that a hybrid war from a constructivist point of view is a war for values, discourses and identities, and, finally, for perception. Hybrid warfare differs from classical warfare in the following transformation processes: from a traditional battlefield to a war of perceptions; to a war in the human mind and to a cultural war. Hybrid warfare occurs asymmetrically and contactless and consequently becomes permanent and turns into a natural state of national life. The goal is not to destroy the enemy, but to disintegrate it internally through operations of direct influence using specially trained troops.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> HORBULIN, Volodymyr., 2017. p. 41 - 43, 48 - 50, 58

<sup>99</sup> DODONOV, Roman. *Hibrydna viyna: in verbo et in praxi: monohrafiya*. Vinnytsia: Nilan-LTD, 2017. ISBN: 9789669245076. Available online (downloaded 09.03.2021): <https://jmonographs.donnu.edu.ua/article/view/3781/3814>. p. 256

<sup>100</sup> PARAKHONSKYY, Borys; et al., 2019. p. 94 - 101, 131 - 136

<sup>101</sup> BĒRZIŅŠ, Jānis., 2014. p. 5



## 3.2 Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a war of identities

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia can be assessed as a war for identity. The cause of the conflict was the refusal of the country's leadership from Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic course, which provoked a full-scale military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In this case, the Russian-Ukrainian war can be regarded as the protection of certain ideas about the socio-political order in the countries of the former Soviet Union. According to constructivists, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine comes from different realities: authoritarian-imperial and national-democratic.<sup>102</sup>

Analysing the discourses of the parties to the conflict, Russia sees the conflict proceeding from the myth that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation with a common history and culture; and from a desire to renew the old empire under the slogans of the Russian world. For Ukraine, a confrontation with Russia is a national liberation struggle for its independent identity, which is shaped by its own historical experience, culture and language.<sup>103</sup> The main source of different discourses of the parties is the different vector of geopolitical development, as well as the activation of all the old complexes of Ukraine and Russia, which are connected primarily in different interpretations of the legacy of the history of totalitarianism during the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup>

As mentioned above in the context of the project of the Russian world, the emphasis is not on belonging to citizenship, but on the creation of the concept of Russia as identity and civilization. The concept of "Russian people" has gone far beyond the borders of the Russian Federation and is often used in the context of Russian speakers.<sup>105</sup> The lack of specific parameters of subjects belonging to the concept of the Russian world has become

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<sup>102</sup> ZVEREV, Aleksandr., 2015. p. 8

<sup>103</sup> PARAKHONSKYY, Borys; et al., 2019. p. 249 - 252

<sup>104</sup> DODONOV, Roman., 2017. p. 256

<sup>105</sup> POLEGKYI, Oleksii. Changes in Russian foreign policy discourse and concept of "Russian World". *PECOB's Papers Series*. [online] October 2011, 16. ISSN: 2038-632. Available online (opened 05.04.2021): <http://www.pecob.net/changes-russian-foreign-policy-discourse-concept-russian-world>. p. 16

an advantage. For example, during the annexation of Crimea and the dispatch of the so-called Russian humanitarian convoys to Donbass, Russia, through all information channels, used a narrative about the alleged protection of the Russian-speaking population and salvation from the hostile illegitimate government from Kiev.<sup>106</sup>

The sociocultural concept of the Russian World is also based on a certain interpretation of history. The concept of the Russian world contains certain historical narratives in which Ukraine acts as a state, which appeared exclusively as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.<sup>107</sup> For example, for most of Ukrainians the collapse of the USSR is associated with gaining independence from the totalitarian empire. However, in the context of the Russian world, as Putin said in 2005, the collapse of the USSR was a «geopolitical catastrophe».<sup>108</sup> Thus, Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine has its roots in Russia's desire to revive the Soviet Union, and the propaganda of the concept of the Russian world became the basis for Russia's revanchism.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, in the discourses of national and imperial statehood, two realities are created that are absolutely incompatible with each other. The concept of the Russian World became the basis for the strategy of Russia's hybrid aggression against Ukraine. Historical, linguistic, political and religious narratives have become the backbone of information campaigns. The general historical experience, the expansion of the Russian Orthodox Church and the residence of a large number of Russian speakers became the basis for creating a certain reality for the target societies. These elements became the basis for instruments of Russian propaganda are the imposition of stereotypes of inferiority and

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<sup>106</sup> PYNNÖNIEMI, Katri; et al., 2016. p. 75 - 78

<sup>107</sup> LUTSEVYCH, Orysia. *Agents of the Russian World. Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood*. London: Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 2016. ISBN: 9781784131005. Available online (opened 15.04.2021): <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/04/agents-russian-world-proxy-groups-contested-neighbourhood>. p. 16 - 17

<sup>108</sup> <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>

<sup>109</sup> MAGDA, Evhenii. *Gibridnaya voyna: vyzhit' i pobedit'*. Kharkov: Vivat, 2015. ISBN: 9786177246489. p. 22 - 23

secondary nature of Ukraine, the expansion of the discourse of language and the split among the political elite and civil society. Thus, the hybrid war of Russia against Ukraine can be called a war of meanings.<sup>110</sup>

### **3.3 Weaponization of the Russian world identity**

Effective information operations and propaganda of the ideas of the Russian world in a certain territory of Ukraine provided a springboard for the occupation of Crimea and support for the ideas of separatism in Donbas. As it was already noted above, the idea of the Russian world consists of three main components: language, culture and church. Thus, a well-defined interpretation of facts about history, politics and culture can cause conflict of identity among the target audience and cause the subjects to feel a sense of belonging to another country. During a military conflict, the Russian Federation could rely on subjects who identified themselves with the basic concepts of a particular socio-cultural group.<sup>111</sup>

As in any type of warfare, the planning phase is the key to the effectiveness of hybrid aggression. One of the main steps in using non-conventional combat methods is to define the target audience. During the military operations in Crimea and Donbass, the target audience of information campaigns through various communication channels was the local population, Ukrainian politicians and the military, and the international community.<sup>112</sup>

For a long time, among the local population, the main target audience for disinformation was the so-called shaky segments of society. Shaky segments can be called community members who formally perceive the fact of its citizenship. The shaky segments of society include the marginals, people with a criminal past, fanatics, non-integrated diasporas, or political opposition to the current regime. With a sharp change in the political situation, under the influence of non-military methods, shaky segments become the so-

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<sup>110</sup> DODONOV, Roman., 2017. p. 158

<sup>111</sup> DODONOV, Roman., 2017. p. 152

<sup>112</sup> ŠÍR, Jan; et al., 2017. p. 106 - 109

called "fifth column". In the active phase of the conflict, the so-called "fifth column" become the main instrument of hybrid aggression.<sup>113</sup>

An example of the use of the "fifth column" by Russia in Ukraine can be seen during the use of the so-called *titushki* during the protests in 2013-2014; activities of pro-Russian organizations (Oplot,); opposition parties (Russian Unity) and the formation of paramilitary groups and quasi-states (the so-called LPR and DPR). The activities of the *titushkas* and the Anti-Maidan movement were also funded by Russia. Many of the *titushkas* were members of Oplot-type organizations. For a long time, their members cultivated common Slavic values against the fascist western Ukraine and other components of the Russian world.<sup>114</sup>

In the context of hybrid warfare, the socio-cultural model of the Russian world has become a new form of weapon. This disguise was used primarily to cover up the use of conventional instruments; to intimidate the enemy and his allies; and to mobilize local residents against the new Kiev government. Aggressive narratives and disinformation thus activate all parts of the collective memory that have been cultivated for years and catalyze the protest moods of the population. Narratives that are based on the concept of the Russian world seem to be an illusory justification and cover for the implementation of Russia's geopolitical ambitions.<sup>115</sup>

During the events on the Maidan in 2013-2014, Russian propaganda changed its character dramatically. All the previously laid down parts of the identities of the Russian world began to crystallize into the formation of fear of the local population and the creation of an atmosphere of chaos. More radical narratives about the "terrible future" of the population of Crimea and Donbass began to appear in the media. During this period,

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<sup>113</sup> RUSHCHENKO, Ihor., 2015. p. 29 - 49

<sup>114</sup> WILSON, Andrew., 2014. p. 79

<sup>115</sup> DODONOV, Roman., 2017. p. 151

the instrumentalization of the identities of the Russian world began, which gradually turned into ideology. Putin personally gave a clear assessment of this in June 2014, when he said that “We will always protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine and that part of the Ukrainian population, the Ukrainian people, which feels its inseparable not only ethnic, but also cultural, linguistic connection with Russia, feels part of the wider Russian world.”<sup>116</sup>

The Russian side actively used the ideology of the Russian World to radicalize the target audience in order to warm up separatist sentiments in certain regions of Ukraine. The main narratives were “preserving a common historical memory” and “rebuffing nationalism”. The target audience for such rhetoric was the extremist groups that were widespread in Crimea and Donbass. Thus, the ideas and slogans of the Russian world became the main ones for the separatist movement. Such aggressive propaganda became especially dangerous for such shaky social groups that were disoriented. In this way, the residents became the target audience for the military groups that were actively created in the Donbass. The main narrative for such residents was the promise of stability after separation from Ukraine and the creation of the so-called people's republics. The events in Crimea, which were interpreted as the liberation of the Russian people from nationalists, became an example and inspiration for the separatists.<sup>117</sup>

The main tools for manipulating collective memory have become the media and cyder-sphere. Their main goal is to demoralize and disorient the enemy and allies and mobilize the local population in the conflict zone. The local population, under the influence of information campaigns, becomes a direct participant in military actions.

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<sup>116</sup> Ofitsial'nyye setevyye resursy Prezidenta Rossii. *Zayavleniya dlya pressy i otvety na voprosy zhurnalistov po itogam rossiysko-avstriyskikh peregovorov* [online]. 24.06.2014. Available online (opened 15.03.2021): <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/46060>

<sup>117</sup> ZDIORUK, Serhiy; et al., 2014. p. 62

Propaganda during hybrid aggression becomes a tool that is focused on the implementation of political goals and the dissemination of various value systems.<sup>118</sup>

Despite the fact that Ukrainian channels are the most popular in the country, it is important to note that Russian channels were also popular especially among the Russian-speaking population in the East. An interesting fact is also that in 2014 in Crimea the most important source of information were Russian channels: Russia 24, NTV, ORT (Channel One) and RTR (Russia-1). It should be noted that the situation has changed dramatically compared to 2012, when the most popular sources of news for Crimeans were all Ukrainian TV channels. Thus, the seizure of radio and television towers and the replacement of Ukrainian channels with Russian ones in Crimea in the Donbass only confirms the thesis about the importance of using the information space in Russia's hybrid strategy.<sup>119</sup>

As noted above, the West has also been one of the target audiences for the Russian information campaigns. For Western viewers, RT (former Russia Today) has become one of the most famous channels abroad. RT was founded in 2005 with a budget of around \$ 30 million. In 2013, the channel's financing grew to more than \$ 300 million. By comparison, the BBC World Service Group, the world's largest broadcaster, has a budget of \$ 376 million for the same year. RT broadcasts in English, Spanish, French, German and Arabic. The videos on RT's English-language YouTube channel have garnered nearly 3.5 billion views and over 4 million subscribers. RT has become so popular, not least because of RT's

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<sup>118</sup> VLASYUK, Oleksandr; KONONENKO Serhii. *Kremlivs'ka ahresiya proty Ukrayiny: rozdumy v konteksti viyny: monohrafiya*. Kyiv: NISD, 2017. ISBN: 9789665542827. Available online (downloaded 11.03.2021): [http://old2.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/niss\\_Kreml-agressin\\_\\_druk-d7e5f.pdf](http://old2.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/niss_Kreml-agressin__druk-d7e5f.pdf). p. 280 - 287

<sup>119</sup> LANGE-IONATAMIŠVILI, Elīna; et al., p. 11 - 15

ability to post raw footage of violence and natural disasters that tend to go viral, drawing more viewers to his political proposals.<sup>120</sup>

A feature of the Russian hybrid war was the active use of the cyber-space. The videos that were broadcast by TV channels were also published on social networks. It should be noted here that the Russian social network VK (former Vkontakte) in 2014 was the most popular site in Ukraine and was for many an important source of information.<sup>121</sup> Thus, groups of the so-called trolls were specially created. These are internet users who are paid to repeat the main messages of Russian propaganda. This mainly happens through social networks, instant messengers and forums.<sup>122</sup> In Moscow, for \$ 19 million, about 600 people were employed for these purposes. Their task was to post 50 articles a day on the web; managing six Facebook accounts with three posts per day; managing ten Twitter accounts and posting 50 tweets a day there.<sup>123</sup>

## Conclusion

### Conclusion

The origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war cannot be analyzed without understanding the history of individual regions of Ukraine. In the context of the topic of the work, an ethno-social and political analysis of the Crimean Peninsula, Donetsk and Lugansk regions

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<sup>120</sup> SHUSTER, Simon. The global news network RT is the Russian government's main weapon in an intensifying information war with the West - and its top editor has a direct phone line to the Kremlin. In: *time.com* [online]. 05.03.2015. Available online (opened 04.02.2021): <http://time.com/rt-putin>

<sup>121</sup> самый популярный сайт в украине 2014

<sup>122</sup> IRISOVA, Olga; BARBASHIN, Anton; BURKHARDT, Fabian; WYCISZKIEWICZ, Ernest. *A Successful Failure: Russia After Crime(A)*. Warsaw: The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. 2017. ISBN: 9788364486531. Available online (downloaded 25.02.2021): <https://core.ac.uk/reader/132624130>. p. 19

<sup>123</sup> JONSSON, Oscar; SEELY, Robert. Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* [online]. 2015, **28**(1), 1–22. ISSN: 15563006. p. 15

of Ukraine was carried out. The history and ethnological development of Crimea demanded special attention. For a long time, the Crimean Peninsula remained the last territory of the former Golden Horde, which was not conquered by the Russian Empire. However, shortly after gaining independence, the Crimean Khanate, in 1783, was annexed by Catherine the Great, which caused the outbreak of war with the Ottoman Empire. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Crimea and the southern regions of Ukraine have been part of the same province for more than a hundred years. This fact was an important moment that contributed to the resettlement of Ukrainians in Crimea.

The Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created on the territory of the peninsula in 1921. The Soviet authorities officially recognized the fact that the Crimean Tatar and Crimean Karaites were called indigenous peoples. However, after the Second World War, there was a massive deportation of Crimean Tatars and other indigenous ethnic groups. The motive for this decision was allegedly cooperation with the Nazis. The demographic situation in Crimea remained catastrophic for a long time, and the authorities solved this problem exclusively through migrants from other regions of the USSR. In 1954, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR formally transferred the Crimean region to the Ukrainian SSR. This decision was primarily motivated by fear of growing Ukrainian nationalism. By transferring the region, Khrushchev's team achieved a change in the national composition of the Ukrainian SSR, where more Russians appeared. The demographic situation thus changed mainly artificially within the framework of special programs. The main problem was the complete disregard for the demands of the indigenous population of the Crimean Tatars.

After Ukraine gained independence, Crimea was also included in its composition. This fact has been confirmed by several international treaties. However, the Russian side soon expressed its claims regarding the Crimea as part of Ukraine. Ukraine was obliged to



make concessions and give Sevastopol the status of a federal city, and to grant Crimea autonomy with the right to elect its own parliament. However, pro-Russian political forces demanded independence and separation from Ukraine. Due to internal problems, Russia was not ready to support the separatists and the problem was soon resolved. However, the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation was still based in Crimea. Due to the debt dependence for gas supplies, Ukraine had to agree to the transfer of the entire fleet to Russia. However, the key moment for the future development of the peninsula as part of Ukraine was the large number of Russians, who made up more than half of the population of Crimea. Historical heritage and symbolism became an important factor. The concept of the Russian World has become so attractive for the population of Crimea.

In the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, certain conditions have also developed for the expansion of the ideas of the Russian world. The number of Russians in the five southeastern regions of Ukraine was higher than the average for Ukraine. However, the linguistic factor has become the key to the growing popularity of the ideas of the Russian world. Most of the people used Russian in the main language, and the main sources of information were Russian-language television channels and newspapers. The next factor that catalyzed the spread of the concept of the Russian World was the problem of double identity among the population. The identity of the population of Donbass thus began to be determined primarily by the political situation in the country. Also an important factor was the certain information environment in which the inhabitants of the region were. Considering all these factors, it can be stated that the concept of the Russian World in Donetsk and Lugansk regions could find its target audience.

The pro-Russian Party of Regions with the leader from Donbas Viktor Yanukovich has become popular in Ukraine. The party was especially popular in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in the South-Eastern regions. The Party of Regions actively

defended the rights of Russian speakers and unofficially promoted the ideas of the Russian world. After the Orange Revolution and the victory of the nationalist Viktor Yushchenko in the presidential elections, Ukraine was divided into two parts: pro-European and pro-Russian. This situation only fueled the interest of the population of the Southeastern regions in the ideas of the Russian World. After the controversial Viktor Yushchenko, Viktor Yanukovich became president. The pro-European course turned out to be only declarative, and the "reforms" of the Party of Regions team were aimed at reducing the military potential of Ukraine. In fact, during the presidency of Yanukovich, the Russian world in Ukraine was actively promoted and the number of sympathizers of this concept grew.

The concept of the Russian world became especially popular after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian world is a socio-cultural concept based on cultural, religious and linguistic identity. Already at the beginning of the 2000s, the concept of the Russian world began to be promoted at the official level and gradually became a political instrument. Various foundations and institutions were created, the main purpose of which was to support the Russian-speaking population abroad. A special place in this concept is occupied by the Russian Orthodox Church, which is one of the main propagators of this concept.

The propaganda of the ideas of the Russian world also takes place through the so-called cultural centers and pro-Russian political organizations, which actively worked especially in regions where a large number of Russian speakers lived. The media and books have become an additional tool for promoting the ideas of the Russian world. Thus, the church, political and cultural organizations for a long time cultivated certain beliefs of the population and worked to create a certain identity. This means that a certain target audience, under the influence of narratives, formulated a certain set of historical, cultural

and political ideas and norms. This, in turn, influenced the perception of political facts and events. The concept of the Russian World has become practically a state ideology for President Vladimir Putin. The concept of the Russian world has become part of the concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The narratives of the Russian world began to be frequently used to achieve political goals abroad. Ukraine, with 45 million inhabitants and the second largest post-Soviet country in terms of GDP, plays an important role in the concept of the Russian world.

In reaction to the refusal of the political elite to sign an association agreement with the European Union, hundreds of thousands of people gathered on the Independence Square in Kiev at the end of November 2013. Attempts to disperse the protesters by force forced more and more people to take to the streets. Solidarity actions with protesters were held in most cities of Ukraine. The main demand of the protesters was the renewal of the pro-European course of foreign policy. In the South-Eastern regions, protests were also held for supporting cooperation with Russia. However, President Yanukovich decided to sign an agreement with President Putin, according to which Ukraine should receive financial assistance and a discount on gas imports. Yanukovich and his team actively tried to support the rallies of their "supporters" by moving titushki from different regions to Kiev to organize provocations.

An important moment was the violent dispersal of the protesters, in which more than 100 people died. Despite the signed agreement with representatives of the EU, Russia and the Ukrainian opposition, Yanukovich fled the country. Rallies of supporters of different vectors of foreign policy development did not stop. The world media actively covered the events in Ukraine. However, Russian media dramatically changed their rhetoric after Yanukovich's escape. Narratives began to proliferate that "Nazis" would come to power in Ukraine and that the Russian-speaking population would be in danger. Thus, people who

received information from Russian TV channels created an atmosphere of panic and fear about their future in Ukraine. If we take into account the socio-political situation in certain regions of Ukraine, such actions by the Russian side were aimed at radicalizing certain parts of the population.

In an atmosphere of fear and chaos, pro-Russian organizations in Crimea began to organize so-called self-defence militias. After information that the Supreme Council of Crimea plans to secede from Ukraine, mass actions were organized. At the same time, rallies were held in support of the Ukrainian authorities and supporters of the independence of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. It is worth noting the active participation of the Crimean Tatars in actions to support Ukraine. The actions took place peacefully, but at night the buildings of the Supreme Soviet and the Crimean government were seized by the military without insignia, which presented themselves as representatives of the self-defence militias. After analyzing the uniforms and weapons of the military, it was possible to identify that they were the Russian military. Later, Putin personally acknowledged this fact.

The Crimean Parliament, in the presence of the armed military, voted to hold a referendum on the status of Crimea. On a similar principle, television and radio communication towers were seized to stop broadcasting Ukrainian channels. Russia has also conducted numerical military exercises along the border with Ukraine, posing the threat of a full-scale invasion. The entire military operation was carried out under clear informational, political and diplomatic cover. Politicians, diplomats and the media actively developed a discourse about the self-defence militias of the Crimea and refused to recognize their participation in the operation. The last stage of the military operation in Crimea was an attempt to legitimize the annexation through a referendum. Despite the

"official results" of the referendum organizers, most countries in the world do not recognize Crimea as part of Russian territory.

After the military operation in the Crimea, there was an attempt to implement a similar scenario in other regions of Ukraine with a population that for a long time was subjected to active propaganda of the ideas of the Russian world. However, after the seizure of administrative buildings in Kharkov, the Ukrainian authorities managed to quickly return the situation under their control. In Donetsk and Lugansk announced the creation of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic". By analogy with Crimea, referendums were organized in the so-called "people's republics", which were supposed to legalize their independence. On the territories of the regions, armed groups began to be created under the leadership of the fanatics of the Russian world. After a direct clash of pro-Russian militants with the Ukrainian army, Ukraine announced the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

After the announcement of the ATO, the Ukrainian army regained control of most of the territories. After the plane crash of a Boeing 777 from Malaysian Airlines in the airspace of Ukraine and a special examination, additional evidence of Russia's active participation in the conflict was obtained. Soon, the Russian military themselves recognized their participation in the war on the Donbas on the side of the separatists. Including in the battles for Debaltseve, where the Ukrainian forces were forced to retreat. It is noteworthy that the transfer of troops and weapons was carried out, including under the cover of "humanitarian convoys".

This type of warfare can be called hybrid warfare. A feature of this type of warfare is a complex of conventional and non-conventional methods of war. The Russian concept of this type of warfare was described by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, a year before the start of the

Russian-Ukrainian war. It can also be stated that some tactics were borrowed from the Soviet military strategy. A feature of the Russian hybrid war against Ukraine was the use of strategic denial and deception tactics and information campaigns. Information campaigns are an integral part of Russia's hybrid strategy. However, it is worth noting that without the use of special forces and military maneuvers that created a constant threat of invasion, it would be impossible to carry out military operations of this scale.

From a constructivist perspective, hybrid warfare is a war for values, discourses and identities. The attacker's goal is to perceive the target audience and redefine cultural, historical and political ideas and norms. This is achieved by creating a specific discourse and using various non-military methods over a period of time. The attacker thus changes the identity of the target audience in order to get a more advantageous position in the active phase of the conflict. Hybrid war becomes a war for collective memory, which consists of a certain interpretation of the historical past, language and religion.

Analysis of Russian non-military methods of waging war against Ukraine confirms that weaponization of norms and ideas was one of the components of hybrid warfare. A certain set of norms and ideas that would be convenient for the attacking parties became the concept of the Russian world. Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian war can be characterized as a war of different socio-cultural models. The different identities that have emerged over the years have become one of the reasons for this conflict. Russia has been actively imposing the ideas of the Russian world on certain groups of the population of Ukraine for 20 years. The target audience of such information campaigns were Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine, who mostly lived in Crimea and in the South-East of Ukraine. During a dramatic change in the political environment, these groups of the population were radicalized. This has become an important component in the active phase of the military operation of the Russian special forces in Crimea and Donbas.

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