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**MEANS OF RUSSIA HYBRID WARFARE
AGAINST UKRAINE**

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The scientific work investigates the issues of the origins of separatist ideas in the East of Ukraine, as well as the creation of illegal armed groups as the basis for the initiation of the “hybrid war” against Ukraine and the invasion of Russian troops into Ukrainian territory.

The work could be useful for a wide range of readers.

The English translation was made by the specialists of the Foreign Languages Learning and Research Center of the National Defense University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskyi, and was edited by the chief of the Center, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Colonel Mykhailo Hrebeniuk.

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the XXI century, the Russian Federation, strengthening its military potential and strengthening the Putin authoritarian regime of power, began to claim the status of a superpower, trying to influence the nature of international relations and the formation of the foundations of the modern world order. The political matrix in implementing its plans in the post-Soviet space has become an ideologeme of the “Russian world”, which is a symbiosis of the modernized Soviet formula of “fraternal East Slavic peoples”, which reinforces hierarchical superiority of the Russian people as “elder brother” [1].

Russian government assigns a key place for Ukraine in their plans for recovery of post-soviet empire. Throughout its history Ukraine was a powerful resource, military-industrial and spiritual donor for Russia. Strengthening the state independence Ukraine has become a challenge to imperial consciousness and psychological trauma for the Russian imperial extreme nationalists. Almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union leadership of the Russian Federation was talking about Ukraine as “temporarily lost territory”.

In February 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a renewed concept of foreign policy, which outlined by a separate item that Ukraine should develop only within the Commonwealth of Independent States, where Russia occupies a dominant position [2]. On this basis Russia launched an unprecedented large-scale measures to prevent Ukraine from signing an agreement with the European Union. The Russian government has initiated “hybrid warfare” measures against Ukraine in order to carve up its territory and turn it into non-functional state without own sovereignty. Due to the fault of Russia a military conflict has started and has been continuing in the East Ukraine. The causes of this conflict require clarification.

SEPARATISM IN THE EAST AND SOUTH OF UKRAINE

The recent past shows that in the late 1980s - early 1990s the population of eastern and southern Ukraine massively supported the process of getting sovereignty of the republic and its independent national development. Out of the 2,957,372 people who participated in the poll in the Donetsk region, 83.9% supported the Act of Independence of Ukraine. 83.8% out of 1,682,344 people who participated in the poll in Luhansk region, also supported the independence of Ukraine [3]. Most voters in the South of the country voted for independence of Ukraine. However, it is difficult to identify the motivation of citizens who supported the state independence of Ukraine, its unitary democratic development. Not all of them were guided only by national and patriotic consciousness. More likely some pragmatic goals served as their motivation: the residents of Donetsk were tempted by hope of financial incomes that market economy would provide them. In the minds of many the population of the Donbas the independent Ukraine was associated with the expansion of its authority in the social sphere and the improvement of living standards in the region.

At the time of transition from a planned economy to a market economy, the Donbas differed from other regions due to some distinctive features of local ruling elite. It was formed primarily by influential persons who previously held senior positions in the Communist nomenclature and had a direct connection with the management of production. Privatization of the industry in the Donbas was conducted according to complex procedures. As a result, the shady and sometimes criminal capital obtained benefits. The new ruling elite believed that the region was economically self-sufficient and powerful and never hesitated to declare publicly that the Donbas kept by its economy the rest of Ukrainian regions.

The new elite, called by people “masters of the Donbas” and “oligarchs”, focused on the domination not only in the region but also on extending its powers over the central government structures in Kyiv. Some hints were made that only people from the Donetsk region were able to improve the situation in the Ukrainian

economy and politics. The position of the industrial elite, plants owners was openly expressed by a businessman from Zaporizhzhia then the President of the “Motor Sich” Public Joint Stock Company and a member of the Ukrainian parliament Viktor Bohuslaiev. During the 2007 parliamentary elections he said “We represent interests of the South-East Region” and then continued saying that a main industrial potential was located in South-Eastern Ukraine ... therefore, the representatives of the South-East had to govern the country and the economy [4]. A rapid growth of local business structures and their dreams about getting influence the central government gave many reasons for political opposition of the Donbas to other regions of Ukraine.

Comparing to other regions of Ukraine, due to the functioning of large core town-forming enterprises (factories, mines, plants, etc.) the development of small and medium enterprises was low. The dependency of employees from the owners and managers significantly increased because of a limited choice of workplaces. This dependency of the residents led to their faulty perception of social injustice concerning a distribution of the production revenue. The same dependency provoked the expectation that the state and the owners of private enterprises would eventually provide decent working and life conditions to those who worked or pensioners.

On the eve of a military conflict, Donetsk region occupied the last and Luhansk second-to-last place in Ukraine by the factors such as demographics, peoples’ living conditions, education of the population and the environment. Moreover, the nature of production and its negative impact on workers’ health, workers’ traumatism and mortality in the region were higher than the average, and life expectancy was shorter than ordinary people from other regions of Ukraine had [5].

Unemployment of workable population had direct impact on destabilization in the region. The total number of the unemployed registered by the state employment service at the end of December 2013 was 33 thousand people in the

Donetsk region, which is by 3.3% higher compared to the previous year. The number of available jobs (vacancies) declared by enterprises, institutions and organizations at that time was 2.1 thousands. Unemployed young people under 35, who were registered by the employment service, amounted to 14.6 thousand people or 44.2% of all unemployed. Pro-Russian political forces that undermined the socio-political situation in the region widely used unemployed young people recruiting them as separatists and terrorists.

Significant changes occurred in mass media. Having quite substantial financial resources, Donetsk region business structures representatives created private media and actively participated in the formation of images of historical memory pursuing their political interests. A stereotype was formed on this basis of “Donetsk identity”. It has been actively promoted as part of the political struggle for power by Party of the Regions proclaimed in 1997 [6]. Speculating on the local particularities and regional differences these politicians ignoring political responsibility and conscience offered the local motto “love your region and your party” instead of nationwide patriotic mottoes. “Donetsk identity” served as a mean of “cementing” the inhabitants of mining settlements, “personification of workers spirit”.

Historically, Donetsk region had a special geopolitical and economic interests for Russia. A significant part of Russians and Russian-speaking population has lived in the region (1844,4 thousand people or 38.2% of the population of Donetsk and 991.8 thousand people or 39% of Luhansk region), most of which are oriented on Russian and Soviet cultural traditional values [7]. The region is connected with Russia via family relationships. Besides, Russia was the main trading partner of the region: about 21.7% of export from the Donetsk region and approximately 44.5% of export of Luhansk region was related to the Russian Federation [8]. Such a reality in combination with other factors and motivators influenced the political and social behaviour of many Donbas residents.

A large proportion of Donetsk region population, especially older persons, tends to believe the Russian authorities are closer to their nostalgic Soviet social, historical, cultural and other practices. The reason for this was that Russia largely stands as a successor of the Soviet Union. Some part of the residents of the Donbas regretted of the collapse of the Soviet Union and preferred the power of “strong hand” and “planned economy” as an alternative for democracy and market economy. According to a survey of sociological group “Reitynh”, held in March 2013, 68% of the Donbas respondents (on average 59 % in Ukraine) voted in favour of “strong government”. At large, the residents of the Donbas voted for strengthening of censorship in the media (43%) as opposed to greater freedom of expression (24%). In this regard, the answers of respondents who were residents of the Donbas contradicted all-Ukrainian reaction (on average 26% of citizens in Ukraine voted for censoring and 42% voted for free media). Remarkably, only the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, at most (50%), supported a return to a planned economy.

Due to the efforts of Party of the Regions and its supporters, events related to the so-called Severodonetsk congress held November 28, 2004 were reproduced in the collective memory. The calls for a so-called “South-East Ukrainian Autonomous Republic” were announced at the congress. According to separatists, the congress was transformed into “one of the most important events on the way to “Novorosiiia” recovery. Something similar happened in Odesa, where in December 2004 the city council some leaders declared intentions to transform Odesa and the Odesa region into a “free self-governing territory where orders of local authorities will be effective”. Such threats were conditioned by the situation if the supporters of V. Yushchenko would win over the rest of Ukraine. But the separatist calls were not supported [9].

Separatism in the East and South of Ukraine had being spread by pro-Russian organizations. In December 2005, socio-political organization “Donetsk Republic”, initially at the city-scale and then at the regional one, was created in

Donetsk. The organization announced the granting of special status to the eastern regions of Ukraine with reference to the Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic as the successor to the regional statehood, which existed for several months in 1918. The appeal to the events of this republic, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks, was accompanied by the rationale for the separation of the eastern and southern regions from Ukraine. In early 2007, the organization held a series of events in several eastern cities promoting the idea of Ukraine federalization. On November 12, 2007, according to the decision of the Donetsk Regional Administrative Court, the activities of the “Donetsk Republic” were banned, but it continued to exist illegally, limited to certain anti-Ukrainian actions. In February 2009, activists of this organization circulated a provocative statement that the Donbas and Kherson Oblasts seem to be “an independent sovereign Russian federal state”. In June 2012, supporters of the organization opened their own “embassy” at the headquarters of the “Eurasian Youth Union” in Moscow, where they issued “passports of citizens” of the Donetsk republic. In early March 2014, representatives of the organization participated in the pro-Russian rallies in Donetsk stormed the building of Donetsk Regional State Administration under its walls demanded a referendum on the separation of the Donbas from Ukraine.

The Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter – ROC) also played a destructive role in destabilizing the situation in the East of Ukraine. Since 2011, the leadership of the ROC has started holding annual meetings of bishops of the border dioceses of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in Moscow. The content of such meetings was not revealed, but practical actions that followed after these meetings showed that they were dedicated to the implementation of “Russian world” doctrine. The Moscow Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev), referring to the believers, assessed the “Russian world” as a great Russian civilization emerging from the Kievan font. In an attempt to correct the mood of the faithful of Ukraine, the apologists of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter referred to as the UOC-MP) declared the European Union a totalitarian state, where “the

repressions against “dissidents” were actively pursued”. The head of UOC-KP Filaret defined “Russian world” ideologeme as the following: “Under this euphoric sign, the idea of depriving Ukraine of its statehood and independence is concealed” [10].

According to the order and the submission of Russian politicians in 2013–2014, the prospect of federalization of Ukraine was widely discussed in the Donbas region, which seemed to be among the separatists as the only means of solving regional and national problems. Declarations on a separation of certain regions of the Donbas from Ukraine began with a discussion initiated by the pro-Russian forces on changing the form of a state structure from unitary to federal. It is noteworthy, that many people who participated in protest actions in support of the federal system of Ukraine did not really know what federalization meant. Often people understood this term as the improvement of the social-economic situation in the region. Understanding of the fact, that the words “federalism” and “federalization” lie behind the planned intention to tear up part of Ukrainian territory in favor of Russia, became clear when the flags of the Russian Federation were placed on the administrative buildings of many eastern Ukrainian cities.

Pro-Russian organizations with the participation of representatives from different cities of the East and South of Ukraine held conferences and round tables, which proved the special role of the Donbas in the formation of the Eurasian Union. At a scientific conference “Donbas in the Eurasian Project”, which took place in Donetsk on November 24–25, 2012, as reported by the media, “the public from Moscow, Rostov, Belgorod, Kyiv and Odesa, it was declared that the Donetsk region – an organic part of the “Russian world”, the epicentre of “Novorosiiia”. In the circumstances described above, the participants of the conference confirmed that the transformation of the Donbas from a purely socio-economic reality to the political factor became a burning problem. According to the conference participants, the current problem was the transformation of the Donbas from a purely socio-economic reality into a political factor.

The authoritarian system of Russian power implies following the statements and instructions of its “national leader”, which is invariably the second decade of V. Putin. And he unceremoniously demonstrates his own vision of history that directs Russian society. In November 2014, during a meeting with Russian historians, Putin gave a clear signal that Kievan Rus and Russia are identical. Soon after the assertion that Kievan Rus was the initial period of the Russian state appeared in the use of the historians. In official editions of Russia the term “Kievan Rus” disappeared, but the “Old Russian State” was adopted. Baptism of Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv in Chersonesos V. Putin also tied to Russia, without mentioning Kyiv and Ukraine.

The leader of Russia peculiarly appreciated the secret pact of Molotov-Ribbentrop, which became a prerequisite for the beginning of the Second World War. According to Russian president, the Soviet Union did not want to fight, that is why the pact was concluded. If it did not want to, then why on September 17, 1939, the Stalinist regime sent the Red Army to capture Western Ukraine? In order to implement the “liberation campaign” the Soviet troops consisting of 54 infantry and 13 cavalry divisions, 18 armoured brigades and 11 artillery regiments with a total of more than 600,000 soldiers and officers were deployed [11]. At the same time, the Soviet government showed demonstrative passivity in the situation when the German army occupied Poland.

With the submission of Russian politicians of the highest rank, Ukraine's role in the historical events of the past and in modern times is being diminished. President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, during a meeting with US President George W. Bush at the NATO-Russia Summit in Sochi, on April 5, 2008, said: “Regarding our relations with Ukraine ... I will not agree with your statement that if we had been divided, we would not have won the war (referring to the Second World War). We would still have won because we are a country of winners. This means that the war was won, I do not want to offend anyone, due to the industrial resources of the Russian Federation. This is a historical fact, it's all

stated in the documents”. Similar statements about Russia’s decisive role in the victory over the enemy in the Second World War were made by V. Putin (at that time, already the prime minister of the Russian Federation) and during direct communication with the Russians on December 16, 2010 [12].

The Russian leadership, while preparing aggressive plans for Ukraine, identified the Crimean peninsula with a special object of its informational influence. Thanks to the media controlled by the Kremlin, Russian politicians masterly shaped the public consciousness they needed. As a result, a kind of Russian ideology prevailed in Crimea, pro-Russian political parties appeared, the basis of which was mythological logic:

The transfer of the Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 was illegal; Crimean Tatars are the greatest threat to peace in the autonomy because they seemed eager to turn the Crimea into another Chechnya; Crimean History is a permanent heroism of the Russian people. With the domination of Party of the Regions the entire Crimea was shrouded with billboards depicting the texts which ended with the words: “We have the right for history and Russian language”. Crimeans could view relationship with Ukraine only through the prism of history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

To justify and implement Putin’s aggressive plans in the discourse of Russian historians, the Donbas was seen as part of the “Russian world”, which by force of law, allegedly contrary to the will of the local population, was included in Ukraine. To substantiate their position, pseudo-scientific scholars have resorted to falsifying the historical process of settlement of the Donbas region, emphasized the national composition of the population and its migration, highlighting the role of the Russian ethnos in the development of the region, while ignoring the participation of Ukrainians in its economic development. To foment separatism, the state leadership of Russia focused on the historical term “Novorosiia”, which, with the submission of V. Putin, began to actively spread to the East and South of Ukraine. In the context of the Novorosiia program, Putin said: “Kharkiv, Luhansk,

Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa were not part of Ukraine during tsarist times. These are all territories that were handed over by the Soviet (Russian) Government in the 1920s". Russian historians influenced by Putin began to consider "Novorosiia" as a peculiar state formation of the Russian Empire, which allegedly covered the current south-eastern Ukrainian lands. Modern Ukrainian historians, basing on new documents and materials, developed the statements of M. Hrushevskyi, N. Polonskyi, D. Baglii, M. Arkas, S. Rudnytskyi and other well-known researchers that Katerina II, eliminating the autonomous structure of Ukraine in order to ensure Administrative influence on the Ukrainian territories, began to create provinces and general-governors. In the south of Ukraine, the Novorosiisk province was created, and in 1764 the name "Novorosiia" appeared as a territorial-geographical association [13].

In plans for the restoration of the post-Soviet empire, the Russian leadership imposed on society the idea of Ukraine's statehood as a "temporary misunderstanding", "an unceasing step for a certain province of Russia", which was marked by a certain peculiarity of thoughts and opinions, but always in line with the all-Russian interests despite inappropriate "manifestations local nationalism". In assessing diverse events in Ukraine, Russia's leadership emphasized the "artificiality of Ukrainian statehood". Due to such statements, informational potential of anti-Ukrainian separatism was formed in uninformed (or poorly informed) citizens.

In order to mobilize the local electorate to the side of the separatists, the pro-Russian political forces used the so-called linguistic question, which helped them to oppose the regions of Ukraine. In the linguistic opposition of the East and the West, an electoral campaign of the candidate for President of Ukraine V. Yanukovich was built, and the Party of the Regions sought victory in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Statements about "the need to protect the Russian language" seemed rather strange in view of its widespread use on the territory of the Donbas. According to the census 1989, there were citizens of

130 nationalities in the Donetsk region. Ukrainians made up 50.7%, Russians – 43.6% of the population. Despite this, the communicative spheres of social life in the region were dominated by the Russian language. As of January 1, 2005, according to official data, 990 periodicals were registered in the Donetsk region, of which only 18 were published in Ukrainian (including the oblast newspaper “Donechchina”). 69 newspapers and magazines claimed that they printed their circulation both in Ukrainian and in Russian. Most editions (over 660) were Russian-language. The data of Donetsk regional administration for 2011 show that on April 1, 2011, 1245 printed publications were registered in the Donetsk region, of which 14 were Ukrainian, 121 were issued in both Ukrainian and Russian (bilingual), another periodical was Russian-language [14]. TV broadcasting organizations of the region conducted their broadcasts in most cases in Russian (55% of the broadcast) [15].

Under the rule of the representatives of the Party of the Regions in the state structures, a peculiar modification of the thesis of “the split of Ukrainian society in the East Ukrainian and Western Ukraine” began to appear in the publications. The opposition of the population of the Donbas and the Galicia in the information field of the Party of the Regions was very closely interwoven with the materials of the Russian mass media, where the Galician people often described as “Galician scum”. It should be noted that in a number of Donetsk editions, the Russians of the Donbas were called “stabilizing component”, by which allegedly managed to avoid inter-ethnic confrontation in the region and ensure the progressive development of industry. At the same time, the outstanding figures whose life and activities were directly related to the Donbas were underestimated and deliberately ignored even in the local press: the Alchevsk family, Borys Hrinchenko, Petro Hryhorenko, Volodymyr Dal, Arkhyp Kuindzhi, Volodymyr Sosiura, Ivan Svitlychnyi, Vasyl Stus, Mykyta Shapoval and many others. They did not belong to the category of unknowns, but their presence in the national memory of the Donbas citizens was

practically not mentioned and, of course, did not affect the formation of regional identity.

Events related to Euro-Maidan in Kyiv significantly influenced the political sentiment and social behaviour of the inhabitants of East Ukraine [16].

A survey conducted at the end of January 2014 by the Research Branding Group in the oblast (regional) centres of Ukraine showed that 81% of the residents of the Eastern regional centres did not support Euro-Maidan, while 86% of the residents of the oblast centres of the western regions expressed their support for the protesters. According to analysts, most residents of the Donbas did not understand the motives of the participants in the Kyiv protest actions, and the protesters themselves were considered deceitful or insincere. The political forces that supported the government of Viktor Yanukovych, actively and purposefully shaped Euro-Maidan negative image that originally was associated with ambitions of opposition politicians who sought power.

From early November 2013, Russia launched a large-scale information campaign to discredit Euro-Maidan and the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, and became on the way of intimidating the population by a “fascist rebellion”, and called the new government “military junta”. Such statements were accompanied by a statement on “the need to protect the Russian-speaking population in the Ukrainian territory”. Members of Euro-Maidan were branded as militants and “ordinary protesters from the Southeast of Ukraine” were missing. The presence of the tents with the inscription “Donetsk” on Euro-Maidan has been explained by the fact that those “Donetsk residents, who went out to support Euro-Maidan, are often party functionaries of some semi-nationalist parties” or employees of organizations whose activities relied on foreign grants. Not accepting Kyivan authorities after Euro-Maidan as their own, most of the residents of the Donetsk region, in their sympathies, spurred in the direction of those forces that promoted the independence of the region and its entry into Russia.

In the context of the revolutionary events of the time, the pro-Russian idea of dismemberment of Ukraine became more active. On the Internet, a map appeared from the office of the Communist Party of Ukraine in Kyiv, where a possible division of Ukraine into 5 parts was envisaged (the Republic of Crimea, the Donbas Republic, the Dnipro-Slobozhansk republic, the Republic of Novorosiia, and Ukraine) [17]. Communists called this incident as a provocation, but further events gave grounds for doubt in such a statement. The first step in implementing this plan was the annexation by the Russian Federation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Eight regions, along with Crimea, should have left to the Russian Federation (Novorosiia); Kyiv with surrounding regions should become a buffer with the subsequent entry into the “Russian world” (“Little Russia”); the Galicia could realize its European dreams.

The popularity of this topic is clearly illustrated by the polls of public opinion about imposing the ideas of separatism on Ukrainian society. According to a study conducted in March 2014 by the Sociological Group “Reitynh” commissioned by the International Republican Institute, the majority of Ukrainian citizens supported the unitary form of government and voiced themselves against federalization. 64% of respondents said that Ukraine should remain a unitary state in its present form. Only 14% spoke in favour of the federal form of government [18].

Thus, one of the causes of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict in the East of Ukraine was the emergence of “hybrid threats” that manifested itself in the creation of pro-Russian organizations that demanded a federal system of Ukraine that foresees the separation of the Donetsk region from Ukraine and its entry into the Russian Federation.

ILLEGAL MILITIAS IN EASTERN UKRAINE

Realizing the aggressive plans for Ukraine, the Russian state leadership was directly involved in the creation and resource support of illegal armed groups on the Ukrainian territory. It considered them as a decisive force in implementing the plan for the division of Ukraine on a federal basis and the destruction of independent Ukrainian statehood. Creating the illegal armed formations, Russia used theoretical knowledge and the unique practical experience of irregular armed groups operating during the First and Second Chechen wars (1994–2001).

The Russian intelligence services also analysed and used the experience of the activities of illegal associations operating in the Ukrainian territory before the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict began. Back in 2004, under protection of the Party of the Regions and its leaders, a number of cities formed formation under the guise of “sports” organizations with military and partly criminal rules and procedures. These organizations were particularly noticeable in the election campaign with such actions as terrorizing journalists and participants in protest actions and peaceful demonstrations. In the last years of Yanukovich’s presidency, the experience of creating such organizations, which later became known as “titushky” (from the name of one of the participants), was distributed throughout Ukraine.

With the assistance of Russia in the East of Ukraine, separatist organizations were formed that relied on armed hostilities against Ukrainian authorities. In 2009, the group “Donetsk Republic” with the ideology of separatism was preparing for an armed action against the Ukrainian authorities on the territory of the Donetsk region. Under the auspices of this organization, a military camp was created in Makiivka where its supporters learned to shoot, make and use Molotov’s cocktails. In April 2014, the group appeared to be a radical force in the proclaimed “Donetsk People's Republic” and together with “Free Donbas Party” took an active part in the illegal and unrecognized international elections in the “Donetsk People's Republic”.

In turn, a separatist organization called “Moloda hvardiia” (“Young Guard”) was established in Luhansk. Their leader was a deputy of the local council A. Klinchaev. This organization, which bares the same name as youth wing of the “Iedyna Rosiia” (“United Russia”) Russian ruling party, was set to implement anti-Ukrainian actions, including direct military aggression. The management of the organization sought to make its branch in the Party of the Regions. According to the official report of the Security Service of Ukraine “Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy” (SBU), Klinchaev planned to seize the control of the SBU, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the premises of the State Treasury of Luhansk region together with a group of 500 militants. Each participant was promised a monetary reward of US\$ 150. Luhansk “young guardsmen” did not act alone. The weekly “Dzerkalo tyzhnia” of March 6, 2014 noted that “it is impossible to organize mass gatherings without the participation of local elites”. There was a lot of indirect evidence to this end: the first place where was openly called to enrol for “Narodne opolchennia Donbasu” (“People's militia of the Donbas”) was the local office of the Party of the Regions. Pro-Russian organizations that possessed weapons (already mentioned “Young Guard” and “People's Militia” and “Skhidnyi front” (“Eastern Front”), “Patriotychni syly Donbasu” (“Patriotic Forces of Donbas”), “Oborona Donetska” (“Donetsk Defence”) and so on) were created in the Donbas long before the armed conflict involving Russian consultants.

The creation of illegal armed groups in the conditions of the socio-political crisis in Ukraine was fuelled by the indecisiveness of law enforcement agencies, the weakness of the defence structures of the state in defending the legal principles of life. Russia took into account that Ukraine, following the principle of non-alignment, was deprived of external armed support. Indeed, because of Russia’s pressure under President Kuchma the point about Ukraine’s intention to join NATO was removed from its military doctrine. This was done at a time when Armed Forces of Ukraine had been preparing for NATO integration for two years (since May 2002). The decision to change policy, on the contrary to a membership

of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was adopted after the events surrounding Tuzla in 2003, directly pointed to the possibility of military aggression from Russia. At that time, Russian Defence Minister Ivanov announced that Novorosiisk was not an alternative to Sevastopol as a base for the Black Sea Fleet.

The illegal armed groups in the Eastern Ukraine were established under the conditions of a general weakness of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This was facilitated by the fact that under President Viktor Yanukovich people with openly pro-Russian views occupied key positions in the security sector (MOD, SBU, “Ukroboronprom”), and some of their actions were aimed at destroying the defence capabilities of Ukraine. From 2010 to 2014, the highest executive positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine were occupied by those who did not consider the formation of the army as a key direction of their activity. Dmitro Salamatin, according to experts, “drain the army of blood”, made redundant the professional personnel that received military training and experience of military service. Pavel Lebedev followed the same policy by after him. It is not unexpected that they are called “agents of the Kremlin’s influence” in the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Before the beginning of the military conflict in the East, Ukraine had a tendency of reducing her armed forces. This process was motivated by easing international tensions, a reduction of armed forces in states adjacent to Ukraine and Russia's seemingly peace-loving policy. The State Program of Reform and Development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine up to 2005 stated that “in the near future, the possibility of large-scale use of military force against Ukraine was unlikely”. There was an extraordinary situation: the neighbouring state (Russia) on the border with Ukraine was increasing its strength, conducting military exercises, and Ukraine was reducing forces, weapons and military equipment. As a result, a significant area of Eastern and Southern Ukraine on the eve of Russian aggression against Ukraine was left without an adequate military protection.

Creating the “Spivdruzhnist nezaleznykh derzhav” (Commonwealth of Independent States), the special services of the former Soviet republics entered into a series of agreements that would not work against each other, in particular, the agreement between the services of foreign intelligence of Russia and Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Russian “Federalnaia sluzhba bezopasnosti” (FSB) (Federal Security Service) established a special department which was instructed to carry out intelligence activities against Ukraine, such as: holding actions of influence and ideological sabotage for weakening of the Ukrainian state as maximum as possible, the collapse of Ukrainian society from the inside in favour of refusal of European choice and accession to NATO, etc. The task of the newly formed FSB administration was to transform Ukraine into a formally independent but vassal state formation, subordinated to Kremlin. The same department was engaged in supplying weapons to the Donbas militants, their training, providing intelligence etc.

Along with the FSB against Ukraine, the “Hlavnoe rozvedovalnoe upravleniye” (GRU) (Main Intelligence Department) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, including its regional subordinated structures of the military districts neighbouring Ukraine and the Black Sea Fleet relevant structures, was involved. The department specializes in penetration into the structure of the Armed Forces and the defence industry of Ukraine, drafting agents, collecting secret information on the number, disposition, combat capability and plans of individual units. Such anti-Ukrainian activities demonstrate the revealed facts, in particular, the SBU unmasked Russian spy who worked for the GRU and arrived in Lviv as a businessman in 2013. While in Ukraine, he collected secret military information and tried to recruit agents among the Ukrainian military. The SBU detained well-armed groups of saboteurs who had been preparing for the abduction of combat aircraft, explosions at defence facilities in the Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kherson, and Kharkiv regions. These and other facts clearly testify to the timely preparation of pro-Russian forces to destabilize the situation in Ukraine.

Some intelligence centres of General Intelligent Service of the General Staff of Russian Federation as “Moskovskiy” (Moscow), 2nd (Kursk, intelligence activities in the Northern regions of Ukraine), 3rd (Voronezh, intelligence in the Central areas) and 4th (Tver) operational units of Moscow intelligence centre (Rostov-on-Don, intelligence in the Eastern regions of Ukraine), 1st (Crimea), 2nd (Sochi) and 3rd (Abkhazia) separate units of 78th Krasnodar intelligence centre also work against the sovereignty of Ukraine [19].

Since 2010, the subversive work against Ukraine has intensified, in addition to undercover penetration of the facilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, especially in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. GRU of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation managed to recruit a number of agents among Ukrainian middle and high level officers. Investigation of the Military Prosecution of Ukraine shows that traitors were recruited and especially among those officers whose units were the first resist Russian aggression (intelligence, the Coast Guard, communications). Having its agents among the Ukrainian high-ranking personnel, the Russian intelligence service had the opportunity to influence appointments of personnel in Ukrainian military units in Crimea, to work on their demoralisation in advance, and to identify military traitors who were eventually appointed as leaders of illegal armed formations.

The Russian leadership began to use elements of the “hybrid war” tactics in advance. In order to implement her aggressive plans, Russia sent to Ukraine specially trained military units without identification marks. These units took an active part in the creation of illegal armed formations and destabilization of the socio-political situation in Crimea, in the East and South of Ukraine. In February-May 2014, Crimea and the Donbas were flooded with armed and equipped so-called green men”, “polite people”, groups of “unknown armed people”, “tourists” and Cossacks and other antisocial elements, which the Kremlin propaganda called “local self-defence” and “Militiamen”. Human Rights Watch in its report of November 2014 paid special attention to the practice of kidnapping people by the

so-called “Crimean self-defence”, an illegal paramilitary formation, which helped the Russian troops to capture the peninsula and then acted as a force instrument for the establishment of Russian rule in Crimea [20].

At the turn of 2013-2014, the Cossacks of Luhansk region and Donetsk region became more active. Cossacks from other regions of Russia arrived and joined them, most of whom stayed in the Donbas and participated in separatist anti-Ukrainian actions. Revealed sources indicate that under the Russian army officers' leadership the Cossacks were armed and received military training. The activation of paramilitary Cossack structures, coordination of their activities with regular military formations of the Russian Federation testified to the build-up of forces with the aim of destroying the foundations of Ukraine's national security.

Neo-Cossacks were in the sight of the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, considering it as part of the policy of creating the “Russian world”. Neo-Cossacks organizations under the tutelage of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) maintained ties with the Don and Terek Cossacks of Russia, relying on the idea of the unity of “Slavs-brothers-defenders of Orthodoxy”. The interaction of the Russian Orthodox Church with the UOC-MP was marked by Patriarch Kiril’s meeting with the atamans of the registered Cossack troops of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, which took place at the end of 2012 in a monastery in Moscow.

With the assistance of the UOC-MP, the mass media disseminated the image of the “Donetsk Cossacks”, which, according to religious leaders, “served as a symbol of the defence of the Donbas,” “defenders of the Fatherland and the Orthodox faith.” At the same time, they opposed the Orthodox Donbas to the West Ukrainian regions. On February 22, 2014, participants of a pro-Russian rally in Donetsk demanded that local authorities create a detachment of Cossacks called upon to defend citizens in case if “Ukrainian extremists try to destabilize the situation in the region.” It was proposed to open the eastern front designed to protect “the Donbas border from Bandera's evil spirits and fascist plague.” In

support of their appeals the registration of persons who had volunteered to take part in the case was registered as well as an appeal to the local authorities to hand over the weapons to the activists “for the protection of the Donbas”. In February 2014, the Cossacks of the Luhansk region quite seriously referred to Putin on the introduction of Russian troops on their territory for “protection from Ukrainian nationalists.”

Terrorist organizations in the East of Ukraine were formed under different names: militias, self-defence, volunteers, people's squads. Over time, separatist leaders announced the creation of the “Army of the South-East”, “People’s Militia of Donbas”, “Army of Novorosiiia.” At the first stage, the Russian special services armed the militants with explosive packages, stun grenades and automatic weapons. At the beginning of the destabilization of the situation in Eastern Ukraine, the terrorists used local and partially Russian small arms. The later was delivered through the Russian-Ukrainian border by land and the Sea of Azov. In addition, the militants seized the premises of the regional, local and district offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the SBU together with weapons. Later on, the Russia-produced “Buk” surface-to-air missile system, armoured personnel carriers, tanks, “Grad”, “Tornado” and “Smerch” multiple rocket systems began to appear in the inventory of the illegal armed groups.

In February-March 2014, illegal organizations under the guise of “People's militia”, “Patriotic forces of Donbas”, “Defence of Donetsk” with the participation of the Party of the Regions and the UOC-MP gathered mercenaries who terrorized participants in protest areas (“maidans”) creating an atmosphere of anxiety, instability and a sense of danger. On March 5, 2014, pro-Russian militant activists attacked the participants of the rally “For the unity of Ukraine” in Donetsk, which resulted in the death and hospitalization of more than 20 people. In early April 2014, local pro-Russian armed extremists, along with Russian saboteurs arrived from Russia, seized administrative buildings and facilities of law enforcement agencies. The impostors proclaimed themselves “people’s mayors,” “governors,”

“people's militiamen”. Illegal military formations in the Donbas were created with the direct participation of the Russian Army officers. Thus, Russia was preparing a springboard for launching armed aggression against Ukraine.

In order to provoke a military conflict in the Donbas, the Russian leadership sent an armed detachment of I. Girkin (I. Strelkov) to Sloviansk town. Under his command, armed men seized the premises of state institutions and district police stations, raised up Russian flags. It was quite revealing that Girkin had no relation to the Donbas until 2013. He was born and raised in Moscow, graduated from the Moscow State Historic-archival Institute, served in the Russian Army, participated in military operations in Transnistria, Bosnia and Chechnia. On July 10, 2014, at the press conference Girkin stated that he was a FSB colonel but resigned on March 31, 2013. According to the British intelligence, I. Girkin was a colonel of the Russian GRU. However, some Russian sources affirmed that he was an officer in reserve. In preparation for the armed actions against Ukraine, Russian intelligence services sent him to Ukraine beforehand. He also visited Kyiv as well as Crimea under the cover of the Russian Orthodox Church. The terrorist leader called on the population of the Donbas to join the ranks of the militias, calling them the “Army of Novorosiiia” and proclaimed himself the “Minister of Defence of the “Donetska narodna respublika” (People’s Republic of Donetsk)”.

The creation of illegal armed formations took place with the participation of the Russian leadership, because the most active part of them was represented by citizens of the Russian Federation who were sent to the Donbas to fulfil some specific tasks. There were already the mentioned Igor Girkin (“Strelkov”), Oleksii Borodai, Aleksandr Mozhaev (“Babai”), Arsenii Pavlov (“Motorola”) and others. The Russian special services recruited their puppets of Pavlo Hubarev, Ihor Bezler (“Bes”), Denis Pushylin, Mykola Kozytsyn, Ihor Plotnytskyi, Viacheslav Ponomarev, Oleksandr Zakharchenko and others by promising high-ranking posts and big salaries.

In mid-April 2014, the Moscow generously funded and well-armed groups of pro-Russian activists began to seize administrative buildings, police stations in Sloviansk, Artemivsk, Kramatorsk and other towns of the Donbas. Attempts to seize administrative buildings took place in Zaporizhzhia, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa oblasts (regions) but did not find enough support of the local population. But the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk was worsening. The situation that developed was also the result of poor policy of the official Kyiv that did not pay attention to the economic and political problems of a deeply depressed region in the years of independence.

Starting from May 2014, military servicemen-contractors have been sent from Russia to the East of Ukraine (they seemed to have broken off the contract with the army or “went on vacation” before such a “trip”). In August 2014, there was noted a sharp increase of Russia’s military presence in the Donbas – up to ten battalion-size tactical groups. That was an attempt to save the puppet separatist formations from their defeat. [21] Experts from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in their special report “Russian troops in Ukraine” emphasized the large-scale participation of the Russian army in combat actions against Ukrainian units from mid-August 2014. Their estimated number was from 3.5 thousand to 6–6.5 thousand of personnel at the end of the summer. In mid-December of that year, at the peak of the direct Russian invasion, the number increased up to 10 thousand of military personnel [21].

RUSSIA'S EXPORT OF “CRIMEAN SCENARIO” TO THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN UKRAINE

The Russian Federation authorities were closely observing events that unfolded on Independence Square in and around Kyiv. “Maidan” (square) occurred as a result of mass protests in relations with the official Kyiv refusal from signing an association agreement with the European Union. In this regard, the new Kyiv “square” was unofficially called as “Euro-Maidan”. On February 23, 2014,

President of Ukraine V. Yanukovich has been compelled to leave Kyiv under unbearable pressure of democratic forces. He grabbed the cash collected for him by all categories of his “supervisors”. On the same day Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine) stated that V. Yanukovich had “self-resigned” from performing his presidential duties and decided to hold extraordinary early presidential elections.

Maidan protesters’ demands in Kyiv and other cities, Viktor Yanukovich’s fleeing and his removal from power meant that Ukraine was finally coming out of the orbit of Russian influence. Therefore, Moscow faced a dilemma whether to accept the collapse of its imperial project or commence an aggression. As already known, the choice was made in favor of military arguments followed by armed aggression.

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine began on February 20, 2014 when the first cases of violation of the international legal obligations of Russia as a result of crossing the interstate border in the Kerch Strait were recorded. At the same time, the military formations of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation, which were in the Crimea in accordance with the intergovernmental agreements, were used to block the Ukrainian military units. On February 24, 2014, additional Russian units were thrown onto the peninsula, including airborne troops, but without any insignia on their uniforms. In three days so-called “little green men”, later known as Russian FSB units, had been blocking the building of Parliament and Autonomous Republic of Crimea Government in Simferopol. Held at a gunpoint there was a parliamentary session that changed the head of the Crimean Council of Ministers. As a result the leader of a marginal party “Rosiiska yednist” (“Russian Unity”) S. Aksonov took over the office.

Thus, Russian Special Forces staged a political coup in Crimea. Official Kyiv did not recognize the illegitimate change of power in Simferopol. Instead, the Russian State Duma urgently, “for the Crimean situation”, amended the procedure for considering an annexation of “new subjects” to the Russian Federation. Along

with the political overthrow, the Russian military began blocking military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and transport routes from the mainland. The Ukrainian Navy ships were also blocked. In addition, on February 28, more than 200 civilians recruited from former “Afghans” (veterans of the Soviet Union war in Afghanistan), boxers, bikers, members of military patriotic clubs and security guards were secretly airlifted from Russia to the peninsula. The days before, some Ukrainian journalists had recorded two military trucks with Russian servicemen who drove into the territory of the military sanatorium of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation “Yalta” [22].

Taking advantage of temporary confusion of official Kyiv and the international community, which hoped for a peaceful resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russian authorities accelerated the Crimea annexation. Initially specified date of the so-called “referendum” had been rescheduled from May, 25 to March, 30 and later on – to March, 16. Also, the issue of people's “will” was corrected promptly. If in the first version of the ballots it was stated that “Does the Autonomous Republic of Crimea have a state autonomy and is an integral part of Ukraine on the basis of treaties and agreements?” Then, in the final form of the ballots, the inhabitants of the peninsula were offered to choose between “Are you for the reunification of the Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation?” and “Are you for the restoration of the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea in 1992 and for the status of the Crimea as part of Ukraine?”.

An illegal campaign with a “referendum” took place with numerous violations that were recorded, in particular, by the Russian Federation Presidential Council on Civil Society Development and Human Rights (though subsequently the relevant report was called “informal”). The Constitutional Court of Ukraine recognized the “referendum” unconstitutional. Meanwhile, an illegal and hasty deal took place on March, 18, 2014 when Russia included Crimea into the Russian Federation. Analysts have been positively drawing parallels between the actions of Vladimir Putin on Crimea annexation in 2014 and Adolf Hitler's ones during the

Anschluss of Austria and the German invasion of Bohemia and consequent annexation of Moravia in 1938.

The Crimean peninsula events are de facto defined in the UN resolution as “Definition of aggression” [23]. Instead, the Ukrainian servicemen, following Ukrainian government policy, did not make armed resistance, so there were no direct military engagements with Russian troops. In addition, Russian troops stripped of identifying insignia and disguised its soldiers as “volunteers” and “local self-defence” forces. Accordingly, the UN did not make immediate steps to recognize Russian actions as an aggression against Ukraine, and then the national political issue has become a matter of international law. Given the will and the emphasis on the legal evidence base (which needs to be carefully collected), Ukraine can bring to an official recognition by international organisations the actions of the neighbouring country on the Crimean peninsula at the end of February and in March 2014 as just an act of aggression. Furthermore, an aggression in international law is a grave crime serious crime that has no limitation period [24].

Russia's occupation by the Crimea, carried out by the Russian military forces with the assistance of local pro-Russian extremist forces, influenced the intensification of separatist sentiment among the inhabitants of the East and South of Ukraine. A part of the citizens of the East of Ukraine expected a repeat of the “Crimean scenario” in the Donbas. Therefore, this category of the population did not anticipate the danger of armed confrontation and destruction of infrastructure in the region in case of separation from Ukraine. After the annexation of Crimea, “unwelcome visitors” from Rostov, Belgorod and other Russian arrived to Donetsk, Kharkiv and Luhansk by buses followed by the well-armed combatants. In early March 2014 numerous pro-Russian activists began to seize the premises of the Donetsk Regional State Administration and a number of administrative bodies. The events in Luhansk were unfolded similar to the Crimea annexation where pro-Russian activists also seized the State Administration on several occasions, and the

deputies of the Luhansk Regional Council decided to appeal to the leadership of the Russian Federation to bring Russian troops into the region. However, at that stage the pro-Russian separatists failed to repeat the “Crimean scenario” of the “Russian spring” in Luhansk.

On March 2, 2014, under conditions of an acute political crisis, mass anti-war rallies were held in support of Ukraine's integrity throughout the southeast of Ukraine. In Donetsk, the protesters came out with posters “Peace and freedom to Ukraine”, “No occupation!”, “Do not disorder our living!” Though the meeting was peaceful, pro-Russian proponents, in particular the members of the public organization of veterans of the Naval Forces of the USSR, tried to foil it. At the same time, Russian TV channels kept on broadcasting in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. On those channels, the new Ukrainian leadership whose actions seemed to be aimed at both against Russia and the population of the South-Eastern Ukraine was called the “junta”. The South-Eastern Ukraine began to be called as “Novorosiiia” in the Russian media reports [25]. The analysis of the demands made at protest rallies in cities in the Southern and Eastern Ukraine at the end of February – early March 2014 suggested that they were planned, since their content coincided, regardless of where they were held. Particularly, such coordination took place in early March 2014, when simultaneously pro-Russian rallies with separatist demands were held in many cities simultaneously. The protesters in Donetsk expressed distrust to A. Shyshatskyi, the head of the Regional State Administration, demanding a referendum on the separation of the Donbas from Ukraine. At the same time, there was a march of protesters in Melitopol proclaiming “We are with Russia and Belarus”, “We do not obey the new government” (Ukrainian), “We are for the Customs Union!”. In early March, pro-Russian protest runners in Luhansk held flags of Russia and demanded to hold the election of the head of the State Administration, the prosecutor, and also to form a municipal police. In their speeches, the protestors condemned the Ukrainian government, called it “brown plague” and “fascist”, demanded a referendum on the

federalization of Ukraine.

On April 7, 2014, the radical separatists, acting according to the Moscow's scenario, proclaimed the so-called "People's Council of Donbas" in the seized building of Donetsk Regional State Administration. This Council adopted an illegal unconstitutional decision to create the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" and its entry into the Russian Federation. As in the "Crimean scenario", separatists announced a referendum with the results pre-determined in Moscow. The organizers of the self-proclaimed "Luhansk People's Republic" acted in the same way.

In Kharkov, self-proclaimed "deputies of the South-East" ", who gathered at the separatist congress, urged local residents "to arm and restore order". On February 23, 2014, the armed combatants of the "Oplot" ("Bulwark") organization led by Ye.Zhylin and O. Zakharchenko commenced an attack on the Maidan protesters. There were injured about a hundred people. On March 1, some armed separatists undertook an unsuccessful attempt to seize the buildings of the Regional State Administration. Blood was shed during the violent action, but the assault failed. On March 15, 2014, pro-Russian forces attacked offices of the regional "Prosvita" ("Education") and the local "Patriot Ukrainy" ("Patriot of Ukraine") organizations. Separatists used fire arms. As a result of these attacks, two people were killed and five were injured. However, the pro-Russian forces failed to provoke mass riots and gaining control over Kharkiv city.

The Dnipro (former Dnipropetrovsk) city authorities opposed to the federalization of Ukraine and supported its unity and unitary form. But the separatists decided to take revenge and organized a mass anti-constitutional meeting on March 1, 2014. Its participants conducted some acts of provocation. Its participants staged a provocation - they destroyed the traces of honoring the Heroes of the Maidan, and raised the Russian tricolour and the red-and-blue flag of the Ukrainian SSR around the city council. There were clashes, as a result of which several people were injured. The citizens of Dnipro reacted to the "Russkii mir"

(“Russian world”) supporters’ provocations by organizing a 15 thousand strong mass meeting under the slogans “Slava Ukraini! Heroiam slava!” (“Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!”), “Slava natsii – smert voroham!” (“Glory to the nation – death to the enemies!”), “Putin – het!” (“Putin get away!”), “Ukraina - yedyna!” (“Ukraine is united!”). The citizens took the administrative building under their protection and determined themselves as supporters of a united Ukraine.

The local anti-Russian Maidan in Zaporizhzhia was scattered on January 26, 2014. Fifty people were taken to hospital; about a hundred participants were arrested. However, the protests did not stop. There had been clashes between the Maidan participants and the pro-Russian forces, who sought to proclaim Zaporizhzhia People's Republic, for more than six weeks. On April 13, 2014, two mass meetings of Maidan and Antimaidan supporters were held in the city. The police had to intervene. The information had been disseminated around the city immediately. Thousands of people quickly surrounded “titushky” (thugs) and demanded the arrest of separatists. Later in the evening the “titushky” were led through a long “korydor hanby” (“corridor of shame”) to the police. The “titushky” suffered public humiliation and the complete failure of their separatist acts in the city of Ukrainian Cozaks.

Some confrontations between the supporters and adversaries of Ukraine unity took place in Mykolaiv and Kherson. Separatists came out for creating a federal association of Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kherson regions and its separation from Ukraine. The decisive actions took place in Mykolaiv on April 8, 2014 when the separatists made an attempt to seize the building of the Regional State Administration. There were injured people from both sides, but the advantage was on the side of the pro-Ukrainian forces and separatists dispersed. During March-April, the central government also established control over Kherson despite the proximity to the Crimea where spies and provocateurs were coming from.

Odesa occupied a significant place in the pro-Russian forces’ plans because

of its strategic importance. Russian secret agents and local pro-Russian separatists acted aggressively seeking an immediate revenge. The conflict between the local Maidan and pro-Russian activists in Odesa escalated after V. Yanukovich had escaped to Russia. In March and April 2014, a series of demonstrations was held to meet the requirements for holding a referendum on the granting of autonomy to the Odesa region or its entry into Novorosiia. There were attempts to storm the building of the regional administration and the establishment of Russian “tricolor” over it. On April 25, the local defence group was attacked by a grenade at the checkpoint near Odesa. Seven people were injured. The tension in the city was increasing and ultimately resulted in the tragedy on May 2, 2014. There were several confrontations between the local “Maidan people” with support of the “ultras” of “Chornomorets” and “Metalist” football clubs and the local and non-resident separatists. The violent (with shootings) confrontation began in the city centre and subsequently turned into pursuit of pro-Russian activists up to their concentration point in Kulikovo field. Some of the separatists hid in their headquarters which was based in the Budynok Profspilok (Trade Unions Building). The building was caught in fire under circumstances that are still unclear. Dozens of people died. The total amount of fatal casualties reached 47 people on that day. On May 3, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine announced that “there is every reason to assert that the tragedy was pre-planned and generously paid by the Russian special services in an action aimed at provoking an explosion of violence in Odesa and destabilizing the situation throughout the Southern region of Ukraine”.

The aim of the March and April pro-Russian campaigns in 2014 was to divert attention of the Ukrainian society from the occupation of Crimea. At the beginning of April 2014, just after the formal annexation of the peninsular, Russia started implementing the project “Novorosiia”, within which a new wave of occupation of administrative buildings began. The participants of the unlawful campaigns were not only local pro-Russian agents and political marginals but also

Russian citizens, including Russian secret service agents. The essence of slogans and actions of the separatists had changed. They went beyond not just internal political discussions but became anti-constitutional ones, aimed at breakup of Ukraine and its territorial integrity.

The creation of so-called “People’s Republics” was proclaimed with the direct involvement of Russian citizens who turned to stay in Ukraine and demonstrated extreme aggressiveness. The ultimate aim, as it was declared by Moscow, was to “federalize” Ukraine that would split the state, slow down or even stop its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Since mid-April 2014, the organized armed gangs had already seized administrative buildings in the East of Ukraine outside the regional centres (Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Krasnyi Lyman, etc.), and they terrorized the local population. With the support of Russian special services, such formations resorted to terror, dispersed pro-Ukrainian mass meetings, systematically assaulted the administrative buildings, seized and held hostages, persecuted and repressed Ukrainian activists, arranged illegal actions against the civilian population.

Receiving from Russia, through unprotected border areas, financing and weapons, including heavy armoured vehicles and multiple rocket launchers, the terrorists began to destroy the Donbas. In those circumstances, the Kremlin propaganda quickly found the enemy. She accused Western countries of all Ukrainian troubles, which made it possible, in the short term, to support the popularity of Putin’s aggressive policy. This was also facilitated by a lack of information from outside of Russia, where 95% of all Russian citizens receive information through Russian media controlled by the Russian central government.

Ukraine faced a special “hybrid” kind of war with the Russian Federation, when the main battleground was the people’s minds and the most effective weapon was distorted information. Deceived by brutal Russian propaganda the inhabitants of the Donbas deprived themselves, with their own hands, of the opportunity to live and work safely in a peaceful environment. At the same time, one must be

aware that a radical part of the population is not the whole Donbas region, and not even its majority, but only a part that is essentially “diluted” by foreign mercenaries who did not have an idea of what the Ukrainian Donbas is.

Russian occupation of Crimea, Russia's actions regarding the formation of a pro-Russian quasi-state formation under the name “Novorosiiia” on the territory of Ukraine with its subsequent inclusion in the Russian Federation caused an international crisis. They spoke about Russia's “hybrid war” against Ukraine and about Russia's revenge in Europe, an attempt to rebuild the Russian Empire in a new form and to include the country of Central and Eastern Europe in its sphere of influence. The countries of Europe, the USA, Canada and other NATO countries stood in defence of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its sovereignty.

There was an anxiety among various segments of Ukrainian society in connection with the statements and actions of pro-Russian separatists and terrorists. The population of the Donetsk neighbouring regions expressed concern about the possibility of invasion of their territory by terrorist sabotage groups. On April 12, 2014, local residents began to build roadblocks at all the entrances to Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk) and the national defence headquarters surged its efforts in the city. Similar measures were taken by the residents of Zaporizhzhia. In accordance with international and national legislation, Ukraine as a state is obligated to be responsible for its proper territory, to crush any attempt of force that threatens its territorial integrity, the life and health of its citizens. The actions of illegal armed groups that emerged in Eastern Ukraine, their plans for territorial dismemberment of Ukraine could only be stopped by adequate actions. The current military-political situation that emerged in the East of Ukraine required a decision on armed resistance to Russian aggression and its henchmen.

In order to overcome the terrorist threat and to preserve the territorial integrity of the State, on April 13, 2014 National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDC Ukraine) decided to launch the anti-terrorist operation. The Acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov appealed to the separatists with

demands to lay down their arms and announced the signing of a decree according to which “those who didn't fire on our security forces and who will lay down their arms and leave the occupied administrative premises” for a specified period would not be punished for their committed actions. However, the leaders of the separatists with the consent of the leadership of Russia refused to comply with the appeal of the state leadership of Ukraine. With the help of Russia they continued anti-Ukrainian actions, increased the number of illegal military formations, armed militants, and held captured administrative buildings. On the 14th of April 2014, the Acting President of Ukraine commissioned the decision of NSDC of Ukraine from April 13, 2014 “On urgent measures to overcome the terrorist threat and preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine” [26].

The legal basis for the implementation and conduct of the anti-terrorist operation was the Law of Ukraine dated March 20, 2003 No. 638-IV “On the fight against terrorism” [27]. The anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine, which began April 15, 2014, became a forced military action involving military units of the Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine. The necessity for its introduction was conditioned by the military-political situation created by Russia in the East of Ukraine in accordance with its imperial plans and resulted in a separatist movement, the creation of illegal military formations, the proclamation of quasi-states in the territory of Ukraine, whose leaders declared their entry to Russia. Separatists and terrorists ignored the Constitution of Ukraine, its territorial integrity, carried out terrorist actions against the authorities and the population of the Eastern regions of Ukraine.

Reasonably mass and fairly organized anti-Ukrainian protest by pro-Russian forces in the East and South of Ukraine in March-April 2014 were inspired and supported by Russia. The Russian military-political leadership sent in advance officers of special services, saboteurs, professional provocateurs to Ukraine through the state border. Russian military personnel recruited to illegal armed units representatives of local criminals, part of corrupt law enforcement officers and

other law enforcement agencies, as well as unemployed youth and mercenaries from Russia and other foreign countries.

Available sources indicate that the leadership of the Russian Federation, taking an advantage of the compliance of the Ukrainian authorities, had a deliberate impact on the political situation in Ukraine prior to armed aggression. Pro-Russian political forces, the media, intelligence services, sabotage groups, etc. were involved to implement the aggressive plans against Ukraine. Indecisiveness of the Ukrainian political leadership throughout the period of independence, underestimation of the foreign policy of the neighbouring state, missed opportunities for reform, and the provision of reliable defences turned Ukraine into a convenient object of the Russian military aggression. The Euro-Maidan in Kyiv in 2013-2014 destroyed Russia's integration plans to push Ukraine into the Customs Union.

Implementing imperial plans to restore its role as a great world power, Russia has opposed Ukraine's European integration and waged the "hybrid war" against it. Having succeeded in the annexation of Crimea and attempting to further implement the plans for the dismemberment of Ukraine, Russia has created zones of destabilization, which were established primarily in the East of the state. Outside the Donbas, in other cities of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine, Russian arrivals received a rebuff. Thanks to the active opposition of the Armed Forces to the Russian aggression, the separatists failed to implement the "Crimean scenario". Ukraine has managed to stop Russian aggression and restrict the conflict area in the Donbas at a great price. However, the victory is still far away. Treacherous and insidious, public and secret actions to implement imperial ambitions regarding Ukraine, apparently, have been aimed to design and plan far more provoking acts [28]. Ukraine and its Armed Forces have to react asymmetrically to hybrid challenges. One of the steps to this is thorough analysis, taking into account the experience and lessons learned during the anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine.

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