

RUSSIA'S INFORMATION EXPANSION: UKRAINIAN FOOHOLD¹

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The three-year hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine that started in February 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and is still going on in Donbas is not a second-rate conflict on the periphery of Europe. This war poses a threat not only to Ukraine and its statehood, but also to the West, in particular, the unity of the EU, and Europe's political structure. Europeans turned out to be critically vulnerable to both, internal problems and Kremlin's "hybrid" power policy, the main component of which is powerful information expansion. Today, it is already not about just "fending off Western influence" in the post-Soviet space – "zone of Kremlin's privileged interests", it is about a wide-scale hybrid expansion on the EU territory with the goal of ultimate weakening/fragmenting (breaking apart) of the European Union, and reformatting the established European political system according to Russia's plan. All of this is happening against the background of total depreciation of global and regional security structures.

¹ This article references some materials from the analytical report by the Razumkov Centre "Russia's "Hybrid" War – Challenge and Threat for Europe". National Security and Defence, No. 9–10, 2016, p. 2–16. – http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD167-168_2016_ukr.pdf

The scale of Russia's influence got so alarming that on 1 November 2016 in the first newspaper interview given by an incumbent MI5 chief in the service's 107-year history, Andrew Parker said: "It [Russia] is using its whole range of state organs and powers to push its foreign policy abroad in increasingly aggressive ways – involving propaganda, espionage, subversion and cyber-attacks. Russia is at work across Europe and in the UK today".² Currently, Ukraine is a foothold where Kremlin is using its entire range of "hybrid" warfare – from military invasion of the territory of the country, sabotage, cyber-attacks, economic sanctions, inciting separatist sentiments – to large-scale information sabotage. Russia's aggression has caused the country vast suffering and loss – over 10 thousand Ukrainian citizens are dead, 23 thousand wounded, 1.8 million internally displaced persons, 44 thousand sq. meters of territory occupied (7%), 20% of industrial potential destroyed. The experience with and consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war cannot be forgotten as was the case with the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. Finding adequate and effective forms of response, developing a common policy of countering Russia's threats, information expansion in particular, is critically important for Ukraine, as well as the European countries.

RUSSIA'S INFORMATION AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE: CHARACTERISTICS, GOALS, METHODS

Recently, a separate field of scientific analytical studies by domestic and foreign experts had emerged, which looks at the goals, mechanisms, technologies and means of Russia's hybrid (in particular, information) aggression in

² The Guardian, 1 November 2016 – <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/31/andrew-parker-increasingly-aggressive-russia-a-growing-threat-to-uk-says-mi5-head>

Ukraine and Europe³. One of the latest studies (February 2017) is a monograph by the Ukrainian National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS) – “World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Front”.⁴

Along with military means of aggression (occupation and annexation of Crimea, military intervention in Donbas), Russia is using the entire available range of “hybrid” warfare – from informational propaganda expansion, economic, energy sector pressure and discrediting Kyiv in the global arena, to subversive activity, espionage and sabotage operations in Ukraine, inciting separatist sentiments in regions and massive cyber-attacks on electronic government networks.

Ukrainian experts believe that expansion in the information space is one of the most dangerous components of Russia’s “hybrid” war against Ukraine (Table “Assessment of threat coming...”).⁵

- 3 Marcel H. Van Herpen. Putin’s Wars. Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine: Undigested Lessons of the Past. – Kharkiv, 2015; Yu. Fedorov. “Hybrid” War A-La Russe. Centre for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies. – Kyiv, 2016; E. Magda. Hybrid Warfare: Survive and Win. – Kharkiv, 2015; Putin Hybression. Non-Military Aspects of New Generation Warfare. Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI”. – Kyiv, 2016; V. Horbulin, O. Vlasiuk, S. Kononenko. Ukraine and Russia: the Tenth Wave or the Chinese Wall. NISS, Kyiv, 2015. http://www.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/Gorbulin_Ukraine_08_05_pereverstka2.indd-2da77.pdf; Information Challenges of Hybrid War: Content, Channels, Countermeasures. NISS Monograph, Kyiv, 2016. – http://www.niss.gov.ua/public/File/2016_nauk_anal_rozrob/inform_vukluku.pdf; A. Arzhanovskiy. Discord between Ukraine and Russia: Dive Recovery Strategy. – Kharkiv, 2015; Yu. Felshtinski. S. Stanchev. Third World War: Battle for Ukraine. – Kyiv, 2015; J. Sherr. Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion. – Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2013; C.Vaissie. Les reseaux du kremlin en france. – Les Petit Matins. 2016; The Kremlin’s Trojan Horses. – – Atlantic Council – atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/The_Kremlins_Trojan_Horses_web_1116.pdf
- 4 “World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Front”, Kyiv, 2017. – http://www.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/HW_druk_fin+site_changed-6e437.pdf
- 5 Expert survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre from 17 to 28 November 2016. Total number of surveyed experts – 92, including representatives of central and regional government bodies, governmental and non-governmental research agencies, independent experts, media representatives.

Moscow has been exerting its aggressive media influence throughout the entire contemporary history of Russia-Ukraine relations. Experts at NISS believe that “...it is safe to assume that in reality Russia started its hybrid information aggression in 2007–2008. During this period, Russia was taking active steps to entrench in the Ukrainian information space... the topics and messages meant to prepare target audiences for the future military aggression, or encourage them to take the enemy’s side in the active phase of confrontation”.⁶We can assume that the active stage of the information war began in the fall of 2013, on the eve of the Vilnius summit, where parties were supposed to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. It was then that Kremlin started involving a powerful propaganda machine against Ukraine, which included TV and radio broadcasting, print and electronic media, cinema, theatre, book publishing, concerts, festivals and exhibitions, youth subcultures and social networks on the Internet, different public and religious organisations.⁷

Russian media industry is as effective as information warfare, a tool for targeted distribution of Russian ideology and the “Russian World” concept. J. Sherr believes that “Russian World is a world with its own discourse, logic and coherence. “Facts” that come out of it can be disputed and even refuted. But the world view of this environment cannot be broken down by facts...the divide between the “Russian World” and the order based on Helsinki Accords cannot be bridged with a “sensible compromise”.⁸ From October 2015 to July 2016, special working group at the European External Action Service (*East Strat-ComTask Force*) recorded 936 cases of deceptive information, fake messages of Kremlin’s propaganda presented for the citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states in Russian.⁹

An important target of Russia’s influence is the domestic political situation in Ukraine, as well as separate political and public institutions: the system of

6 “World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Front”. Kyiv, 2017, p. 261.

7 For more information, see: Analytical report of the Razumkov Centre “Prospects of Russia-Ukraine Relations. National Security and Defence, 2015, No. 89, p. 1820.

8 J. Sherr. Valdai-2016. Ukrainian Week, No. 44, 2016, p. 31.

9 EU experts discovered thousands of false stories by Russian media. – Deutsche Welle web-site, 26 July 2016. – <http://www.dw.com/uk>

government, local self-government, political parties and civil movements, religious organisations, and the media. The goal of Russia's information (psychological) warfare is the destruction of Ukrainian society from within – through discrediting the acting government, Ukraine's course for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, instigation of social discontent and separatist sentiment in the regions, promotion of the "Russian World" doctrine in Ukraine's cultural and information space, as well as appropriateness of protecting "fellow compatriots" on Ukrainian territory. The overall aim of this warfare is the disintegration and destruction of Ukraine's statehood.

The realisation of political goals of Kremlin's information aggression can be achieved through different scenarios. The first one includes driving the socio-political and socio-economic situation into the state of explosiveness and formation of a government loyal to Russia (controlled by it). This means creating sources of instability and conflicts in the society and the political circles, creating new lines of confrontation, atmosphere of uncertainty and fear (including, with the help of information sabotage).

The second scenario includes achieving the goals announced by Russia's leadership on numerous occasions – federalisation of Ukraine with the rights of regions to influence the country's foreign and security policy. This would allow stalling Ukraine's European integration and halting the country's course toward NATO accession, which, consequently, would cause resistance from the majority of the citizens and a large-scale civilian conflict. The means for the realisation of this scenario are built into the Minsk Agreements, where the main demand is for Ukraine to grant special status to regions controlled by "DNR/LNR". The course of events in Ukraine in 2014–2016 has demonstrated a combination of both scenarios.

Russia's propaganda methods include outright lies, distortion of facts, insinuation, slander, information sabotage, provocations, distortion of historical events, etc. (See table "Top Fakes news of Russia's Propaganda")

Top fake news¹⁰ of Russia's propaganda

Source	Content
Russian MFA	In its statement on 20 April 2014, Russian MFA reported that "Right Sector" militants attacked Sloviansk checkpoint. According to Russian journalists, "militants" were setting on fire the vehicles of pro-Russian citizens, leaving a special token at the crime scene – the red-and-black business card of Dmytro Yarosh.
Channel One	According to Channel One, May 2014 elections in Ukraine resulted in the victory of the "Right Sector" leader D. Yarosh, who got 37.13% of votes. As evidence, they demonstrated a screenshot of the web-site that looked similar to the CEC web-site.
Channel One	On 12 July 2014, Channel One showed a news piece, in which H. Pyshniak (a "mother and a wife of a rebel from Western Ukraine") told a story about a three-year-old boy who was crucified on the newsboard in Sloviansk, and his mother, who also suffered abuse.
NTV	On 2 November 2014, NTV channel showed a video piece, which told a story of "Ukrainian army men beating up the parents of a boy, drugging him afterwards and sending him off to scout out pro-Russian fighters' checkpoint positions".
"Russia 1"	On 15 December 2014, TV channel told a story about teachers in Zaporizhzhia, who teach children to feed chickadees (yellow-and-blue, symbolising Ukraine) and to kill bullfinches (symbolising Russia).
"Rossiyskaya Gazeta"	In the interview on 8 September 2015, Director of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Alexander Bastrykin stated that A. Yatseniuk, being a member of punitive squads "Argo" and "Viking", took part in the torture and execution of captive Russian soldiers in January 1995 in Grozny and was awarded the "Honour of the Nation" medal by D. Dudayev.
RIA News	On 26 April 2016, the agency spread the information about the report by Russian Prosecutor General Yu. Chaika to the Federation Council, in which he claimed that supporters of the "Right Sector" were preparing a coup d'etat in Russia.

The latest strong example of public distortion of facts, creating fake arguments were Russia's claims at the International Court of Justice in Hague hearing (7 March 2017). In response to Ukraine's accusations that Russia supplies DNR/LNR with weapons, Russian representative Ilya Rogachev said that "the

¹⁰ Fake – "false, forged, unreal", forged photographs, videos, news, social network profiles, fake or edited with special technologies and computer software. Presented as truthful information.

main source of rebels' weapons is Soviet-era stocks on the territory of Ukraine. A part of these stockpiles was abandoned in Donbas mines... most of them – abandoned by the withdrawing Ukrainian Army”.¹¹ However, this “argument” hardly looks convincing in the context of the four-year full-scale war in Donbas with daily shelling and military operations. Ukraine's Armed Forces are faced with a regular army, which is equal to some European countries' armies by its size and equipment.

Hostile anti-Ukrainian propaganda over the three years of information aggression has formed a persistent false image of the neighbour state. For a common Russian citizen, Ukraine is a country, where: a) an anti-constitutional coup took place supported by the West, and the “Banderites” took over, who started a genocide against Russian-speaking population and a fratricidal civil war; (b) Russophobic Kyiv government is conducting a counterinsurgency operation against Donbas rebels; (c) Russia's enemies are dragging Ukraine into the EU and NATO against the will of its people; (d) Ukraine is the “state that did not happen” and without Russia it will degenerate and dissolve.

Against the backdrop of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's military expansion in Donbas, the passage in the new Concept of the Foreign Policy of the RF with respect to Ukraine (approved by V. Putin on 30 November 2016) serves as an illustrative example of unprecedented cynicism and hypocrisy – “Russia is interested in the development of the entire range of political, economic, cultural and spiritual ties with Ukraine, based on mutual respect... Russia will make the necessary efforts for political and diplomatic resolution of the internal conflict in Ukraine”.¹²

11 RT television channel web-site – russian.rt.com/ussr/article/365905-ukraina-isk-gaaga-rossiya?utm_source=smi2

12 See: Web-site of the MFA of the RF – http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248

RUSSIA'S CYBER-EXPANSION

Aggression in cyberspace constitutes an extremely dangerous component of Russia's “hybrid” war against Ukraine. In particular, this includes massive attacks on government and state companies' web-sites, war on social networks launched by Russian “troll factories”, and cyberspying. Russia has numerous hacker groups active, such as Sandworm, “Cyber-Berkut”, “Sprut” (from the “DNR” territory), among many others. Clearly, it is Russian intelligence services that are behind the effort and control their operations. (To counter Russian cyber-expansion, in 2014, Ukrainian volunteers organised the “Ukrainian cyber-troops” group. Also, there is a “**cyber-alliance**” active (an alliance of **FalconsFlame, Trinity, “Ruh8” and “CyberHunta”** groups).

Russia's “hybrid” war in cyberspace is growing in strength. CERT-UA group (Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine) of the State Service of Special Communications has recorded 216 external cyber-attacks in 2014 (more than half of them – against government institutions).¹³ In 2015, the number of attacks increased 1.5-fold. In the past three years, pro-Russian hackers had carried out massive attacks on government web-sites and web-pages of state institutions, e.g. the web-sites of Presidential Administration, Cabinet of Ministers, State Service of Special Communications. In addition, a number of attacks were waged against the web-sites of regional state administrations, where hackers uploaded anti-Ukrainian content and Russian symbols.¹⁴

Perhaps the most dangerous cyber-sabotage took place on 23 December 2015, when a massive attack was launched on the traffic controller of company Ukrenergo and 6 other energy companies, which caused a power outage in 103 cities and villages in the West of Ukraine (carried out with the help of a malware attack, known as BlackEnergy). US experts established that the massive sabotage was launched by the Russian Federation. What is more, already in January

13 At State Service of Special Communications there is also another similar unit – Centre for Antivirus Information Protection.

14 Specifically, such attacks have been executed on the web-sites of Ternopil, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zaporizhzhia and other oblast state administrations.

2016, IT infrastructure of Boryspil airport suffered an attack. On 27 January 2016, at the meeting of NSDC of Ukraine, dedicated to creating a state cyber-defence system, the President said: “Cyberspace has now turned into another confrontation scene and battle field for the independence of the state... attempts to use cyber-attacks for attaining political goals is just another small part of what Ukraine has already been facing from the very beginning of Russian aggression”.¹⁵

On 15 March 2016, President signed the Decree that brought into force the NSDC decision “On Cyber-Security Strategy of Ukraine”.¹⁶ According to this document, the National Centre for Cyber-Security was created as part of NSDC. Despite the fact that Ukraine’s security agencies had created special units for electronic security (including, the cyber-police department established at the MIA in 2015), the country was still unprepared for the Internet war.

The recent major online sabotage against the Ukrainian financial and banking sector was further evidence of the magnitude of Russia’s cyber-war against Ukraine. On 6 December 2016, a hacker attack has put out of commission the web-sites of State Treasury, Ministry of Finance and Pension Fund. Later, these attacks continued against the Ukrainian Railways and Ministry of Defence web-sites. According to Mr. Turchynov, National Security and Defence Council Secretary “These attacks were pre-planned and coordinated from a single centre located in the Russian Federation”.¹⁷

Russian aggression in the Internet domain has caused serious concerns among intelligence services of several countries around the world. US intelligence agencies accused senior Russian officials of organising cyber-attacks during the

15 President: A thorough National Cyber-Security system must be put in place immediately. – The official web-site of the President of Ukraine, 27 January 2016, <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-maye-buti-negajno-vidpracovana-nacionalna-sistema-36667>.

16 Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the Decision of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council dated 27 January 2016 “On Cyber-Security Strategy of Ukraine” No.96 dated 15 March 2016.

17 NSDC says that Russians are behind the latest cyber-attacks. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 14 December 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/12/14/7129820>.

election campaign in the USA. Representatives of intelligence services in Germany, Czech Republic and other European countries are talking about the threat of Russian interference. Obviously, the intensity and the scale of Russian Internet expansion against Ukraine will be increasing. Cyberattacks are becoming one of the main components of Kremlin’s “hybrid” war against Ukraine.

THE DONBAS ANOMALY

In the three years of war, Russia managed to create militarised pseudo-state puppet formations DNR/LNR with the system of “government institutions” in Donbas – just in DNR, there are 20 “ministries”, as well as different “public councils”, “councils of ministers”, “prosecutor’s offices”, “supreme courts”, etc. There is a grotesque “nano-Russia” run by the militants, who are controlled by Russian intelligence. **In this anomalous area, a political-ideological and socio-cultural reality hostile to Ukraine had been established.**

Elite special media forces were formed in the “republics” consisting of: 7 TV channels (First Republican, “Union”, “Oplot”, “Novorossia”, etc.), along with 4 radio stations and 13 republican newspapers. This machinery is controlled by the Ministry of Propaganda with a staff of 120 (For example, in 2015, Ukrainian Ministry of Information Policy had 29 employees). However, local media outlets serve just as a supplement for the Russian media, and DNR/LNR are a base and training grounds for the information war. This area has created its own system of “patriotic” education of youth based on Russian methods, which tells the story of militants’ “heroic deeds”. In particular, according to the Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine’s Defence Ministry, in early 2017, occupation “authorities” intensified propaganda in secondary schools – in “civics classes” pupils are taught the idea of impossibility of further co-existence with Ukraine, including due to “intensification of Ukrainian terror” in the “republics”.¹⁸

18 Pupils in ORDLO are taught about “Givi the Hero”. Ukrayinska Pravda (Ukrainian Truth), 15 February 2017. – <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/02/15/7135445/>

The “republics” are also writing their “separate” history. For example, a Museum of Heroic Protection of DNR was created in Horlivka lyceum No.14, the first section of which is dedicated to “acts of atrocity” committed by the Ukrainian army. In DNR, Ukrainian public organisations and parties are banned, namely the parliamentary parties “Svoboda”, Radical Party, “People’s Front”. Numerous examples like this make up today’s socio-cultural reality in DNR/LNR. The higher education system in this area is completely tied to Russia – from specially allocated spots in Russian universities, to receiving Russian standardized certificates at local institutes. The occupied territories are undergoing open and total Russification. In the “republics”, Russian ruble is the mandatory currency used for settlements and payments.

The orientation towards Russia is very clear. Militants’ leaders are not planning to integrate with Ukraine. The head of DNR Zakharchenko, in September 2015, in his “Address to DNR citizens” stated that they are not going back to Ukraine. In May 2016, during conference calls with Odesa and Kharkiv residents, he encouraged them to disintegrate Ukraine, on 12 July 2016 stating in his address: “Each of us is ready to defend the right to be a part of the “Russian world” to the end”.¹⁹ Russia has essentially created a regular army in “LNR” and “DNR”, the backbone of which consists of Russian special forces, officers and generals, which are supplied with Russian equipment and weapons, and which operate under the command of the Russian Ministry of Defence.²⁰ According to the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, as of late December 2016 – early January 2017, “DNR/LNR army” had 40 thousand soldiers. Out of them – 5 thousand were regular Russian troops. The militants had approximately 600 tanks, 1300 IFV, 860 artillery systems, 300 multiple rocket launchers.²¹ Situation in the “republics” is under total control of Russian special forces. Inspection visits to

19 DNR Donetsk News Agency – <http://dan-news.info/official/obrashhenie-glavy-dnr-po-sluchayu-prazdnovaniya-dnya-rossii.html>

20 See: K. Mashovets “Military Component of Russia’s Aggression”. National Security and Defence, No. 9–10, 2016, p. 81–84. – http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD167-168_2016_eng.pdf

21 Poltorak revealed the size of Russian contingent. – UNIAN, 3 January 2017. – <http://www.unian.net/war/1709736-poltorak-raskryil-chislennost-rossiyskoy-voennoy-gruppirovki-i-tehniki-rf-na-donbasse.html>

Donetsk by Russia’s General Staff commissions have become a regular practice, as well as joint planning of military operations with participation of Federal Security Service and local militants. Ukrainian sources report that in February 2017, there was an inspection of the 1st DNR Army Corps by an inspection group from Territorial Forces Centre of Southern Military District of Russian Armed Forces.²²

According to western sources,²³ “DNR/LNR’s” socio-economic sector is administered by Russian government through an interdepartmental commission (6 working groups created by five Russian ministries); sectors that are being controlled include finance, taxes, infrastructure, transport, energy, etc.²⁴ Psychological consequences of Russia’s informational brainwashing that professionally develops hatred of the “Kyiv junta”, “Ukrainian fascists” and everything Ukrainian in general, are colossal in scale and critical in influence.

“Hybrid” annexation of Donbas created “DNR/LNR” – a militarised zone hostile and foreign to Ukraine, soaked with “Russian World” ideology, filled with weapons, covered with a vast network of agents and Russian special services residents, controlled by the army of militants with Russian officers in the lead. That being said, for many militants a reverse change to peaceful “miners and tractor drivers” is already impossible.

We can predict the consequences of conducting “express elections” in Donbas and integrating DNR/LNR into Ukraine in their current form (as insisted by the Russian side). The two army corps of DNR/LNR militants would become “people’s police”, de facto subordinate to Kremlin, and after the withdrawal of Ukrainian troops and removal of checkpoints, they would spread across entire Ukraine, together with the network of sabotage and reconnaissance groups,

22 Russians put Zakharchenko “in his place”. – Segodnya, 24 February 2017. – <http://www.segodnya.ua/regions/donetsk/rossiyane-postavili-zaharchenko-na-mesto-872722.html>

23 Putin’s shadow government for Donbas exposed. Bild, 29. 03. 2016 – <http://m.bild.de/politik/ausland/ukraine-konflikt/donbass-shadow-government-45102202.bildMobile.html>

24 This shadow government includes Vice Prime Minister D. Kozak, Deputy Minister of Economic Development S. Nazarov, Deputy Minister of Finance L. Hornin. On the part of Kremlin, “Donbas project” is headed by Russian President’s advisor V. Surkov.

agents of FSB secret police, GRU military intelligence, SVR external intelligence, paramilitary formations. Then, massive contamination of the entire country, a full-scale violent conflict and disintegration of the country with unpredictable consequences would become a reality. This would create a huge crisis area (the size of Spain), a colossal migration volcano right in the middle of Europe, instead of the terrorist enclave in the form of DNR/LNR, currently isolated by the Ukrainian army. Against this background, the Syrian conflict would look like a local misunderstanding.

Putin's decree as of 18 February 2017 on recognising passports and other documents originating from DNR/LNR, Zakharchenko's "decree" establishing the "state border" of DNR with Ukraine from 27 February, as well as DNR/LNR militants' takeover of 40 large Ukrainian industrial enterprises on the territory of these "republics" – all of these are pushing Donbas to the "point of no return". Essentially, these are steps towards the enactment of "Ossetia-Abkhazia scenario" tested by Russia after the war with Georgia, when in August 2008 Russia recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in September, signed agreements on "Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" with them.

For Kyiv, Russia's plan of "constitutional implantation" of puppet DNR/LNR into Ukraine is completely unacceptable, while for Kremlin, Ukraine's settlement plan is unacceptable. At this point, there are no plans, recipes, or mechanisms for comprehensive resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. So we need to talk about bringing down tensions, preventing further escalation of aggression.

In this situation, the best possible solution is "freezing" the conflict, i.e. taking the first three provisions of the Minsk Agreements (ceasefire, disengagement of troops, control) and signing a separate corresponding memorandum in the Normandy format. The goal should be to stop the fighting, disengage the parties, and create a 400-kilometre buffer zone with international control. This should be followed by political dialogue (in other areas with frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space, such dialogue has been going on for quarter of century). Certainly, "freezing" of the conflict is not a solution, but it is the least of the evils compared to a "smouldering" conflict or the threat of its escalation.

UKRAINE ON THE INFORMATION FRONT: VULNERABILITIES AND PRIORITIES

Ukraine proved to be wholly unprepared for a full-scale information war. Today, the policy of reacting to Russian media expansion is largely limited to maximum possible reduction of Russian presence in the national information space, strengthening counter-propaganda in the Ukrainian media and creating legislative framework for ensuring the dominant position of Ukrainian language content on national media. However, so far, the Ukrainian side does not measure up to the enemy in the long-standing informational confrontation with Russia's state propaganda machine.

Discussing the characteristics of Russia's information war against Ukraine, we would like to note that Ukraine has been (and largely still is) extremely vulnerable to Kremlin's media aggression. In particular, this means that: a) Russia has had the absolute advantage over Ukraine's information space and electronic/print media, as well as book publishing, as the media potential of the countries is disparate; b) the presence of the "fifth column" in the Ukrainian media system, government bodies, public associations, and political parties proved a critically important factor; c) in its information expansion, Russia has been actively using pro-Russian sentiments of the large segment of Ukraine's population in Eastern regions; d) media aggression has made use of favourable conditions such as absence of the language barrier, mental similarity of both countries' citizens, common history, certain proximity of national cultures, a huge network of family contacts, etc. Ukraine has adopted some safety measures to counter Russia's information expansion. Namely, in December 2014 establishing the Ministry of Information Policy, and later, in October 2015 launching the International Broadcasting Multimedia Platform of Ukraine. In 2015–2016, Ukraine introduced a package of sanctions against Russian media, journalists, artists, publishing houses, etc. Ukrainian Government cancelled the intergovernmental agreement with Russia on cooperation in the field of television and radio broadcasting in 2014–2016. National Radio and TV Council banned retransmission of 78 Russian TV channels. Ukrainian State Film Agency banned over 500 Russian films and TV series from being aired on television or screened in cinemas.

In October 2016, International Information Consortium “Bastion” was established under the auspices of NSDC of Ukraine to counter Russia’s informational influence.²⁵ At the same time, broadcasting is being gradually restored on the occupied territories of Donbas.

Another step in countering Russia’s information aggression is the Decree of the President of Ukraine as of 25 February 2017, which approves the new “Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine”.²⁶ The document states: “Russia is using the newest information technologies for influencing people’s minds in Ukraine, aiming to inflame national and religious tensions, spread propaganda advocating aggressive war, to violently change the constitutional order or violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state”.²⁷ The goal of the document is “countering Russia’s destructive influence in the context of the hybrid war started by it”.

Nevertheless, Ukraine’s countermeasures are largely situational, sector-specific and are far from fully matching the scale of Russian expansion. Clearly, measures that ban Russian presence in the Ukrainian media space have to go hand in hand with active efforts to create high-quality competitive national information product.

It is also clear that the expenditures needed to counter Russian information aggression and strengthen national media industry must be comparable to the expenses in the defence sector. At the same time, deployment of effective resistance that would cover the entire humanitarian and socio-cultural spectrum is hindered by the absence of state humanitarian policy, and thus – com-

25 Oleksandr Turchynov called for establishing an information army that will give a proper response to Russia’s propaganda. Web-site of the NSDC of Ukraine, 28 October 2016. – <http://www.rnbo.gov.ua/news/2622.html>

26 See: Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 47 dated 25 February 2017. “On the Decision of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council as of 29 December 2016 “On Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine”. – Web-site of the President of Ukraine – <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/472017-21374>

27 Ibid.

prehensive ideological support of information activities.²⁸ It is clear that Russia (at least until its current political regime remains in power) will continue its information aggression against Ukraine both, within its own and in Ukrainian information space, as well as on the international level. It is also clear that even in the event of “freezing” the Donbas conflict, we are to expect more active engagement of Russia’s main warfare – informational. Moreover, this media expansion will be getting stronger with Ukraine’s progress towards EU and NATO.

CONSEQUENCES OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION: THE MENTAL ASPECT

Analysis of regular sociological studies conducted by the Razumkov Centre from 2000 to 2016 allows to state that Kremlin’s information aggression has ruined interpersonal contacts between Russians and Ukrainians, has created a deep (generations-long) divide of alienation, hostility, and mistrust between the two nations. Ukrainian citizens have suffered a colossal trauma experience from the “brotherly” country. The Russia-Ukraine war that started in 2014 and is still going on has drastically changed Ukrainians’ attitudes and assessments of relations with Russia, its state institutions, Kremlin’s policy towards Ukraine, the nature and prospects of Kyiv-Moscow contacts.²⁹

First. Obviously, with the start of Russian aggression, the opinions with respect to Kyiv-Moscow relations have changed drastically. While in April 2012, 65% of citizens said that Russia-Ukraine relations were unstable, 15% – bad and 14% – good, in November 2016, 82% of respondents viewed the Russia-Ukraine relations as hostile, or bad, only 2% – as good. In 2014–2016, a stable majority (over 60%) of Ukrainians stated that relations between the two nations deteriorated.

28 See: Analytical report of the Razumkov Centre “Prospects of Russia-Ukraine Relations. National Security and Defence, 2015, No. 89, p. 19.

29 Similar processes are also corroborated in the long-term research carried out by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and Russian Levada-Center. – <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr & cat=r eports & id=680 & page=1>

The largest percentage – 83% was recorded in October 2014, as at that time respondents were comparing these relations with the end of 2013, – i.e. the situation before the start of the conflict in Donbas. 57% of respondents felt there was alienation between the citizens of Russia and Ukraine.

Second. The attitude towards state institutions of the Russian Federation definitely turned negative. When for instance in November 2009, 59% of Ukrainian citizens had positive attitude to Putin, and in the period from 2014 to 2016, the attitude to the Russian President was consistently negative (between 71% and 74%). Similarly negative was the perception to other state institutions – Russian State Duma and Government – at 70%. The sentiment toward Russian citizens was more reserved. However, in November 2016, the share of Ukrainians with positive attitude to Russians decreased from 45% to 29% compared to April 2014. At the same time, the level of negative attitude did not increase greatly – from 17% to 21%, while the number of those with neutral attitude grew – from 33% to 39%.

Third. Citizens are more pessimistic with respect to prospects of Russia-Ukraine relations. In 2014, after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the share of respondents hoping for improvement in relations between Russia and Ukraine dropped, while the number of those who think that these relations will keep deteriorating significantly rose. (While in April 2012, 8% of respondents supported this point of view, in November 2016, it was 35%).

Fourth. In the years of war, people's attitudes with regard to what Ukraine's policy should be towards Russia changed substantially. In 2002–2012, a stable majority of respondents supported enhancing of cooperation with Russia. From 2014 on, the views had changed dramatically – most frequently, people noted the need for Ukraine to distance itself from the Russian Federation: either by reducing cooperation and Russia's influence on Ukraine, or by ceasing cooperation with Moscow.

Fifth. Russian aggression influenced the geopolitical affiliation of Ukrainian citizens. On the one hand, more Ukrainians started to support EU integration.

While in December 2013, EU accession was supported by 46%, and joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – by 36%, in December 2016, already 57% supported EU accession, and only 11% – EEU. Attitude to Euro-Atlantic integration changed as well. In the pre-war period, NATO membership was supported by about 17–20% of the population, while in December 2016, surveys showed that 62% of Ukrainian citizens would take part in the hypothetical referendum on NATO membership, and 72% of them would vote in favour.

This is obviously neither an isolated rise of emotion, nor a situational fluctuation of public sentiment – Russian aggression has caused deep and lasting changes in Ukrainian citizens' attitudes and views. Therefore, there are reasons to say that this “mental component” of the Russia-Ukraine conflict will be determining the character, climate, and specifics of Kyiv-Moscow relations for a long time to come.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently, there are no reasons to believe in the reality of any effective plans for comprehensive resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which would be long-term and fundamental, and include all areas of bilateral relations (annexation of Crimea is de facto a “set aside issue”, while the situation in Donbas exhibits all signs of a “frozen conflict”).

Out of the entire range of possible interstate relations (excluding the war as it is), Russia's three-year “hybrid” war against Ukraine has made the only format of co-existence with Russia possible for a long period of time – limited, forced, confrontational, cold – depending on the unfolding of the situation. Russian ongoing aggression causes further curtailing of contacts in all areas without exception. The tendency to reduction of trade tendency will continue, as well as energy confrontation; restrictive measures in information, social and cultural fields will be expanded, there will be even less mutual visits and contacts between people. Confrontation in international courts will grow more intense. Information expansion will remain the key component of Russia's “hybrid” war

against Ukraine. In recent years, Ukraine has accumulated considerable experience in opposing the media pressure from the neighbouring state, has acquired certain immunity from Kremlin's massive propaganda, and implemented a number of countermeasures. However, due to the many historical, socio-cultural, financial and economic reasons, Ukraine remains vulnerable to Russian information influence. The media war will continue and Kyiv should not expect any positive changes on the information front in the mid-term perspective. Moreover, there is a real risk of conflict escalation, including in cyberspace. And this threat is likely to intensify as Ukraine moves forward with its European and Euro-Atlantic integration plans.

On the one hand, Ukraine's experience is rather helpful for Western countries feeling the threat of Russia's information aggression. On the other, – Ukraine, which is essentially a training ground and foothold of Russia's media war, needs support and assistance of its Western partners. In particular, it is critically important for Ukraine to become a part of the system of centres for countering hybrid threats that is being created in Europe, to ensure effective cooperation of Ukrainian state agencies tasked with cyber protection with specialised NATO and EU centres and agencies, to expand the "cyber component" of Annual National Programmes of NATO-Ukraine Cooperation.

Problematic is also the lack of adequate assessment of the goals, means and scale of Kremlin's information expansion by the European political class, and the overall lack of public awareness as to the nature and ideology of Putin's regime. There is clear substance to the view that Europe, while being in "a post-modern state of wishful thinking", has "demobilised and disarmed itself, despite clear signs that Russia, the successor to the Soviet Union, is becoming extremely nationalist and revanchist".³⁰

30 Marcel H. Van Herpen. *Putin's Wars. Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine: Undigested Lessons of the Past.* – Kharkiv, 2015. p. 4

It is fundamentally important to draw adequate conclusions from the long-term "hybrid" war between Russia and Ukraine. This is because in the mid-term perspective, both, Ukraine and the Western states will have to co-exist with Putin's Russia – an authoritarian state with elements of cult of personality, totalitarian domestic and aggressive foreign policy, and disdain for international rules and regulations. Realising this is essential to the West's self-identification process in the new "hybrid" world.