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## RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT. FIRST STAGE: PROPAGANDA WAR

The aim of the paper is to explore the evolution of the Russian aims and the instruments of influence in Ukraine during 2013–2014. The works of Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson about the special aspects of the Russian power were used as the theoretical foundation of this paper. The analysis of Russian and Ukrainian media proves that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has a combined character therefore it might become even the longest frozen conflict in the post-communist world.

**Key words:** Russian-Ukrainian conflict, propaganda, ideology, international relations.

The aim of the paper is to explore the evolution of the Russian aims and the instruments of influence in Ukraine during 2013–2014. The works of Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson about the special aspects of the Russian power were used as the theoretical foundation of this paper.

Popescu and Wilson compared the EU and Russian politics. Russian soft power is built on bedrock of historical and cultural affinity — the presence of Russian minorities in neighbourhood countries, the Russian language, post-Soviet nostalgia and the strength of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The turning point came with the Orange revolution in 2004, when Russia's clumsy tactics of interference in support for Viktor Yanukovich backfired, triggering a serious Russian tactical rethink. Drawing its lessons from the central role played by civil society groups and NGOs in the Orange revolution, Russia began developing a rival «counter-revolutionary» ideology, supporting «its» NGOs, using «its» web technologies, and exporting its own brands of political and economic influence. Gleb Pavlovsky describes the Orange revolution as «a very useful catastrophe for Russia. We learnt a lot.» [1, p. 29].

Russia's strategy emphasises the building of alliances with all neighbourhood states irrespective of their political regimes. While it readily makes use of its black arts of political manipulation to serve its own foreign policy interests, it is also happy to make these techniques available for export to friendly regimes. Russia's concept of «sovereign democracy» (a political model that emphasises the need for states to follow «national paths» to democracy, free from foreign intervention) has found echoes throughout the neighbourhood [1, p. 35].

Equally important has been Russia's interference in regional politics. This has often come in the form of so-called «political technology»: during the

2004 Ukrainian elections, for example, the Russians seconded to the Yanukovych campaign made use of a range of political shenanigans: invented parties, agents provocateurs, voter fraud and ultimately interference with the vote count. But Russia has also shown itself willing to intervene at the highest level to support favoured candidates. Such support for friendly regimes in the neighbourhood is a traditional Russian tactic. But today it is complemented by a new-found appreciation for the importance of NGOs — a lesson the Kremlin learned after the Orange revolution. Organisations like the Institute of CIS Countries and Russian World have channelled funding to Russia-friendly parties and NGOs in the region, often covertly [1, p. 36].

Russia maintains media influence in the neighbourhood through a variety of means: local joint ventures, rebranding media of Russian origin as «local» (the Russian newspapers «Argumenty i Fakty» and «Komsomolskaya Pravda» have editions «in Belarus» and «in Ukraine»), and making use of cable and the internet. The Russian media perform a double function in the region. They are active players in domestic politics, and more often than not support particular candidates during elections. But they also help shape the way citizens in neighbourhood countries see international events [1, p. 37–38].

Russia claims that it has a responsibility to ensure the security of Russian citizens, ethnic Russians and even mere Russian-speakers in its «near abroad». But the war in Georgia led to allegations that Russia deliberately handed out passports to foreign nationals in order to create or bolster minorities it could then claim the right to protect (estimates for Crimea range from 2,000 to 100,000, and one source counts 543,000 in Ukraine as a whole) [1, p. 42].

Oleksiy Volovych commented Russian point: «The official Moscow perceives independence of Ukraine as something abnormal and temporary. At the meeting in Sochi after the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, V. Putin said to the US President George W. Bush, «You know, George, Ukraine — is not even a state! What is Ukraine? Part of it territory is Eastern Europe, and a part, and big enough, we gave!» [2].

In July 2009, at a meeting of the State Duma of Russia, during the discussion of the theme of the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, Deputy S. Bagdasarov said, «The next presidential elections in 2010 in Ukraine — will be not just the next elections of the president, they will be our Battle of Poltava-2, only not a military» [3]. At this time 80 % of Russians support Putin's policy towards Ukraine.

Lots of victories have been won through the use of «soft power». Despite the Orange Revolution Putin in 2009 did manage to seat a Russian puppet Yanukovych. In February 2014 Kremlin began to use the whole arsenal of coercion designed to further destabilizing the situation in Ukraine. First of all it was announced that in Ukraine took place allegedly unconstitutional armed seizure of power, although the elected in October 2012 Verkhovna Rada remained in its full composition. Russia has not recognized the new A. Yatsenyuk's government.

25 of May 2014 an experienced politician P. Poroshenko was elected as the Ukrainian President. All pro-Russian presidential candidates taken together

did not get even 3 % of the vote. Ukrainian leaders are devoted supporters of European integration. Putin could not accept the loss of Ukraine and began to act in accordance with the previously prepared plan. FSB agents organized separatist movements in Trans-Carpathia, the Crimea and in the South-East of Ukraine. Why did Moscow decide to go for it? Because it understood that if nothing changed within the system of international relations, it would be slowly losing its positions and further politics would become senseless.

First the Crimea was annexed. The Crimean referendum was rigged. According to official information, 123 % of Sevastopol citizens voted for joining Russia [4]. The referendum results were recognized only by several developing countries that have close ties with Russia. Given all the abovementioned, claims on legality of the annexation of Crimea have nothing to do with international law. However, it was reported in Russia that the decision to join Russia was supported by more than 97 % of voters.

Russian Duma has been repeatedly raising the question about the return of Crimea to Russia. In late October 2014 Vladimir Putin emphasized that Russia was ready to stand up to the United States which, in his view, was crushing the global order and pushing humanity to the brink of war. Referring to the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Putin explained that it had been caused by the haste with which the European Union pushed for association with Ukraine. «That was unacceptable for Russia, because it infringed on its interests in a neighbouring state». Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, interprets the events in eastern Ukraine as «next steps in the plan to disintegrate the Soviet Union and Russia» [5, p. 4].

In this context, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict over «Novorossiya» («New Russia») are just other incidents in Russia's information war on the West. This is primarily a «war» of narratives and interpretations. One's own interpretation is being multiplied in all possible ways, while the «foreign» interpretation is being pushed to the margins where it poses no threat. The aim is to neutralise the enemy, support the allies and win over the undecided ones [5, p. 6]. This war did not start with the Euro-Maidan in December 2013. It started when Russia entered the path of authoritarianism under Putin. The Russian doctrinaires argue that by fighting liberal globalisation, Russia is primarily confronting anarchism («the global Maidan», the negation of all hierarchic rules), and defending the sovereignty of the nation state and the right of nations to choose their own values [5, p. 10].

The proponents of «Eurasianism» claim that there exists a separate civilization and historical community in the territory corresponding to the area of the former Russian Empire. They ascribe a cultural meaning to the Russian-speaking community (so-called Russian world). The concept of «nation» is expanded to include areas where the Russian language and culture are dominant. This ideology has become an instrument for managing the conflicts in the post-Soviet area (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, and Novorossiya).

Even after annexation of Crimea the problem of Russian-speaking is still dangerous for the stability of Ukraine, because they are actively supported

by Russian Federation. At the beginning of the «people's uprising» in the Donbas, separatists reached weighty political success. Police and Security Service in Donetsk and Lugansk regions almost entirely went over to the side of separatists. Thanks to the support of Communists and «Regionals» «People's Republic of Donetsk» and «People's Republic of Lugansk» were declared, and May 11 was held a «referendum» on their independence. Separatists' leaders had reached an agreement to unite these «republics» into a federal state «Novorossiya».

The notion of «Novorossiya» denotes the confederation of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Putin first called this part of Ukraine «Novorossiya» on 17 March, 2014 after the annexation of Crimea, and on 11 September he visited the church in Moscow to «light candles for those fallen in the fight for Novorossiya».

In the Russian empire, the term «Novorossiya» was used for entity created by Catherine II. It comprised parts of present-day Ukraine: the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Mikolaiv, Kherson and Odessa Regions. Today «Novorossiya» with its news agencies, intelligence services, parliament, etc., is an example of a pseudo-reality created by Russia as it plays with the imperial heritage, just as the notion of the Russian world refers back to such historical notions as Pax Romana. These are the kind of ideas that serve to create new myths and new realities [5, p. 11]. New news agencies and news portals devoted to separate countries are also emerging, e.g. [pl.novorossia.today](http://pl.novorossia.today). The Crimean television has recently joined this trend with a tab that says its purpose is to show events from the point of view of the history of Russia and Crimea and the global rivalry between the Russian world and the Western world [5, p. 12].

The policy of concessions denotes that Russia has the right to defend its interests and soft power. However, the Russian and the Western soft power differ fundamentally. Russian soft power, civil society, expert networks or analytic schools by definition are not equivalent or similar institutions as those in the West. They serve different functions, namely propaganda. The vectors Russia's soft power, including the Russian-speaking minority organisations, have organised the referendum in Crimea, and have been destabilising the eastern regions of Ukraine [5, p. 16].

Nowadays to consider everyone who speaks Russian to be pro-Russian is a big delusion. It was easy to meet Russian-speaking Ukrainian patriots during the Euro-Maidan. Moreover, according to the results of the IRI survey in 2014, no less than 79 % of Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine oppose the decision of Russian Federation to send its army to protect Russian speaking citizens of Ukraine. In fact, total majority of people in the Russian-speaking South and East definitely do not support this decision [6].

Russia has managed to transform the real Ukrainian-Russian conflict and military intervention into a virtual conflict between Russia and the West. Russia has now revealed its geopolitical ambitions and has gone ahead towards imposing its way of thinking in terms of border between the Russian world civilisation and the West. This has been the source of many difficulties for

Russia's relations with the West. The West has not been able to formulate a good response to Russia's policies, or find a way to support Ukraine.

Through its anti-Ukrainian plans the Kremlin seeks to make a split between certain European countries as well as between the EU and the USA. The main instruments of this policy are the use of the «energy weapon» and economic ties, bribing officials and media in European countries, conducting information-psychological war. Putin tries to position the BRICS group countries as an anti-American interstate association.

The current conflict opens a new page in international relations. Putin's escalation of the conflict is ideologically based on the concept of Novorossiya, and it is essentially very different from, for example, the aggression against Georgia in 2008. As Kadri Liik and Andrew Wilson wrote, then Russia drew the red line which the EU or the US integration projects could not cross, now Russia has decisively crossed the red lines laid down by the West»[7].

The situation after the 2008 conflict in Georgia allows Russia to assume that after the end of the conflict in Ukraine, relations with the West will eventually revert back to the business as usual situation. Russia hopes to repeat this scenario again. It is important to emphasize that the business as usual concept includes not only normalization of economic relations, lifting of sanctions, and renewal of the political dialogue, but also recognition of Russia as a veto holder in the security architecture of Europe.

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**РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ КОНФЛІКТ. ПЕРША СТАДІЯ:  
ПРОПАГАНДИСТСЬКА ВІЙНА**

**Резюме**

Метою статті є виявлення еволюції російських цілей та інструментів впливу на Україну протягом 2013–2014 рр. Праці Ніку Попеску та Ендрю Уілсона щодо особливостей російської сили використані як теоретична база статті. Аналіз російських та українських медій доводить, що російсько-український конфлікт носить комбінований характер, тому може стати найдовшим із заморожених конфліктів у посткомуністичному світі.

**Ключові слова:** російсько-український конфлікт, пропаганда, ідеологія, міжнародні відносини.

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**Резюме**

Целью статьи является выявление эволюции российских целей и инструментов влияния на Украину на протяжении 2013–2014 гг. Работы Нику Попеску и Эндрю Уилсона об особенностях российской силы использованы в качестве теоретической базы статьи. Анализ российских и украинских медийных источников доказывает, что российско-украинский конфликт носит комбинированный характер, поэтому может стать самым длительным из замороженных конфликтов в посткоммунистическом мире.

**Ключевые слова:** российско-украинский конфликт, пропаганда, идеология, международные отношения.