

III.5. Onset analysis of the frozen conflict taking place in Eastern-Ukraine

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Abstract

The paper discusses the background of the ongoing frozen conflict in Eastern-Ukraine. Within the country groups of the Post-Soviet region, especially among those countries which became independent from the Soviet Union directly, this is not the first case to experience these kinds of conflicts. Prominent examples are Moldova and Georgia for frozen conflicts from the mentioned region. These countries are facing major geopolitical challenges since declaring their independence. This paper aims to analyze the background of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, to understand the real cause behind the breakout of violence. The paper forms the hypothesis that the real driving forces and motivations were not ancient hatred or the involvement of the Russian Government, but rather the clash of local elites and their promises of opportunities for better living. To prove this, the paper uses the scholarly work of Civil War Studies focusing on qualitative methods. The paper suggests that although the involvement of the Russian troops was proven, the conflict itself cannot only be considered as a hybrid-war between two Eastern-European countries, as it also shows signs of a classic civil war. The paper will discuss all the criteria of a classic civil war, and in the conclusion it will form a clear statement regarding this conflict.

Keywords: Ukraine, Donbass, frozen conflict, onset analysis, ethnic conflict

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III.5.1. Introduction

The number of new armed conflicts have declined in the past seventy years and civil wars in recent periods are far more common than international wars (SINGER, J. D. – SMALL, M. 1994). Instead of interstate wars a new wave of conflicts has started in which different kinds of militias and armed groups have begun to challenge

the incumbent government's sovereignty (JOHNSON, C. 2008). During the bipolar world order the main reason behind this was more obvious: the two major actors in foreign policy were fighting proxy wars against each other. But the current case in Ukraine is a vastly different situation from past events. This topic is highly relevant and important, as the conflict is still ongoing and the root causes from

both sides have not yet been analyzed. On the other hand, the case of Moldova (KAUFMAN, S. J. 1996) and Georgia (NODIA, G. O. 1995) are showing very similar processes. These kinds of frozen conflicts prevent them from joining any military alliances, which could have an impact on the geopolitical and economic challenges they may face in the mid- to long-term.

During the last 5 years since the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict, many analyses have been published about the Russian intervention and the combination of various methods used in this conflict (ALLISON, R. 2014), that is to say, the expression of a hybrid war has gained traction among scholars. On the other hand, in the scientific works of civil war studies, the topic of Ukraine has not been widely discussed, and an onset analysis in the case of this conflict has been glaringly missing. The aim of this work is to provide a deeper understanding of the main reasons of the outbreak of the conflict, and to present a comprehensive view of the conflict, as manipulations and fake news are presented on both sides. The purpose of this study is to create an overview from articles written not only by western scholars, but also by Russian and Ukrainian scholars in order to stay authentic and present a balanced

view. The main goal of this study is to analyze the onset of the Ukrainian armed conflict, its origins, and how this very problematic situation could have occurred between these two ethnic groups. The paper forms the hypothesis that the real driving forces and motivations were not ancient hatred or the involvement of the Russian Government, but rather the clash of the local elites and the promising of an opportunity for better living. Without the financial backing and influence of these elites, would this conflict have started anyway or not? In parallel, the dynamics of the East-Ukrainian conflict will be examined and analyzed as well, in order to gain an informed understanding of these very complex events. It is an important and highly relevant question to understand the real driving forces of the conflict, as previously the Russians and Ukrainians had a friendly relationship over past decades. By uncovering the main causes behind the deterioration in their relations, a similar conflict could be averted in the future.

In the first part of the study the basic context of the armed conflict is presented using normative and descriptive methods as a facilitating means by which the different aspects of the two sides can be observed. In this part

a brief overview of the historical background in Ukrainian - Russian relations will be presented, how relations developed through the centuries, especially during the period of the Soviet Union, in order to better understand the grievances and ancient hatreds between the two ethnic groups. It will be highlighted how the nationalistic policies developed over the past 25 years since Ukraine became independent. The roles that these nationalistic policies played in the everyday lives of Ukrainian citizens will be listed, and also how these policies changed after the revolution. A short overview will be given on how the language laws changed in the past thirty years, as this will help us in understanding the motives and perceptions of the rebel side.

In the second part of the case study the real motives and driving forces will be analyzed in order to understand the onset of the conflict. In this part qualitative research methods would be more suitable, as this part will focus primarily on exploratory aspects, provide insights into the problem, uncover trends and dive deeper. Qualitative methodology deals with high flexibility and applicability: a textual record exists for almost every major international event in modern world history. It also delivers impressive explanatory insight,

rigor, and reliability (MORAVCSIK A. 2014), which will be useful in analyzing the onset of the armed conflict. In this section the concepts of security dilemma, opportunism, humanitarian intervention and the dichotomy of greed vs grievance will be used to analyze the conflict. The motivation behind the rebellion will be examined on the basis of these aspects, and on the other hand an explanation will be provided as to how this opportunity occurred for the revolting groups. The preferences and perceptions of the eastern Ukrainian ethnic Russians will be listed, along with the motives and driving forces of the Ukrainian government as well.

Lastly, the end of the conflict and how it might continue or be solved in the near future will be presented in parallel with a geopolitical outlook on the conflicts in the region. At the end of the study the findings and results of the study will be stated with a conclusion regarding the main research question.

III.5.2. The main context of the armed conflict

Literature review – civil or hybrid war?

After Russia's actions (or reactions) in the Ukrainian conflict

the expression “hybrid war” has been widely used. At the same time, it has also become a threatening expression in the Baltic States, Poland or even Kazakhstan as the fear from a similar intervention using conventional or irregular armed forces, financing anti-establishment protests or very effective Russian language based misinformation campaign has been rising. Therefore, it is worthwhile discussing the question, whether the frozen conflict in Eastern-Ukraine can be considered a hybrid war rather than a civil war. Hybrid war is a blending of conventional and non-traditional tactics to achieve political–military objectives (HOFFMAN, F. G. 2007). Based on another definition, hybrid warfare is a military strategy which employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyberwarfare with other influencing methods, such as fake news, diplomacy, lawfare and foreign electoral intervention (STANDISH, R. 2018). In my understanding, the expression “war” itself is misused. It is correct to state that conventional, irregular, political and information tools have been used in the described conflict in a combined way. However, it is also important to note that this is not a new method of modern warfare, since it turns out that

already in ancient times most wars consisted of these multiple aspects. Therefore, warfare can be considered as a hybrid method of the armed conflict, but the war itself does not have any new or unconventional aspects.

The only new thing that emerged with this conflict is the efficiency of the informational warfare from the Russian side. For example, during the 2004-05 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, Russia was already using information warfare tools, but they were much less effective (KOFMAN, M. – ROJANSKY, M. 2015). According to a recent poll, the number of pro-Russia voters among the Russian speaking population of Ukraine jumped significantly due to television-fed perceptions that ethnic Russians would become second-class citizens in Ukraine. On the other hand, these manipulations could be much stronger among the population of Crimea as their majority (85%) do not perceive themselves as European (O’LOUGHLIN, J. – TOAL, G. 2015). In fact, non-linear or non-traditional warfare, as it is described in Russian Military Doctrine (2010), is simply the attempt to catch up to the level of the United States’ methodology of global war on terrorism which has already been used in Iraq, Afghanistan, and

elsewhere (GERASIMOV, V. 2013).

On the other hand, armed conflicts are considered as civil wars if there are more than 1,000 deaths, if there is effective resistance from the rebel side, and the national government's involvement is also required (COLLIER, P. – HOFFLER, A. 2007). According to Sambanis, a civil war is any armed conflict that involves military action internal to the metropole, the active participation of the national government and effective resistance by both sides (SAMBANIS, N. 2004). There is another definition by Kalyvas: civil war is an armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties' subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities (KALYVAS, S. 2003). According to the most commonly used and also measurable definition, civil wars are those internal conflicts that count more than 1,000 battle deaths in a single year, and also include cases with at least twenty-five battles within a year (BLATTMAN, C. – MIGUEL, E. 2010).

Based on these definitions, can the armed conflict in Ukraine be considered as a civil war? Predominantly, the country has two different identities with two major groups using a different language, and even in the previous centuries

there were some clashes between them. Regarding the aspects of the theoretical definition, the fights were internal, the resistance was effective on both sides, and the number of deaths were far more than 1,000 in the year of 2014. This means that the armed conflict that happened in Eastern-Ukraine meets all the criteria of a civil war. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that recently Ukrainian officials often refer to the conflict as a war between Ukraine and Russia, in the beginning of the conflict it was termed as Anti-terrorist operations (SUTYAGIN, I. 2015), which also refers more to a civil war than an interstate war. It is also important to note that the involvement of irregular Russian troops, which was a supportive intervention on the side of the rebels, has been proved and confirmed (KOFMAN, M. et al. 2017). But this is more a reference to the means of the warfare and not to the war itself, since without the original motive of the rebels there would not have been any fights nor any need for these involvements.

In my understanding, the usage of the expression 'hybrid-war' due to the external support of Russia on the side of the rebels is not appropriate, as with this approach most of the civil wars in the 20th century could be considered hybrid wars because an external world

power could always be found in the background as a supporter. I reckon that this is not the right interpretation. On the other hand, the scholarly works of civil war studies provide a better understanding of the whole standoff. Nevertheless, to be as precise as possible, the case of the Ukrainian armed conflict is a very unique one. Similarities can be found to the cases of Moldova and Georgia, but there are major differences as well.

Historical overview

The current population of Ukraine is divided based on the spoken language and we can allocate them to exact territories. This is highly important as over the centuries it changed the local population's dialect and identity for the long term, which has led to the highly divided country that we are facing today. The first event of Ukrainian nationalism was the Khmelnitsky led Cossack uprising (SUBTELNY, O. 1988). However, the uprising was against the Polish – Lithuanian Empire, and as a result of the fights Cossack Ukrainians became part of the Russian Tsar's Empire but they did not receive their autonomy, which they were expecting. During the 19th century there were some major migration movements; Russians migrating to

Ukraine, Ukrainians migrating to other parts of Russia, but there were no conflicts recorded between them. In the First World War 3.5 million Ukrainians were fighting for the Russian Tsar, but ethnic atrocities were recorded only between Polish and Ukrainian groups (SERHIENKO, Y. G. – SMOLIY, A. B. 1994).

Between the two world wars the situation was already more problematic. Right after WWI there were three different Ukrainian revolutionary movements and the country was totally divided. It was a very chaotic situation in which practically everyone was fighting against everyone. The end result was that western Ukrainians became citizens of the newly emerged Polish Republic, and the central and southern Ukrainians became citizens of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic (SMELE, J. 2015). In the first couple of years during which extremely nationalistic leadership was in power in Ukraine, many changes came about such as an elevated importance of the Ukrainian language, culture, history, and literature. Then during the 1930's these policies changed after Stalin came to power and new approaches were implemented. Every nation was equal, it was a golden age for each ethnic group living in the territory of Ukraine (DUMITRU D.

– JOHNSON, C. 2011). However, there was an important event in this period, namely, the Holodomor or known as the great famine. Scholars do not agree whether this famine was genocide or not, but the Ukrainian parliament recently declared that it was (KASIANOV, H. 2014). Even to this day, the Ukrainian population has bad memories about this famine and blame the Russians for it. During the Second World War under the Nazi regime Ukrainian nationalistic movements were rising again, but without any significant result. As a result of the Second World War multi-ethnic territories became part of Ukraine such as Ruthenia and areas previously ruled by Poland, such as Romania. There was another territorial change later, when in 1954 Khrushchev transferred Crimea from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR (KUBIJOVYC, V. 2016).

The language question since the independence of the country

From the 1990's after the dissolution of the Soviet Union huge changes came in Ukraine. The national language became massively important again, while Russian was a state language too. The new governments had a

more nationalistic view than the communist leaders had, which affected all the minorities living in the territory of Ukraine in a negative way. There are many statistics about how the number of minorities changed in the past 25 years, and how they declined as a result of nationalistic policies (SIDOR, D. 2005). Recently, the country has been quite divided in the use of language. Even in Kiev, 50% of the population speaks Russian as their first language. Until 2012, the previous language law dating from the Soviet times was in force, which did not really regulate the use of language at all. Then during the reign of Yanukovich, a new modernized bill was accepted by the parliament: any language other than Ukrainian would be considered a regional minority language if it was used by more than 10% of the local population. As a result minority languages could be used in courts, schools and government institutions in these regions. After the revolution, on the first day of the interim government this bill was repealed. The first decision of the new government was to dismiss the use of the Russian language as a regional language all across Ukraine (BBC, 2014). Following this, many Russian speaking Ukrainian citizens felt that this was not their country anymore, nor did

they feel safe. Of late there have been many discussions and ongoing debates regarding the new language law accepted in May of 2019, which has banned the use of Russian language in cultural products, movies, books, songs, etc., not to mention banning the official use of the language. The language law has been highly criticized and described as ill-defined, illegal, and unconstitutional. Currently, it is being reviewed by the Venice Commission and has also been discussed at the UN's Security Council (brought up by the Russians).

It also worth noting how the country was divided by the election results. In the western and central territories pro-EU powers always led in the polls, whereas in the eastern and southern territories which are dominated by Russian speakers, most of the time pro-Russian powers were elected. But this divide never caused any ethnic atrocities in the country before. Thanks to their common history and culture, people always believed that they were the closest relative nations in the world. My conclusion would be that there was no significant hatred between the two sides before the Euromaidan revolution, until 2014 when the new nationalistic government came into power. Although the number of

nationalistic Ukrainians increased in the past five years, their influence is still insignificant for the overall population of the country.

III.5.3. Onset analysis

The main background and driving motives of the conflict

The huge country of forty-two million people has been struggling with its identity questions already for 25 years, ever since it became independent from the Soviet Union. None of the Ukrainian governments could resolve the internal divisions or build strong political institutions, implement economic reforms, overcome corruption and reduce the influence of powerful oligarchs. All the presidents have allowed oligarchs to gain increasing control over the economy, which is how the country found itself in the situation by 2010 in which Ukraine's fifty richest people controlled nearly half of the country's gross domestic product (WILSON, A. 2013). According to these numbers it's not even a question that elites are dominating not only the economic life of Ukraine but the political life too. In each region or county, we can easily allocate an oligarch who controls the region. Why is this important? Because without

their support the chance for a violent conflict would be relatively small. In order to understand the onset of the Ukrainian conflict, we need to examine this question in detail: what was the main driving force of the whole process, greed or grievances? This is a classic question in every civil war case study and both greed and grievance can be a right assumption.

In favour of understanding the onset of the conflict the perceptions of the parties need to be examined. The pro-European nationalistic Ukrainians consider Ukraine as a regional power. According to the country's resources it could even be true. Unfortunately, as a result of non-consistent governance in the past 25 years, it was never true. While in most cases Ukraine could act as an independent actor in world politics, Ukraine always had a strong and close cooperation with Russia (ROSE, W. 2000). The security dilemma was never a major question for the Ukrainians, in spite of the fact that in the Budapest Memorandum they received assurances from the world's great powers for their safety and integrity. Nevertheless, some western Ukrainian oligarchs decided to lead the country towards the EU and NATO. And that was the time when the real security dilemma occurred, especially in the

eastern part of the country.

Posen already in 1993 came up with this theory regarding the real security dilemma, and he warned the political leaders that this kind of approach in Ukraine could lead to a conflict later. According to Posen, a security dilemma is when offensive and defensive military forces are more or less identical (POSEN, B. 1993). If offensive operations are more effective than defensive operations, actors will choose the offensive options if they wish to survive. In case of Ukraine this theory is correct in two aspects. Firstly, there was the occupation of Crimea by Russian forces. They had superiority on the peninsula, and the political crisis in Kiev was still not resolved. That was an unexpected opportunity for Moscow (MARXSEN, C. 2014). But after these events, Russian speaking eastern Ukrainians wanted to have a similar process, that's why eastern oligarchs started to fund and financially support local militias to revolt against Kiev. After the violent regime change led by the far right nationalists, the local population of Eastern Ukraine started to fear them, which was another important reason that led to the conflict. From another perspective, Ukrainian leaders have always faced the security dilemma, as their big brother Russia was

much stronger and they had always been dependent on them. For this reason they had to act in accordance with Russian interests.

Among civil war scholars, the question of humanitarian intervention also plays an important role. In this case it is less important, but still worth providing a brief overview of this question too. According to Evans and Sahnoun, humanitarian interventions are highly important in case of a civil war, in order to protect innocent civilians. Based on that, these kinds of operations are rather described as the responsibility to protect the people than as an intervention by a third party (EVANS, G. – SAHNOUN, M. 2002). In their opinion a stronger third party always has the right to protect civilians, and this is more important than the sovereignty of a state. On the other hand, Luttwak argues against this statement. According to him we should never make interventions; rather he argues that countries have to “make war to make peace” as in the long term this is a more peaceful solution of the conflict. Hatred between ethnic groups will be less relevant after the conflict has been solved internally, and the peace can stay for longer than in case of an intervention (LUTTWAK, E. 1999).

In Donbass, some humanitarian aid was sent by

the Red Cross and also by the Russian government, but regarding humanitarian intervention the events in Crimea were more significant. As the peninsula is mostly inhabited by ethnic Russians, and there was a threat by the far right nationalistic groups, Moscow had the opportunity to intervene. It could be analysed in another case study whether it was legal, not to mention the geopolitical background. Ultimately, according to official statements made by the Russian Government, the most important factor for intervening was that they wanted to protect the local Russian population, as they were afraid of an attack by the far right thugs against Crimea. Based on my readings and knowledge of the topic, the main reason for Russia’s annexation of Crimea was the opportunity and chaos left behind after the unexpected regime change in Kiev. It can even be claimed that the invasion was Russia’s reaction or answer to the revolt that took place in the Ukrainian capital in late February 2014.

This question of greed or grievance plays an important role in civil war literature as well. Paul Collier and Anke Hoefflers provide us with an influential scheme of analysis. They have introduced a conceptual dichotomy in the literature: greed vs. grievance.

The greed argument refers to self-interested, even selfish behaviour as the main motivation behind civil wars, whereas the grievance approach identifies discontent and frustration as the primary motivation for political action (COLLIER, P. et al. 2005). Later Collier and Hoeffler modified their original concept and changed it into a broader meaning as opportunity. As greed is an important motivating factor for any side, without having a good opportunity itself it doesn't amount to anything – Ukraine being a good case in point. All the political leaders were led by greed in past decades, but this was not enough to start a war; they were not even interested in it. But when a political standoff occurred between the two identities of Ukraine it was the perfect time to drive the country into a violent conflict. We can see great examples for this theory in the Ukrainian case.

According to another explanation weak states and weak governance always create an opportunity for frustration that motivates insurgency. According to Levi a strong state is representative and accountable to its people, and able to protect the population from violence (LEVI M. 2006). In the case of Ukraine neither conditions were met. The Poroshenko government was not representative,

as it represented only the western regions of the country. It was not accountable either, as the level of corruption was still one of the highest in the world; only in a few Central-African countries was the situation worse. And if we have a look at whether the government was able to protect its citizens or not, then we can state that it wasn't in their capabilities either. After the regime change pro-Russian militias could rise up against the central government in the eastern territories. Had there been strong leadership, not to mention the government's legitimacy, this could not have happened, at least not on such a large scale.

It can be clearly stated that the pro-European more nationalistic oligarchs had the opportunity to start an uprising based on Yanukovych's decision in late 2013 not to sign the commercial treaty on the Deep and Comprehensive Cooperation with the EU. But after the regime change in Kiev, the pro-Russian elite had the same chance, however their case was even more problematic since recruiting soldiers to fight against their own government is never easy. The decision of an individual to participate in a rebellion always depends on potential costs and benefits. Insurgents will join an uprising only if the expected benefits are higher than what is

offered by the current status quo (MULLER, E. N. – OPP, K.-D. 1986). This is why most of the opportunity theorists do not perceive domestic violence as an emotional reaction to grievances but rather as a rational response to the circumstances.

On the other hand, among the most important driving forces of a civil war we can usually find not only the opportunity, but the motivation as well (ZEYNEP, T. et. al. 2011). As the Ukrainian society has always been relatively divided, the motivation for an uprising was hiding in the dark waiting for an opportunity. The nationalistic pro-western elites always wanted to get closer to Europe and break up with the Russians, but they could never recruit enough supporters for this idea. On the other hand, pro-Russian elites always believed in the country's integrity and in its Russian based identity. Minor clashes between the two perspectives had already been registered during the last 15 years, but in most cases economic interests played the most important role. As long as both parties could realize their major incomes from the country, there was no need of any armed conflict. But as a result of the revolution, this stable status quo changed, and the economic stability of the Eastern part of the country was threatened. All in all,

it can be claimed that the main driving force of the violence both in Kiev and Eastern Ukraine, were not the grievances or ancient hatreds, but rather the influence of their nationalistic and greedy leaders.

To summarize the beginning of the violence, the onset and the main driving force of the conflict, we can state that the most important ingredient was the opportunity presenting itself on both sides. On its own, however, this opportunity would never have led to a violent conflict, but it was definitely the spark which had been missing previously. Regarding the motivations of the parties, the security dilemma played an important role as well, which led to fear later. Compared to other similar conflicts, we can maintain that ethnic differences did not play an important role, as only some far right nationalistic Ukrainians shared this approach. These nationalists were always in the minority; they never had any major support from the population. In spite of being a divided country having two different identities – in fact there are no significant differences between them either culturally or historically – this has never been a real problem in Ukraine. The other important driving force of the armed conflict was the political and ideological differences between

the elites, who could successfully influence their population in a nationalistic way. Without the help and support of the elites, violence would never have started either in Kiev or Eastern Ukraine. The crisis occurred because of many reasons, such as the more than twenty years of weak governance, a corrupt economy dominated by oligarchs, heavy reliance on Russia, and sharp differences between Ukraine's linguistically, religiously, and ethnically distinct eastern and western halves (McMAHON, R. 2014).

End of the Conflict

After the escalation of the fights in January 2015 the European leaders organized a second summit in Minsk in order to negotiate a ceasefire as soon possible. As a result, on the 12th of February the Minsk II treaty was signed by the parties. Leaders of Belarus, Russia, Germany, France, Ukraine, DPR and LNR participated in the negotiations. Following the 16 hours of overnight discussions the parties agreed to a package of peace-making measures. The negotiations were observed by the OSCE as well (OSCE, 2015). They agreed on the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, the release of prisoners of war, and on

constitutional reform in Ukraine. From this point we are talking about a frozen conflict, as the ceasefire is still in power, but there was no peace treaty signed. Both sides withdrew their heavy weapons sooner or later, they successfully exchanged their prisoners, but the central government still couldn't regain its control over the Russia-Ukrainian border, and they didn't introduce any constitutional reforms (BENTZEN, N. 2016).

The DPR and LNR territories are integrated into the Russian economy, and both territories use the ruble as their currency. Nobody knows what will happen in the near future in Eastern Ukraine. Some fights are still being recorded between the sides, but they are not significant and the front lines have not changed since the signing of the treaty. The election of the new president has also not resulted in any change in the conflict yet. Basically, this is a very similar situation to that which was noted in Transnistria, Abkhazia or South-Osetia. According to international law, the central governments of Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia do not have the right to join any military cooperation (such as NATO) until they reach their total territorial integrity. For this reason, the current status quo is very much in favour of the Russian government. How long

these frozen conflicts can survive, is the crucial question – and anyone's guess. Until a long term agreement is reached concerning the status of these territories, the situation will probably stay the same.

III.5.4. Conclusion

At the beginning of the study the historical background between the Russians and Ukrainians was discussed. Following that, the real driving forces of the violent conflict were defined. Based on the findings, the most important components in the conflict were the motivations and perceptions of the oligarchs and the local elites. The cultural divisions and identity differences would have never led to a conflict in this case, as the Ukrainians and Russians have much more in common with each other than they have differences. According to Posen this cautious situation was always present in Ukraine; the elites just had to wait for the perfect opportunity.

Based on the analysis, the main reason behind the dynamics of the fights were the wrong measures carried out by the newly formed government. Had they begun to negotiate with the eastern militias, no fights would have been necessary. This would have led to a more federal country, which was

obviously not in their interests. The question of the security dilemma played an important role on both sides as well. It can be claimed that the unexpected happenings and the reactions of these events is what ultimately led to this violent conflict. We examined the motivations and perceptions of both sides. There were no significant ancient hatreds between the parties; animosity did not play an important role in the shared Russian-Ukrainian history during the last centuries. Nationalistic aspirations were neither prevalent nor popular in Ukraine; the Poroshenko administration, however, took major steps in that direction.

In essence, the general population never really supported the government's operations against the rebels. The question of humanitarian intervention has also been discussed, as the eastern Ukrainian Russians started to revolt against Kiev after the process took place in Crimea and they were expecting a similar outcome in their case as well. On the other hand, for the eastern oligarchs the situation in Kiev was not sustainable at all due to the ban of the Russian language in schools and in the media. This conflict was a nightmare for every participant, except for the far right radicals; tragically, these kinds of violent people always show up

when they have the opportunity to fight. My answer to the main question is that the conflict would not have occurred without the help of the local Russian elites. What is also important to note is that if the Ukrainian government's reaction to the revolts in the Eastern part of the country had been peaceful, the whole situation would never have flared up, or at least not in the immediate future. Without the support of the elites on both sides the conflict could not have escalated to the extent that it did, which is why the elites must be mostly held responsible.

To conclude, based on the events and outcomes, we can claim that the hybrid war against Ukraine appears instead to be an unplanned series of actions and reactions rather than a consciously planned chain of events on both sides. The intervention of the Russian conventional and irregular forces in Ukraine should be analyzed in a much more flexible way. It has also been suggested that the expression "hybrid-war" itself is a misused term. Basically, it describes the employment of every possible

tool to intervene in the interests of the local ethnic Russians, their political, economic, military and national interests. As far as is known from other conflicts, this is a methodology for spreading influence based on power which would have been familiar to other military powers as well. The paper's aim was to provide a clear understanding of the interests and motives in case of each participant. As a result, it can be claimed that the Ukrainian case is a very unique one and cannot be particularly compared to other similar conflicts in the Post-Soviet region, as the role of the local elites was significantly higher than in any other case.

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