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*Ukraine*

## CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES

### **Abstract:**

*The conflict that has been flaming up since 2014 in the East of Ukraine is a real multi-faceted war between Russia and Ukraine. It is also called the Anti-terrorist operation (ATO), Joint forces operation or “hybrid” war, as in Ukraine at the legislative level it has not been acknowledged as a war. When a war is defined as “hybrid” it is suggested that it is not a full-scale intervention of the Russian Federation and thus it is easier for many politician to justify their inactivity; just crossing the Ukrainian border, Russian forces take off chevrons and other identification marks. The West take advantage of this, pretending to be doubtful and, herewith, its reaction is reasonably less determined; and it vivifies “conspiracy theories” as to Putin’s probable allies. Legislative ambiguity generates not only enhancement of military threat, but also different psychological insinuation, which affect the conscious state of the Ukrainian society.*

### **Keywords:**

*Anti-terrorist operation (ATO), Ukraine, the Russian Federation, psychological factors*

## Introduction

Modern Ukraine is facing a number of threats and challenges, among which one of the main is finding a solution to a military-political conflict in

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eastern regions and reinstating its territorial integrity. A search for the ways of solution to such problem seems to be rather currently topical and it is becoming more and more referred to by politicians, experts and scientists. As the majority of experts believe, the military conflict, which is taking place in the east of Ukraine can be characterized as a hybrid, asymmetric war of the Russian Federation (FR) against Ukraine. To prove or refute it we will try to study this phenomenon and its psychological peculiarities.

### **The essence of the “hybrid war” concept**

Apart from foreign scientists the concept of a hybrid war has been studied by Russian scholars and military officers as well. Thus, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF general V. Gerasymov speaking at the meeting of the Academy of military sciences in 2013 characterized the hybrid war as follows: “The accent of the countermeasures that are used is shifted to applying a wide range of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures, which are implemented together with the protest potential of the people. All this is supplemented by military actions which bear concealed character, including actualization of measures of information war and actions of special operation forces. Open use of force is often applied under the guise of peace-keeping operations and crisis reaction, only at a certain stage, mainly to achieve final success in the conflict”<sup>2</sup>. These ideas of the General Staff are apparently based on the theories proposed by a former white Russian émigré Evgeny Messner, whose works have become widely recognized in Russia since 2006. It is not a “classical war”, but a new type of “special operations”.

Scientist E. Messner worked out the concept, according to which, future wars will take place not over the territory and resources, but “over the souls of nations”, these will be rebellious wars – “insurgent-wars”, i.e. such conflicts in which the materials are national and social controversies and disinformation. Therefore, the wars will be first of all psychological and the method of making the wars will include escalation of strain and propaganda. In such “wars” the most effective are “special forces”, well trained groups for non-convention actions. The result is achieved not on the battlefield. And the army is used not to frighten away the enemy, but to intimidate local population and military forces

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<sup>2</sup> G. V. Liutkene, *Nekotorye novshestva v interpretatsii voiny na Zapade*, „Vestnik Voenogo Universiteta”, 2010, No. 2 (22), p. 171.

of the potential enemy<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the Kremlin applies that number of forces, means and scenarios of their usage, which, how it believes, are sufficient for achieving the goals in the conflict with a previously and deliberately ruined sector of the national service of Ukraine. In the international practice such conflicts are known as “wars by proxy”.

The RF was preparing itself and the whole world to this conflict for at least 7 years, starting with Putin’s speech in February 2007 at the Munich Security Conference. Apart from classical military methods the RF “within the frames of a hybrid war” for the first time ever used the concept “of three quarters”. Its sense lies in the fact that a modern soldier must be ready to conduct general-military fight, in the other – carry out police functions and in the third – humanitarian mission.

The aim of the RF is, due to successes in local conflicts, to prove not only the possibility to undertake tactic tasks, but also get good chances for global leadership on the basis of a “special model” of its relations with the rest of the world. The RF, by recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, annexation and integration of the Crimea, decided to retaliate against “the Kosovo precedent”. In the long-term prospects Russia wants to preserve its influence by means of creating “zones of privileged interests” along the perimeter of its borders and to recognize its right to interfere into the internal affairs of sovereign states and force actions in this zone. In fact, such behaviour of the RF is a challenge for the EU and US, whose anticipating strategy or the attitude of “mild force” may be ineffective while fighting against Russia. Thus there is a need to see more effective measures on the part of the West, necessity to reconsider structural and functional loads of international organizations and legislative regulations, which are called up to provide more effective actions of the system of international mechanisms<sup>4</sup>.

The change of the war paradigm in the sense of involving non-military structures into it is also described by F. van Kappen: “hybrid warfare is the combination of the classical and unusual type of warfare on the battleground. “The state, which leads hybrid war, making a deal with non-state performers by

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<sup>3</sup> Mysli E. Messnera o suti sovremennoi miatezhevoiny, <<http://milresource.ru/Quotations-Messner.html>>, (30.03.2018).

<sup>4</sup> L. Chuprii, O. Zahrebelnyi, *Stan I stsenarii rozviazannia viiskovo-polituchnoho konfliktu na shkodi Ukrainy v konteksti podolannia ahresii Rosii*, [in:] *Rosiiska okupatsiia i de-okupatsiia Ukrainy: istoriia, suchasni zahrozy ta vyklyky sohodennia: Materialy Vseukrainskoi naukovo-praktychnoi konferentsii*, ed. P. Hai-Nyzhnyk, Kiev 2016, pp. 269-270.

the militants, local groups, organizations, the relationship is formally denied. These performers can do things that the state itself cannot do. All the dirty work can be shifted on shoulders of non-state groups”<sup>5</sup>.

### **Specific and understanding of the modern crisis**

The present crisis, which can be easily called both Ukrainian and Russian and European and even global or geopolitical, must be considered in complex. It is a result of coincidence which happened at one point and included three split-level conflicts: geopolitical (global), Ukrainian-Russian (regional) and actually inner-Ukrainian (local).

At the global level it is the conflict between the leading players at the world arena, first of all Russia and the Western world (under the term of the Western World we understand the USA, EU, NATO and other players who abide the same norms and regulations of behaviour at the world arena). The preconditions for the conflict are presupposed by the mistakes in the course of creation and elaboration of the European and North-Atlantic architecture of security and cooperation in the early 1990s, false parameters of integration of the post-Soviet countries to the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Leading players at the world arena violated regulations of the international law and applied double standards (from the Iraqi venture to declaration of Kosovo independence), weakened moral authority of the West, created a number of precedents of violations of the international law. The Kosovo precedent became a delayed action bomb, refusal to provide Ukraine and Georgia with the NATO Membership Action Plan gave a free hand to the Russian imperialism and the Crimea annexation led to the final destruction of the post bipolar system of international affairs, which had been functioning for the last two decades.

At the regional level we deal with a bilateral conflict between Ukraine and Russian, caused by the collapse of the post-Soviet system of relations in the regions and the desire of Russia to “restore historical justice”, return its already lost positions in the region, which it considers to be its sphere of influence, as well as to win back its place in the world and European architecture of security and cooperation. Russia considers Ukraine, first of all, as the object of its influence and the key component in the process of the post-Soviet integration processes.

Thus, a current problem concerning the work out of scenarios aimed at dealing with the conflict in the east appears. On the arbitration of Ukrainian-

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<sup>5</sup> M. van Creveld, *Transformatsiia voyny*, Moscow 2005, p. 46.

Russian conflict and the method of reconciliation will depend peace, stability and welfare not only in the two countries and also other countries of CEE, South Caucasus and Central Asia<sup>6</sup>.

At the local (domestic Ukrainian) level it is the conflict between the closed political, economic, social institutions and new civil society, which stands against the oligarchic “Latin American – post-Soviet” model of the state and social-economic relations.

The importance of Ukraine for security in the EU and even in the world was emphasized by Z. Brzezinski in 1997 in his book “The Grand Chessboard”. The scientist states that taking into account close cooperation within the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany and Poland), enlarged by integrating Ukraine, such axis of states would be the grounds for security, at the same time without being a threat for Russia and other actors at the international scene<sup>7</sup>. Taking into account the fact that non-aligned status of Ukraine could not guarantee Ukraine its security, reliable protection of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity quite actual became the question of immediate integration of defence potential of the country into the existing system of the Euro-Atlantic security.

Artificiality of the problem of separatism in the east of Ukraine and inspiration of the conflict by the RF presupposes unprecedented nature of such conflict in the world practice. The problem how to solve Eastern Ukrainian conflict belongs to the contradictions of the Ukrainian society, which will determine its future for the next decades. However, in the course of the conflict there is a situation when national interests of the people of Ukraine are substituted for the interests of the ruling circles, which does not give an opportunity to find common grounds for further integration of the split society, which are represented by the population of Donbas region and the rest of Ukraine.

To overcome the conflict, first of all, it is necessary to agree to cease the armed stand-off and elaborate future road map. For this there is the Geneva or Normandy formats of negotiations. It should be mentioned that the Geneva format of negotiations (Ukraine, Russia, the EU and USA) – is a format that comprises all global players and Ukraine. Conflict regulation at the global level is a subject of talks within the frames of the Group of Seven and the Group of Twenty, involving all leading actors of the international relations.

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<sup>6</sup> *Voenna doktryna Ukrainy, zatverdzhena Ukazom Prezydenta Ukrainy vid 15.06.2004 r. No. 648 (v redaktsii Ukazu Prezydenta Ukrainy vid 08.06.2012 r. No. 390/2012)*, VRU site, <<http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/648/2004>>, (30.03.2018).

<sup>7</sup> Z. Brzeziński, *Wielka Szachownica*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 85-86.

The Normandy format involves Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France excludes the US and shifts the discussions concerning the conflict regulation from the geopolitical to the regional level, where the geopolitical competitiveness is lower and this complicates the talks over the question of renewing the security architecture, role and place of all sides of the conflict in the world processes of cooperation and integration.

The Minsk Agreements as a way of partial de-escalation of the conflict in the east of Ukraine cannot fully and finally regulate it. It has been determined that reintegration of Donbas under the terms of the Minsk agreements will lead to the “Bosnia scenario” in Ukraine with further escalation of internal conflicts and will close all possibilities of the Euro-Atlantic integration<sup>8</sup>.

### **Psychological consequences of the military situation for the society**

The results of the social-political and legal situation in Ukraine which has been formed in the course of the hostilities in the east of the country and annexation of the Crimea cause numerous psychological traumas at the levels of individuals, groups and communities. It is connected with transformation of values, social norms, and shifts in social perceptions and orientations which lead to the variety of attitudes, thinking patterns, communication and behavior. The essence of these traumas is underlying in the sphere of actual images and evaluations of the political-legal situation in Ukraine, perspectives of possible scenarios of further events and own actions towards them.

According to the information from different sources, currently in the hostilities in the east of Ukraine are involved almost 50 000 Ukrainian soldiers. Along with that the number of people who return home not only physically, but also mentally handicapped has grown significantly. It may refer both to mental and psychological state and may concern the strategies of their intercommunication with other people, state and social institutions, and it disfigures the concept of effective actions within the problematic situations in the political-legal sphere. A great number of people are internal refugees or people who suffered from the military conflict (loss of job, break in relations or abruptness of intercourse with those who stay behind the limitation line, loss of home or health as a result of hostilities and so on). According to the data provided by the Ministry of Social Policy the number of internally displaced people is almost 1.5 mln.

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<sup>8</sup> L. Chuprii, O. Zahrebelnyi, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

Close circles of people, who have suffered losses, has also felt psychological impact<sup>9</sup>.

Having studied the political-legal perceptions of the Ukrainian citizens, connected with evaluation of the events, which are taking place in the east of Ukraine, it should be emphasized that for the part of the Ukrainian population the ORDLO (isolated districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions) combatants are “the gunmen, terrorists, Russian fighters”, for others – they are “people who fight for their interests”. Therefore, people’s perceptions of the situation in the active combat zone are rather polarized and complex<sup>10</sup>. There are differences in the thoughts as to the anti-terrorist operation (ATO). Focused and comprehensive interviews let us fix the point that even despite the fact that the ATO has been officially held for more than 4 years, people do not form a unified perception of the events that are taking place in the east of Ukraine. Respondents use categories “ATO”, “civil war”, “hostilities”, “aggression”, “occupation”, “invasion”, “annexation”, “hybrid war”, “Russian-Ukrainian war”, as well as construct various combinations of these evaluations. A part of respondents do not admit the RF’s aggression and its participation as a separate subject of military actions (though in 2015 the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the decree in which recognized the RF as aggressor).

Thus, differences in defining the ATO and the role of the Military Services of Ukraine, Russia and various military groups over the ORDLO territory which exist in the Ukrainian people’s perceptions show polarization in opinions and high conflict potential of the situation. We believe, that there is an urgent need to elaborate psychological programs to form common criteria of evaluating political-legal events, in particular in eastern Ukraine; involve the representatives of the society to the discussion over the question of amnesty for LNR’s (Luhansk people’s republic) and DNR’s (Donetsk people’s republic) members of armed units, to lessen probable negative results of taking “ill-judged” decisions on behalf of the representatives of authority.

In general, such topics as “the ATO”, “Crimea annexation”, “commercial blockade of the ORDLO”, “blockage of infrastructure facilities”, “LDNR”,

<sup>9</sup> *Kilkist zareiestrovanykh pereselentsiv za misiats zbilshylas na 4 tysiachi osib*, Minsotspolityky, <<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28964951.html>>, (30.03.2018).

<sup>10</sup> *Identychnist hromaiian Ukrainy v novykh umovakh: stan, tendentsii, rehionalni osoblyvosti: inform-analit materialy do fakhovoi dyskusii «Formuvannia spilnoi identychnosti hromadian Ukrainy: perspektvyvy ta vyklyky»*, <[http://old.razumkov.org.ua/ upload/Identi-2016.pdf](http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Identi-2016.pdf)>, (30.03.2018).

“members of armed units”, “Russian aggression” etc. are of high conflict potential. Besides, in the society there is huge protest potential, connected with the level of confidence in the authoritative structures and some personalities, concerning uncoordinated evaluation of the events in the east even among politicians-deputies. Therefore, it means that any “conflict-generating” topic may actualize protest motivation.

In the society circulate ideas of efficiency of protest forms of civil activity that are based on the fact that authority is an “object in itself”, which cares only for “its narrowly corporate interests” and “pay no attention to ordinary people”. Such ideas attract the adherents of “radical” forms of solving social inconsistencies. Among the youth, quite widespread are the ideas of revolution as a possible form of achieving what they desire, a kind of possible scenario of action. Herewith, even those who think of possible risks in the course of such scenarios of political-legal situation development, declare their readiness to use them in “case of necessity”. Young people consider that if there are no chances for self-actualization, if the economic welfare continues decreasing due to the corruption of authority and unwillingness to listen to the voice of the people, if the hostilities in the east are still a source of enrichment for politicians or an instrument for manipulating people then such authority must face protests.

The young people’s vision of the possible scenarios of further development of events and their own actions are based on their understanding of self-actualization and improvement of their welfare, and if such opportunities are “blocked” – they declare readiness towards radical forms of opposition to authority. According to the scenario predictions there are revolutionary motives among young people – rapid life improvement now and not in future, readiness towards various forms of protest actions, even if it means violation of laws, as those “who create laws do not adhere to them”. General results of comprehensive interviews with the respondents among modern student youths give us grounds to state that the problem of future prospects are also cornerstones in the questions of elaborating political-legal issues, connected with the military conflict in the east of the country.

Another important aspect of political-legal process development is connected with involvement of soldiers and ATO ex-combatants into different political-legal moves. Military men are not allowed to participate in any political events, that is why when politicians resort to such actions – it, to our mind, is an indicator that manipulating military men can have significant political-legal consequences (not only for the participants of the processes), and it testifies of present conflict potential, which can be actualized under certain political conditions. Sometimes former soldiers, members of volunteer battalions are engaged into blockage of infrastructure facilities or economic objects, what provokes

power projected scenarios: such strategies are often focused on force reaction, even if they go beyond the legal field. Adaptation to the conditions of military life actualizes corresponding strategies of life substance and cooperation.

There are difficulties connected with obtaining the combat veteran status. A part of people who actually participated in military actions under various circumstances cannot prove this status<sup>11</sup>. Such facts as well can provoke display of various forms of protest activity.

Among other psychological moments connected with the ATO there are avatarism (“relieving” stress by means of alcohol addictive drugs, and criminal offenses connected with this); problems of reintegration, re-adaptation of the ATO combatants (re-adaptation to close social environment, creation of new effective strategies of cooperation in the society); problems of psychological follow-up and arranging governance over the territories near the demarcation line and over the long term – across the temporarily occupied territories; problems of ensuring negotiations between the adherents of the LDNR and citizens with radical views; not providing psychological assistance to people, who suffered due to military actions, in particular those who remained on the occupied territories and refugees; overcoming phenomena, connected with social support; elaboration of measures aimed at reducing paternalist and unreal anticipations from the authority; overcoming psychological effects of the information war and propaganda; problems, connected with shuffling off the responsibility for current political-legal situation only on politicians; psychological follow-up, provision of functioning of legal regulators of social cooperation on the territories, which have suffered from the military actions; ensuring dialogue between the communities and representatives of authority; psychological-legal problems, connected with readiness to illegal actions to achieve personal interests etc.

Significantly strengthen psychological beginnings of radicalism, extremism, terrorism and their consequences for social-political processes. Quite current is a range of problems, connected with studying peculiarities of people

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<sup>11</sup> N. Volosatska, *Na Lvivshchyni viiskom raptovo otrymav status uchasyka ATO pislia kilkadennoho vidriadzhennia na Donbas*, <<https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/na-lvivschyni-voyenkom-raptovo-otrimavstatus-uchasnika-ato-pislya-kilkadennoyi-komandirovki-na-donbas440493.html>>, (30.03.2018).

cooperation while solving different political-legal events and in everyday life, in particular criminalization of domestic conflicts<sup>12</sup>.

Negative psychological phenomena are enhanced by unwillingness of the representatives of various institutions of the country (psychological manifestations, connected with such phenomena as bureaucracy, corruption, bribery, embezzlement etc.) to take on them responsibility for the destiny of the country or its individual members. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate technologies of working with different layers of the society (in the zone of the military conflict, with internally displaced people, members of the ATO combatants' families) to overcome different negative psychological phenomena.

### Conclusion

We suppose that if Ukraine wishes to return its territories and restore sovereignty in future, it must put the most efforts both within the country and at the international arena; lead awareness-building and raising activities to convince the society and international community that Donbas and the Crimea are Ukrainian territories, temporarily occupied by the Russian federation, and Ukraine in no way would refuse from them and sooner or later will return them. It is important that talks over restitution of the lost territories must include not only Donbas, but, with no doubts, the Crimea. Donbas and the Crimea must be considered together.

A set of possible psychological approaches towards the question of political-legal sphere of modern Ukrainian society, connected with hostilities in the east of Ukraine, is almost inexhaustible. There is sense to speak of elaboration of programs aimed at involving people to integration processes, what will broaden their possibilities to influence on the events, fixation of locus in a certain problematic political-legal situation from the perspective "we help authority to overcome common problems", but not "we are against authority".

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<sup>12</sup> *Polityka intehratsii ukrainskoho suspilstva v konteksti vyklykiv ta zahroz podii na donbasi (natsionalna dopovid)*, [Libanova E. M., Horbulin V. P., Pirozhkov S. I. and others]; ed. E. M. Libanova, Kiev 2015, pp. 244-251.

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