

**The Echo of the Contemporary Ukrainian Conflict
in Saint-Petersburg, Russia**

by

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions and life experiences of the contemporary Ukrainian conflict, developed by Ukrainian and Russian citizens living in St. Petersburg. Based on basic human needs theory and relative deprivations framework, social identity perspective, and chaos and control paradigms, the research focuses on the participants' understandings of the different phases and stages of the ongoing crisis - its causes, actors, dynamics, and repercussions - starting from November 2013 and up to June 2016, thus, sketching out a collaged image of the Ukrainian conflict. It also draws attention to participants' visions of the future and possibilities for conflict transformation. This qualitative study explores perspectives of seventeen regular people, for whom the conflict matters for personal reasons; thus, this research cannot be viewed as a representative sample, nevertheless it uncovers a number of valuable narratives, represented in St. Petersburg community. This study contributes to the global field of research on the contemporary Ukrainian conflict and on Russian-Ukrainian relations.

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Note on People and Place Names

Spelling of people and place names often resonates, yet still differs in both Russian and Ukrainian languages. Since the fieldwork was conducted in the Russian language, I have used Russian names for all people mentioned in the thesis, as well as for towns, cities, locations and streets, including those in Ukraine and/or located in Ukrainian-speaking regions, except where an established English-language version exists.

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Chapter I – Introduction

1.1 – Personal Connection

It was winter 2013 when the news of clashes between students and Ukrainian government forces reached me in Canada. My program hadn't started yet, but previous experience in journalism and particular interest in armed conflicts, as well as my Russian origin, compelled my attention to the topic. The 2004 Orange Revolution¹ in Ukraine proved to me that Ukrainians knew their existing problems and they knew how to fight to fix them; I believed already then that they had an emerging civil society (which I thought was probably raised with the help of western institutions, yet it still was a Ukrainian movement) with strong ambitions for Ukraine to become a part of a prosperous, and successful West. At that time, the human rights situation was very sad both in Russia and in Ukraine but every new violation hurt me and proved that the countries of my own heritage, countries I love and respect as grand unions of great people, don't treasure their people and don't obey the social pact they have with them. Previous history told me that there could not be a conflict in Ukraine with which Russia wouldn't get involved and which wouldn't affect the Russian population. It was just impossible.

My classes began in January 2014. For many in my group it wasn't clear why Ukraine's willingness to sign the association with the EU was so anticipated by Russia. Until the Ukrainian conflict gathered pace receiving global resonance and attention, a lot of my acquaintances in Canada thought of Russia and Ukraine as almost the same country; so

¹The Orange Revolution was a non-violent revolution in Ukraine after presidential elections in 2004-2005 during which Viktor Yanukovich was declared successful. Mass protests resulted in a revote and victory of Viktor Yushchenko, a more Western-focused candidate. More information is to be provided later in the thesis.

it was for many people raised on ideas of ‘Slavic brotherhood’ strongly promoted during Soviet times. For that reason the possibility of a real border between two strongly economically, culturally, historically, and linguistically related nations, which would appear along with the EU alliance, was hard for me to take in. I believed then, as did many experts and politicians, that there could be another way of development which would allow Ukraine to partner with both the EU and Russia.

As events in Ukraine unfolded I felt more and more alarmed because even in the early stages of the revolution, even after the victory of the revolution, to me it seemed like the beginning of a protracted, deep-rooted conflict which had existed for a very long time in hibernation; however, as soon as an opportunity appeared this problem woke up and turned into a large-scale confrontation not only within Ukraine, but between Russia and Ukraine as well as between Russia and the West.

When the Crimean referendum happened (Harding & Walker, 2014) I still was praying for Russia not to escalate the conflict and not to accept Crimea as part of Russia but what happened, happened. After the Crimean episode along with the emergence of the conflict in the east of Ukraine (Thompson, 2017) I realized that there was no fast way out of this conflict. However, even then I understood it to be mainly a political struggle between elites and radically opposed groups of Ukrainians. Later, I realized that the main catastrophe was actually happening between average Ukrainian citizens. From friends and relatives I was hearing stories about Ukrainians turning against each other without saying a word or giving each other time for discussion, perceiving each other as their worst enemies. Similar events were happening between Russians and Ukrainians, and even here in Canada people who were a part of very distant Russian and Ukrainian diasporas changed towards

each other turning what could be a local minor conflict into a global issue affecting many millions. I realized that to understand the roots of this large-scale conflict and its development and to see possibilities to end it, research was needed at the grass-roots level with the people who are the most affected by the conflict but who have perhaps the smallest role in global decision making. I felt that to find the way out of the conflict it was very important to ask regular people about how they viewed the unveiling problem, what they experienced, and what they thought about it. That is how the idea of this thesis was born.

1.2 – Introduction to the Issue

The contemporary Ukrainian conflict, which started in November 2013 as protests and later a non-violent revolution aiming to reform the economy and hoping to win over corruption in the government, quickly expanded into both a civil war, which in reality was never declared by any of the governments, and an international conflict that has already reshaped the region and the international arena (Black, 2016 b). Lasting for more than three years, the confrontation between the so-called pro-Russian rebels in the Donbass region² and the government of Ukraine has affected millions. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (as referred to in Bonenberger, 2017), the conflict has already cost thousands of lives of civilians and soldiers and brought a large area of the country into a state of humanitarian crisis (Maltseva, 2016). According to Russian data by 2017 between two and three and a half million Ukrainian citizens have been displaced, at least 1.6 million of

² This is a term used to describe the historical, cultural, and economic region in eastern Ukraine situated around the coal Donets Basin. The coal basin spreads over the central part of the Donetsk region (Ukraine), southern parts of the Lugansk region (Ukraine), and western parts of the Rostov region (Russian Federation) (Osipian & Osipian, 2006, p. 497). In contemporary rhetoric the term is used as the common name for the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine.

whom have been internally displaced leaving the conflict area and migrating to more western parts of the country; more than 2.6 million moved east of the border (Bonenberger, 2017). Since the beginning of the confrontation events in Ukraine have been among the top news stories in Russia. Considering that millions of Russian citizens have family members or close friends in Ukraine, the conflict has affected a lot of people in the neighboring country.

The research outlined in this thesis was conducted in Saint-Petersburg (St. Petersburg), which is my home city and where a Ukrainian community has existed ever since it was established in 1703. By 2010 the official number of Ukrainians living here was almost 65 thousand (unofficial ratings reach 300-350 thousand) making it the largest official diaspora in the city (Ovchinnikov, 2012). These numbers increased significantly after 2014 when refugees, forced and working migrants and tourists from Ukraine, started migrating to the cultural capital of Russia seeking a safer place to be and reshaping the existing Ukrainian community in St. Petersburg. Thus, I saw a need to explore experiences and perspectives of the conflict of Russian and Ukrainian citizens living in St. Petersburg as well as their visions of possibilities to resolve it.

1.3 – Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to develop a collaged image of the Ukrainian conflict created at the grass-roots level by Ukrainians and Russians, who at the time of the research lived in St. Petersburg. I also address these people's hopes and fears about the common future of their countries and their relationships and explore their vision of possibilities for conflict resolution. Deeper understanding of public opinion is essential for grass-roots leaders, NGOs, politicians, educators, various experts, and regular people interested or

involved with peacebuilding processes to establish the changes necessary to decrease confrontation between people and, one day, to bring this conflict to an end (Diamond & McDonald, 1996; Lederach, 1997).

1.4 – Context

Not one but three main contexts must be examined to establish the background for this research. First, we need to look at the main stages of Ukrainian history. Then we need to summarize some turning points of the contemporary Ukrainian conflict (from November 2013 to the time of the field work in spring-summer 2016). And finally, we need to sketch out maps of Russian and Ukrainian media fields.

1.4.1 – Brief Overview of Ukraine’s History

Ukrainian history can be tracked back more than a thousand years. The contemporary capital Kiev was formed in 482 A.D. (Lyachinska, 2012) and in the beginning of the past millennium this city was capital of ancient Kievan Rus’ (Russia) which gave origin to contemporary Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. Throughout centuries the beautiful fertile Ukrainian land has been a tidbit for invaders.

At different stages the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita), Rus’ and later the Russian Empire, Austria, Poland, and the USSR occupied different parts of Ukraine in succession. From the end of the fourteenth century until 1654, when Russia proclaimed its support to and later took over a large area of what was then a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, most of contemporary Ukraine was ruled from the Polish capital of Cracow with people experiencing low scale repression, but with freedom to use the western-Russian (Ruthenian) language and express their orthodox

religion (Reid, 2003). In the middle-late seventeenth century Ukraine was divided between the Commonwealth and Russia with the border going along the Dnieper River which flows through Kiev, the capital of contemporary Ukraine located in the central part of the country. At that time the left bank – everything on the east of the Dnieper river – became a part of Russia and the right bank – lands west of the Dnieper – remained under Commonwealth rule; and in this sense Kiev, which is also split into two halves by the river, became a location where “two legacies meet” as reflected in the city architecture (Reid, 2003, p. 16). This division left the western and eastern regions of Ukraine in different, confronting, and every-so-often war-involved countries. This tendency remained in place until the break of the Second World War to some extent affecting the history-based narrative about the Ukrainian identity formation. The above-described split of Ukraine between Poland and Russia lasted until the end of the eighteenth century. Later the Commonwealth was subdivided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, and as an entity ceased to exist. Thus, from the end of the eighteenth century until 1914 Ukraine was split between Russia and Austria. Then, from 1914 until the Second World War, Ukraine was divided between Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania (Reid, 2003; Smolyannikov, “Zemli...”).

Following the establishment of the Russian Empire under the reign of Peter the Great mass Russification, which continued to expand and intensify, was forced on Ukrainian lands remaining and coming under Russian rule. Ukrainian lands existing under western rulers experienced a different influence on their identity – Polonisation; however, in some areas where further geopolitical shifts occurred, Russification followed (Reid, 2003). The emergence of the USSR proceeded with further Russification, which then assumed that all

nations under Soviet rule would gradually and voluntarily dissolve their identities, abandon their language and culture, and adopt a Russian ethnic perspective merging into national identity of *homo sovieticus* (Fournier, 2002). Russification almost succeeded even before the emergence of the USSR: cities were “largely Russian-speaking, and the nobility [was] Russified to the point of indistinguishability from the genuine article,” but the erosion of the Ukrainian identity in favor of a Russian one “never went more than skin deep” (Reid, 2003, p.68). Since the term “Ukraine” wasn’t widely adopted until the end of the nineteenth century, people didn’t call themselves Ukrainians but they acknowledged that they were different from both Muscovites (Russians) and Poles (Reid, 2003).

Two World Wars changed the borders that existed within what we know as a contemporary Ukraine. Following World War I, in 1918, western Ukrainians made an attempt to achieve independence and established the West-Ukrainian People's Republic (Bahturina, 2000; Flaherty, 2012; Marples, 2007). In 1919 the Ukrainian People's Republic appeared uniting east and west as one country for a short period. Then, in just over three years, western Ukraine became a part of Poland and eastern Ukraine, which was widened by a few Russian territories including the Lugansk region, became the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR (Smolyannikov, “Dve...”). These lands were forced to reunite only in 1939-1940 when the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, also known as the pact of Molotov-Ribbentrop, was signed. According to a secret part of the pact, Polish land was subdivided between the two regimes, with eastern Poland joining eastern Soviet-occupied Ukraine, uniting Ukraine within its contemporary borders (Marples, 2007; Smolyannikov, “Ukraina...”). Ukraine was granted Crimea in 1954 by then first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita

Khrushchev. Thus the introduction of communism to the entire area known as contemporary Ukraine was completed (Flaherty, 2012). All the way through post-war time until 1991, the Ukrainian SSR was united.

The Soviet period of Ukrainian history also includes some stages which became especially provocative and contested when a newly reshaped narrative of Ukrainian history emerged after the collapse of the USSR (Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016). For example, Holodomor – the famine of 1932-33 during which at least four million Ukrainians starved or were starved to death was called genocide against Ukrainians by many people and was recognized as such by a number of scholars, politicians and some states, but was denied as a fact by others (Flaherty, 2012; Marples, 2007; Reid, 2003). Marples (2007) noticed that all leading scholars recognized the existence of the famine, yet the most authoritative ones suggested that it wasn't an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation. The European Parliament of the EU named Holodomor a crime against humanity; yet didn't recognize it as genocide against the Ukrainian people. Russia claims that during that time people of different nationalities died because of famine all over the Soviet Union, thus categorically denying any evidence of genocide (Kondrashin, 2008). Another particularly controversial phenomenon is the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) formed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Some saw this group as a “terrorist organization devoted to attaining an independent Ukraine” partially through cooperating with Nazi Germany (Marples, 2007, p. 308). When Germany failed to provide independence to Ukraine the organization was abandoned by one wing of the organization, the OUN-B, led by Stepan Bandera (participants of this organization and followers of ideas of Bandera were named ‘Banderites’) (Marples, 2007). The OUN-B then posed opposition against both Nazi and

Soviet occupiers (Marples, 2007). By 1943 the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) – another contradictory phenomenon in Ukrainian history – superseded OUN-B, which by then discarded the ‘Fascist element’, focusing on a campaign against the Soviet regime and Red Army as main sources of contemporary and future oppression, while viewing a potential alliance with democratic powers of the west as the only possible source of aid (Marples, 2007, p. 309). For some Ukrainians, Bandera and other participants of the OUN and UPA were national heroes who fought to death to achieve the independence for Ukraine; for others they were hated villains who collaborated with the main enemy, led by Hitler, and betrayed their own people (Flaherty, 2012; Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016).

In a similar manner the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) is another debated topic, since for some the return of the Red Army was an occupation when one dictator was replaced with another; the Soviet regime was sometimes even tougher than Nazis. For others the Great Patriotic War was a common victory over Nazism, portrayed as a heroic act of the multi-national Red Army with Soviet people fighting alongside others to defeat the enemy (Marples, 2007). The first group of narratives about the OUN, UPA and the Great Patriotic War is more popular in Ukrainian-speaking western regions surrounding the western-oriented city of Lvov. The second group is widespread in the Russian-oriented southern and eastern regions, especially in Donbass, which borders Russia and is largely an industrial area densely populated with Russian-speakers (Flaherty 2012; 2016 a; Marples, 2007; Osipian & Osipian, 2006; Plekhanov, 2016). Thus, according Reid’s (2003) research, polar narratives and corresponding identities appear on the opposite sides of Ukraine and partly merge in the center. Ukraine’s independence from the USSR was proclaimed on August 24, 1991. Some scholars argue that it was the culmination of a long fight for

independence and sovereignty (Flaherty, 2012; Reid, 2003); others suggest it happened “by default, as a product of the integration of the larger state of which [Ukraine] was an organic part” (Plekhanov, 2016, p. 4). One way or another, Ukraine, like all other former Soviet Republics, wasn’t prepared for this independence (Reid, 2003). The economic recession in 1992-1994 turned the new country into depression and the strongly corrupted state sank into poverty (Plekhanov, 2016). The second Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma, claimed the need to *create* Ukrainians, suggesting mass Ukrainization as a path to a united Ukrainian identity and promoting the rise of Ukrainian nationalists (Plekhanov, 2016). Some scholars argue that since Ukraine’s independence social differences defined by ethnicity, language use and religion have faded, and until the contemporary crisis the 21st century Ukrainian population was broadly characterized by non-accommodating bilingualism, fluid language choice, and Orthodoxy as the ambient faith (Wanner, 2014). Other researchers state that for many citizens Ukrainization, promoting the Ukrainian language and culture, had an artificial nature and lacked the potential to bring the broad and diverse regions together under the national narrative being promoted (Plekhanov, 2016). The constitution of 1996 proclaimed Ukrainian as the only state language, yet guaranteed the freedom of school education in other national minority languages including education in Russian for ethnic Russians (Reid, 2003). However, Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians were left without much choice (Fournier, 2002). Reid (2003) noticed that the historical fight over Ukrainian land was reflected in the country’s name – “Ukraine is literally translated as ‘on the edge’ or ‘borderland’” (p.1) – and probably affected the mentality of many Ukrainians, who after centuries of shifting borders and existence under different regimes, even after proclaiming independence, were not in a hurry to develop and adopt a

national identity. Wanner (2014) also noticed that just as Ukrainian governments have tried to use the borderland location with access to both Europe and Eurasia to the country's benefit, many "Ukrainians have tried to be both Russian and Ukrainian speakers, both believers and doubters, joiners and nonaffiliated" (p. 437). Besides, the national identity question then for millions was less of a focus than a concern about further economic stagnation, lack of reforms, and corruption in the government apparatus jointly pushing the country which had and still has all the potential for prosperity towards complete failure (Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016; Reid, 2003).

After two presidential terms Kuchma left Ukraine with the beginnings of democracy and civil society along with political and economic instability, and still multiple, yet peacefully coexisting national identities within one state (Plekhanov, 2016; Reid, 2003). In 2004, the presidential elections were marked by fraud and triggered the Orange Revolution. The Orange camp of national-democrats led by Viktor Yushchenko and his then ally Yuliya Tymoshenko called for mass protests, challenging the victory of the candidate Viktor Yanukovich who was supported by the industrial, largely pro-Russian eastern segment of the country (Plekhanov, 2016). Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians hit the streets. The nonviolent revolution resulted in a third round of elections, after which Orange camp leader Viktor Yushchenko became the new president of Ukraine.

The peaceful revolution demonstrated the strength of Ukrainian civil society and the capacity of the political system to deal with a serious conflict (Plekhanov, 2016). In 2010, after five years of what Plekhanov (2016) called a "study of mismanagement of state affairs," when former Orange allies turned against each other (p.9) and the Ukrainian economy was in crisis (Plekhanov, 2016; Flaherty, 2012), Viktor Yanukovich was elected

the new president. His efforts to improve then tense relations with Russia which still had a strong economic and political influence over Ukraine, and the decision to pause Ukrainization (which included the adoption of a new law allowing official use of Russian and other minority languages at local levels) were viewed by many as a betrayal of national interests (Plekhanov, 2016). Despite people's hopes, the economic situation in the country didn't change, the level of corruption remained high, and there was an increasing presence of the Yanukovich 'family' – relatives, friends, former classmates, and people originating from Donbass (Wilson, 2016) – in power structures. This did not remain unnoticed and all worked together fueling mass discontent. As Dyer (2014) and Plekhanov (2016) noticed the precedent of the peaceful Orange Revolution played a cruel joke on Ukrainians, when instead of waiting for the next scheduled elections which were supposed to take place in a little over a year, for the second time within one decade Ukrainians hit the streets to demonstrate their protest. This time it was against Yanukovich's decision to postpone the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU and their dissatisfaction with the government in general. These protests quickly turned into the second revolution in contemporary Ukraine, which was named Euromaidan, also known as the "Revolution of Dignity" (a term more popular in western-focused rhetoric). This time blood was spilled and the revolution turned into a protracted, deep-rooted, domestic and international conflict (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016; Thompson, 2017) which will be discussed in the next sub-section.

1.4.2 – Chronology of the Contemporary Ukrainian Conflict

Since the events of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine are the main subject of the research and are discussed throughout the entire work, in this sub-section I provide a brief context for

the conflict represented as a chronology of the main stages of the Ukrainian crisis from late 2013 to September 2017. I cite only some of the many newspapers articles and sources that followed the conflict. For a political map of Ukraine see Appendix B.

- November 21, 2013 – After the Yanukovich government brought negotiations on an Association Agreement with the EU – an act perceived by many as the first step towards a prosperous future within western world – to the final stage, the Ukrainian president made a decision to postpone signing the agreement. This was done in the face of opposition with Russia, which stated that if Ukraine were to proceed with Euro Integration, Russia would have to erect customs barriers to protect its markets, a perspective that wouldn't serve the interests of many among the Yanukovich pro-Russian electorate segment (Plekhanov, 2016). Thousands of Ukrainians hit the streets in the following days (BBC, 2014 b; Thompson, 2017).
- November 30, 2013 – The special police force, Berkut, was ordered to remove the protesters' camps from Maidan (Independence Square), an act that turned into brutal clashes between police and protesting students and led to a major escalation of the political confrontation (Plekhanov, 2016).
- Early December, 2013 – About 800 thousand people rallied in Kiev, occupying Kiev city hall and Maidan Square (BBC, 2014 b). The protesting crowd consisted of representatives and supporters of various political parties, civil organizations, social groups and non-affiliated citizens. At that time a military group - the "Right Sector", a coalition of ultranationalist militant groups, was created "to challenge the government's monopoly on the use of force" (Plekhanov, 2016, p.18).

- December 17, 2013 – Russian president Putin offered, and Ukrainian president Yanukovich accepted, a \$15 billion package of loans and reduced gas prices. The EU offered a \$1 billion package, while Ukraine asked for \$150 billion (Plekhanov, 2016). The acceptance of the Russian offer fueled protests even further (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016).
- Mid January 2014 – Analogous to those in Kiev, protests began in some regions in western Ukraine; protesters stormed administrative buildings and the first few people were killed, but the revolution managed to remain largely non-violent (Plekhanov, 2016).
- February 18-21, 2014 – The ‘Heavenly Hundred’, more than a hundred people including protesters and police, were killed. Later it was suggested that most of the people were killed by unidentified snipers (Traynor and Salem, 2014). Yanukovich yielded to opposition demands and signed the Agreement which assumed the return to the 2004 Constitution, the establishment of a new government, constitutional reform, and early presidential elections (not later than December 2014) (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016; Thompson, 2017).
- February 22, 2014 – President Yanukovich left for Kharkov. In the meantime protesters took over the presidential administrative building; parliament voted to remove the president from power and scheduled the next elections for May 25, 2014, and Yanukovich appeared on television to denounce the ‘coup’. (Plekhanov, 2016; Thompson, 2017) Later, Yanukovich escaped to Russia.
- February 23-26, 2014 – Parliament voted to ban the Russian language as the second official language fueling mass protests in southern and eastern regions. The initiative

was declined. Alexander Turchynov became the Speaker of the Supreme Rada (parliament) and Interim President of Ukraine forming a provisional government dominated by representatives of western regions (BBC, 2014 b).

- March 1, 2014 – The Russian Parliament granted the President the right to use military forces to defend the Russian population in Ukraine (BBC, 2014 b; Thompson, 2017).
- March 16-18, 2014 – The Referendum on independence in Crimea took place, reportedly attended by 97% of voters (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016), while the peninsula remained blocked from larger Ukraine by Russian troops newly transferred and already present in Sevastopol under the Russian Ukrainian Naval Base for Gas treaty (2010) (Plekhanov, 2016). President Putin signed a bill to absorb Crimea into Russia (BBC, 2014 b). Russia's action in Crimea was strongly opposed in Kiev, western Ukraine, and the western world in general, and the results of the referendum were named illegitimate, to this date not recognized as legitimate by Ukraine and the international community (Plekhanov, 2016; Rosenberg, 2014; Thompson, 2017).
- April 2014 – Protests against the results of the revolution in eastern and southeastern regions gained pace. Major anti-Maidan protests took place in the Dnepropetrovsk, Donetsk, Lugansk, and Kharkov regions with similar minor protests in other southeastern regions (BBC, 2014 b). Militia forces were formed in Donbass. Protesters in Lugansk, Donetsk, and Kharkov occupied government buildings in their regions demanding a referendum on independence. Control over a Kharkov government building was regained in a day (BBC, 2014 b). The Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) were established (TASS, 2014).

- April 15, 2014 – Acting President Turchynov announced the ‘Anti-Terrorist Operation’ (ATO) in the east of Ukraine against pro-Russian separatists. (BBC, 2014 b; Thompson, 2017). This ATO was still in progress in September 2017.
- May 2, 2014 – Clashes took place in Odessa, leaving 42 people dead; most were pro-Russian activists trapped in a burning Union building (BBC, 2014 b; Maltseva, 2016).
- May 11, 2014 – A referendum on independence took place in Donetsk and Lugansk (BBC, 2014 a, b; Plekhanov, 2016). Neither the Ukrainian nor any other government, except for the leaders of self-proclaimed republics, recognized the referendum results (Plekhanov, 2016; Sonne & Shishkin, 2014).
- May 24, 2014 – Leaders of the DPR and the LPR sign the Agreement on Association of People Republics into ‘Novorossiya’ (New Russia) (TASS, 2014).
- May 25, 2014 – Petr Poroshenko, the ‘Chocolate King,’ a candy company magnate and politician from the nationalist camp, was elected as the new President of Ukraine. The election wasn’t held in much of the east (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016; Thompson, 2017).
- June 25, 2014 – The Russian Parliament canceled a resolution allowing the use of Russian military force in Ukraine (BBC, 2014 b).
- June 27, 2014 – President Poroshenko signed an Association Agreement with the EU (BBC, 2014 b).
- July 17, 2014 – Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down near the village of Grabove in rebel-held territory killing the 298 international citizens on board (BBC, 2014 b; Black, 2016 a; TASS, 2014; Thompson, 2017).

- July 30, 2014 – The EU and the US announced intensification and extension of the economic and political sanctions against Russia implemented after the Crimean referendum (BBC, 2014 b). Russia responded with a food export ban which was applied against the EU, the US, Canada, Australia, and Norway in 2014; expanded over Lichtenstein, Iceland, Albania, and Montenegro in 2015, and expanded over Ukraine in 2016 (European Commission, 2017).
- August 22, 2014 – The first Russian humanitarian convoy entered Ukraine to provide aid to people in the Donbass region without permission from the Ukrainian government (BBC, 2014 b).
- Late August 2014 – Ukrainian forces took control over a half of the Donbass region; the two regional capitals (Donetsk and Lugansk) and the border with Russia remained under the control of the militia (Plekhanov, 2016).
- September 2014 – Representatives of Kiev, Russia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Lugansk and Donetsk People’s Republics signed the first Minsk Agreements. Negotiations led to a shaky ceasefire with immediate violations (BBC, 2014 b; Plekhanov, 2016; TASS, 2014; Thompson, 2017).
- October 12, 2014 – President Putin called back thousands of troops stationed near the Ukrainian border (BBC, 2014 b).
- October 26, 2014 – The pro-western parties coalition won early parliamentary elections in Ukraine (BBC, 2014 b). Elections weren’t held in Crimea, nine (out of twenty-one) municipalities of the Donetsk region, and in six (out of eleven) municipalities of the Lugansk region (Bedritskiy, Byshok, & Kochetkov, 2014).

- November 2014 – NATO reported Russian troops and military equipment crossing the Ukrainian border (BBC, 2014 b). Moscow denied these claims (Thompson, 2017). The UN reported more than 1.7 million children in the war-affected area were in serious danger intensified by an unusually harsh winter (Thompson, 2017).
- January 2015 –Violent conflict between the rebels and Ukrainian forces escalated in the Donbass region. Rebels gained control over the airport in Donetsk (Thompson, 2017). A travel permit system was introduced between rebel-held areas and the rest of Ukraine. To leave rebel-controlled areas people now had to apply for a special pass and applications were accepted only in Ukrainian-held areas or at checkpoints (Maltseva, 2016).
- February 12, 2015 – The Minsk II Agreements were signed (Thompson, 2017). Parties agreed to: a total immediate bilateral ceasefire (starting February 15); bilateral withdrawal of heavy weapons (within two weeks); OSCE monitoring; dialogue on local elections for the rebel-held regions; total amnesty for participants of the conflict; release of all hostages and detainees ('all for all'); delivery of humanitarian aid (under international supervision); restoration of all economic and social linkages to affected territories; restoration of Ukrainian government control over its borders; withdrawal of all international armed forces under the supervision of the OSCE; and constitutional reform, which would include decentralization and permanent special status for rebel-held regions by the end of 2015 (CSIS, n.d., TASS, 2014; The Telegraph, 2015).
- February 2015 - September 2017 – The ceasefire was in place with frequent and regular violations. More agreements on ceasefire were made throughout this time, yet both sides violated all of them (Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016). The withdrawal of heavy

weapons was not completed (McKirdy, 2017). Other points of Minsk II Agreements had not been implemented in full or at all (Dempsey, 2017). Sanctions against Russia were extended and expanded a number of times (CSIS, n.d.). The Donbass region faced an emerging humanitarian crisis with millions of forced migrants accompanied by a slowly progressing war and a humanitarian and economic blockade imposed on the self-proclaimed regions by the Ukrainian government (Maltseva, 2016).

Beginning in 2015, the Ukrainian conflict, which was once a very hot topic for international media, was slowly turning into a forgotten war despite the fact that in reality the situation in the war-affected regions has been only worsening since then (Altshuller, 2017; Maltseva, 2016).

1.4.3 – Contemporary Russian and Ukrainian Media Fields

Television is the most popular medium in Russia, with three national television channels – *First Channel* (51% publicly owned, controlled by the government), *Rossiya* (100% government owned), and *NTV* (owned by the state-controlled energy giant Gazprom) - being delivered to over 98 percent of the urban population and over 93 percent of the rural population of the country (Federal States Statistics Service, 2008). Those three channels provide news as well as entertainment programs, while *STS* and *TNT* are entertainment-only channels. In the international arena, besides *Russia Today*, the English-language satellite channel that was established in 2005 and promotes Russian interests, there is also an international multimedia news service *Sputnik* (launched in 2014) (Krasnoboka, n.d.). The only independent television channel is *Dozhd* (Rain). *Petersburg-Channel 5* (commercial, state-owned), *Russia K* (culture and arts, state-owned), *Russia 2* (commercial, state-owned), and *Russia 24* (news, state-owned) are among the other main Russian

channels. There are more than thirty-five thousand registered newspapers in Russia. Some are considered ‘yellow’ sources: journalism presenting little or no legitimately researched news and which tend to be exaggerations of news or pieces that are scandal-mongering. These include *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Trud*, and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*. Others such as *Argumenty i Fauty*, *Kommersant*, and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* are considered more truly journalistic and analytical. All of these periodicals are presented on the world wide web as well. Despite the wide variety, Krasnoboka (n.d.) notes that the role and popularity of printed media in Russia has dramatically declined through the last decades. *Radio Rossii* (state-owned, the most widely spread), *Mayak* (state-owned), *Voice of Russia* (English language, state-run), and *Echo of Moscow* (bought by Gazprom, known as an oppositional, critical, and independent station) are considered to be among the main Russian news and entertainment radio stations. Six out of ten Russians in the rural areas and three out of four in the cities use the Internet (.ru and .рф domains) (Lehtisaari, 2015), which has become a common source of information for many Russians. This is done through various online media and main social networks, such as *Vk.com* (or *Vkontakte*), *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Odnoklassniki*. *Yandex.ru* is the leading Russian search engine; *TASS* and *Interfax* are the two main news agencies, and; *Lenta.ru* is among the most popular online news sources (BBC, 2017).

In general, the Russian media field of the twenty-first century is characterized by increased direct and/or indirect state-involvement and state-control which is partially implemented through changing and hardening media-related legislation (Krasnoboka, n.d.; Lehtisaari, 2015).

In Ukraine, television is also a dominant news medium with over 96 percent of all Ukrainians watching news on television at least weekly (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2014). Unlike in Russia, in Ukraine the television business is dominated by private stations, which are owned by four main media groups: *DF Group*, *1+1 Media*, *StarLightMedia* and *SCM* – all of which belong to oligarchs, reflecting their interests and serving their goals (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). The most popular among over thirty national channels are: *Inter* (belongs to D. Firtash and S. Lyovochkin); *Ukraina* (belongs to R. Akhmetov); *1+1* (belongs to I. Kolomoysky); *STB*, *ICTV* and *Novy Kanal* (all belong to V. Pinchuk) (Rozvadovskyy, n.d.). Owned by the President of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko, *Channel 5* falls behind in the ratings. Another popular public television channel is *UA: First*, which in 2015 replaced state-owned *UTI*. There is also a joint project of Ukrainian Internet and television journalists named *Hromadske.tv*, which positions itself as a provider of objective and unbiased information. Most citizens know who owns which channels; yet, the ownership structures are not very transparent (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Other Ukrainian media outlets are predominantly private-owned as well. The main radio stations are *URI* (operated by the state-owned company), with the main commercial entertaining stations being *Russkoye Radio*, *Europa Plus*, *Hit FM*, *Nashe Radio*, and the commercial news-based *Era FM* (BBC, 2015 a). Additional popular radio stations are *Radio Shanson* and *Kiss FM*. There are more than thirty thousand registered printed periodicals, although many of them were registered in the 1990s and never developed. Three quarters of the print media market is controlled by six publishing houses, including two foreign-owned (*Burda-Ukraine* and *EdipPress*) and four Ukrainian-owned, two of which are owned by the earlier mentioned oligarchs: R. Akhmetov (*Segondya-multimedia*), and V. Pinchuk (*Fakty i Commentarii*)

(Rozvadovskyy, n.d.). The main newspapers are: *Fakty i Kommentarii, Vesti, Segodnya, Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine, Argumenti i Fakty v Ukraine, Zerkalo Nedeli, Holos Ukrainy*, and *Kiev Post* (BBC, 2015 a). Many newspapers are printed in both Ukrainian and Russian languages and the press represents a broad variety of formats and political affiliations. However, after the annexation of Crimea to Russia and the beginning of the conflict in the east, “national media has adopted a united patriotic agenda” and relays of leading Russian TV channels were banned by the state (BBC, 2015 a). In the rebel-held areas some outlets seen as pro-Kiev were shut down as well (BBC, 2015 a). The Internet is widespread in Ukraine (.ua domains). It is named as the second source of information after television (Reporters without Borders, 2016). The main news agencies are *Ukrinform* (state-run), *UNIAN* (private), and *Interfax-Ukraine* (private). The main news sites are *Ukrainska Pravda* and *TSN*, and the most visited websites are *Google.com, Mail.ru, Vk.com, Yandex.ua, and YouTube.com*. The most popular social networks are the same as those in Russia: *Vkontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, and Twitter* (BBC, 2015 a).

Despite more frequent attacks on journalists throughout the ongoing conflict, after the revolution in 2014 the status of the press in Ukraine improved from Not Free to Partly Free (Freedom House, 2015), and the public trust in media also slightly increased; however, so far Ukraine still “lacks a public media authority to act as a counterweight, and the conversion of the state broadcaster into a public service broadcaster is still in its initial stage” (Reporters without Borders, 2016, p. 5).

1.5 – Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study, explained its purpose, anticipated its significance, and provided an outline for the study. The following chapter consists of a literature review, which provides the theoretical foundation framing the research.

Chapter II - Literature Review

2.1 – Introduction

The theoretical framework shared here provides structure for the analysis of the contemporary Ukrainian conflict and considers causes for different stages of the confrontation and possibilities for future changes. Further, this framework assists in explaining study participants' perceptions based on their experiences and visions. The literature and theory are organized according to three main areas. The first section discusses ideas of Maslow (1943) and Burton (1990 a, b) on basic human needs and their role in conflicts. The relative deprivation framework (Gurr, 1970) is also addressed in this section. The second section examines the impact of identity and its changes during the conflict and explores the theoretical background explaining people's behavior and identity changes in the face of danger. It also focuses on research provided by Korostelina (2013), Flaherty (2012, 2016 a), Fournier (2002), Wilson (2016), Maltseva (2016) and others on national identity issues in Ukraine. The third section looks at the Control and Chaos paradigms (McNair, 2006), which examine the role of the media and propaganda in conflict escalation. This section also provides a brief overview of existing work on the place of propaganda related to the conflict. The exploration of these three main concepts allows us to better understand the roots of the conflict in Ukraine and the reasons behind its escalation and it opens a window for future steps towards the conflict's resolution.

2.2 – Basic Human Needs

Basic human needs (BHN) theorists propose that long-lasting social conflicts appear in response to unsatisfied physiological and psychological needs (Burton, 1990 a, b; Jeong,

2000; Maslow, 1943). If a system doesn't function properly and cannot satisfy necessities inherent for people's development, then sooner or later the society starts to demonstrate discontent which may result in violent conflict.

Maslow (1943) states that people are motivated to satisfy their ontological needs, and this becomes a driving power for change. He organizes BHN in hierarchical order, suggesting that first humans need to satisfy their physiological needs. When these are met the need for safety emerges, then the need for love, and later the need for esteem; the need of self-actualization is placed on the top of this pyramid (Maslow, 1943). Despite the general pyramidal organization of needs suggesting that a need emerges when the other, more pre-potent one is satisfied, Maslow (1943) specifies that in most cases, people have more than one motivation to act and different needs are at the same time partially satisfied and partially unsatisfied. In other words, a new need emerges slowly increasing in the degree of dissatisfaction when the other, more pre-potent need is gradually more satisfied.

Burton (1990 a, b), Rothman (1997), Northrup (1989), Rosenberg (2003) and Gurr (1970) develop ideas of a human needs theory, which argues that BHN are ontological and genetic; they are universal and essential for human growth and development. Marker (2003) summarizes basic human needs (as suggested by Burton a, b) as beyond physiological and including needs for safety/security, belongingness/love, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, identity, cultural security, freedom, distributive justice and participation. Satisfaction of unmet needs and sub-needs transform negative feelings into a positive state; and, according to Redekop (2002), "Self becomes conscious of its own wellness and efficacy" (p.50). As Byrne (2009) puts it, through the satisfaction of needs and sub-needs, anger is replaced with self-recognizance; depression is substituted with self-esteem; shame is replaced by self-

actualization; fear turns into self-confidence, and; sadness is substituted with self-respect (Byrne, 2009, pp. 57-58; Redekop, 2002).

Burton (1990 a) suggests that needs don't emerge in a particular order, and describes them as a simultaneous collection of human development essentials. In other words, if one or a number of an individual's needs are unmet, they become more pronounced and become a driving force for change (Burton, 1990b; Rothman, 1997). Rosenberg (2003) views violence as an attempt to satisfy unmet BHN, and suggests that to find other ways to respond to human needs we should define essential needs and recognize their universal nature (Valenzuela, 2005). Burton (1990 a) states that human needs will be pursued, and if a system is not compatible with these needs, frustration emerges, which leads to "disturbed and anti-social personal and group behaviors" (p.33). In cases of unmet needs for identity, recognition and autonomy the resultant frustration often has an aggressive nature (Burton, 1990 a). In this way, Burton indirectly develops a relationship between BHN approach and the frustration-aggression theory offered by Dollard (1939), which argues, "aggression is always a consequence of frustration" (p.1).

Most basic needs theorists differentiate between interests, values, and needs. Burton (1990 a) states that needs represent universal motivation and are "an integral part of human being"; values represent "ideas, habits, customs and beliefs", which characterize particular groups; however, being distinct from eternal needs, values may alter over periods of time (pp.36-37). He says interests are "occupational, social, political and economic aspirations of the individual, and of identity groups of individuals within a social system" (Burton, 1990 a, pp. 37-38). Thus, interests are shared among groups, are negotiable, and alter depending on circumstances, meaning they are not an inherent part of humans. Interests may affect tactics

and policies, serving to fulfill needs and values. Although a threat to human values may result in aggressive and defensive behavior, the defense of values serves the satisfaction of particular needs. Maslow (1943) argues that there are particular conditions for basic needs satisfaction; for example, “freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes so long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express one's self, freedom to investigate and seek for information, freedom to defend one's self, justice, fairness, honesty, orderliness in the group” (p. 383). When these conditions are threatened, the defensive reaction caused is almost as strong as if the basic needs were in danger.

Summarizing the conversation, we may say that basic human needs are non-negotiable and universal for human beings, represent a fundamental level of human motivation and when unmet cause frustration, often resulting in an aggressive behavior (Burton, 1990 a; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). In such a manner, BHN theorists see prolonged, often intra-state conflicts, as a consequence of humans’ essential wish to satisfy their unmet needs on individual, group and societal levels (Northrup, 1989; Marker, 2003). These conflicts occur when the demands for wellbeing, safety, cultural security and recognition, as well as for participation, freedom, and distributive justice are denied or threatened (Azar, 1990). Burton (1990 a) suggests that understanding the issues at stake is crucial to understanding a conflict and the development of further intervention.

Relative Deprivation Framework

A relative deprivation framework explores human motivation and expands ideas developed by basic human needs theorists, suggesting that in many cases unsatisfied needs in themselves are not sufficient enough to lead to a major conflict and provoke widespread violence. Gurr (1970) and Jeong (2000) state that even an enormous level of poverty or

“absolute deprivation” (Gurr, 1970, p.24) in a society often cannot be used as a direct indicator of upcoming revolt or revolution. In other words, peoples whose essential needs are not met within the system in which they exist do not usually turn towards violence unless other motivational factors are involved.

According to the relative deprivation framework, it is the gap between people’s expectations about the standard of living or goods and conditions they think they deserve, and what they receive in reality, that moves people to protest. As Davies and Jeong put it, “it is the ‘dissatisfied state of mind’ rather than the tangible supply of goods or social conditions (such as freedom) that produce political instability and violence” (Davies, 1971, p.136, as cited in Jeong, 2000, p.69). In this regard, if people do not expect or hope for any better life conditions, they tend to be less discontented than when they feel that they are entitled to some particular goods, opportunities or conditions (Jeong, 2000). When the level of expectation rises people feel more deprived, which produces frustration; and frustration, in its turn, causes anger and aggression (Dollard 1939; Gurr, 1970; Jeong, 2000). Often people’s expectations rise faster than society can satisfy them, which, coupled with a generally low standard of living, make people feel more discontent (Jeong, 2000).

A feeling of deprivation may also be caused by a comparison of self to others. Thus, exposing impoverished or developing societies to a Western level and style of life can raise the level of dissatisfaction among people (Gurr, 1970). Relative deprivation experienced by a group, rather than by an individual, may be seen as an important factor, predicting social attitudes, as well as a scale of further action and ensuing social change (Aleksynska, 2011). Gurr (1970) states that collective action reaches its violent potential when most people in a particular society believe that they were deprived of receiving their most valued

goods/conditions of life for a long time, when they assume that they have tried all means available to them as individuals and as a group to attain their needs, and they realize that violence remains their last hope to achieve what they feel they deserve (p.92).

Looking at the Ukrainian conflict, and especially at its first stages, we may propose that Ukrainians who were exposed to European culture, economy and education through the entire history of independence and even longer, for years felt deprived of the conditions of life they observed while travelling to neighboring states or communicating with immigrants and tourists. Analyzing the pre-conflict situation in Ukraine, Plekhanov (2016) noticed that many Ukrainians viewed an Association Agreement with the European Union as a first step towards deep and long-lasting integration with the West. This integration would make the country and its citizens more prosperous through access to EU markets, and Western investments would help to renovate the Ukrainian economy and overcome its curse – corruption. Additionally, people felt that they would find better-paid employment opportunities in Europe (Plekhanov, 2016). By fall 2013 Yanukovich and his government brought the discussion of alliance with the EU, which had lasted more than seven years, to its final stage. However, due to several technical and political reasons, President Yanukovich decided to postpone the signing of the Agreement (Plekhanov, 2016, p.11), thus fueling mass protests among Ukrainian students, which later turned into a revolution. Gurr (1970) points out an underlying tendency of such a reaction, suggesting that the most violent and often revolutionary processes happen in societies where citizens have been deprived for some time of their most valued goals. At the moment people were led to believe that their government was due to deliver these goods or conditions to them, they also realized that their hopes were not coming true.

People's aspirations also tend to grow quickly when newly emerged leaders assure them that these hopes are due to come true (Lerner, 1958, as cited in Gurr, 1970) as happened during Euromaidan. Gurr (1970) argues, "mass revolutionary and secessionist movements are most likely to develop if discontent is widespread and intense among both elite and mass, the result of relative or absolute deterioration of many conditions of social existence" (p. 343). In the case of Ukraine, the revolution, which was led by elites and supported by masses, did not find mass support in all regions of Ukraine (Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016) partially because other regions viewed the situation from a different position. At the same time, after the revolution both elites and masses in eastern and southeastern regions could feel deprived of political access (Black, 2016 a; Duleba, 2014; Maltseva, 2016), which either led a new wave of the conflict, or fueled a qualitatively different conflict.

The basic human needs perspective and relative deprivation framework discussed in this section can be used for the analysis of the original causes of Ukrainian protests and the revolution. To some point these theories might also be applied to a broader Ukrainian crisis. However, to understand the depth of the ongoing conflict and to find possibilities for conflict transformation and resolution we need to look at social identity perspectives and explore the results of existing research on Ukrainian national identities.

2.3 – Identity Perspective

Addressing the root causes of the conflict is essential to its understanding and transformation. Identity-based conflicts are recognized by academics and practitioners to be of the most intractable, deep-rooted, and fundamental, while identity groups are the main actors or focus of political struggle (Black, 2008). Consequently, it is important to look at the origins of the

social identity perspective, analyze possible mechanisms affecting identity formation, mobilization and polarization, and look at some possibilities for conflict resolution from the social identity point of view.

2.3.1 - Social Identity Framework

The social identity framework, which explores “the social use of cultural markers to claim, achieve, or ascribe group membership” (Black, 2008, p. 147), originated in the field of psychology and later gained influence in political and organizational behavior, language and communication studies (Spears, 2012), and in the field of conflict resolution (Northrup, 1989). Formulated by Tajfel (1972, as referred in Hogg, 2001) and developed by Tajfel & Turner (1979), social identity theory introduces the concept of social identity as a way in which intergroup behavior can be explained. Social identity is viewed as person’s self-concept originating from apparent membership in a specific social group (Spears 2012; Tajfel, 1978; Turner & Oakes, 1986). This perspective predicts certain intergroup tendencies and behaviors based on the perceived group legitimacy, group status differences and their stability, and the level of mobility of members among different identity groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Spears (2012) summarizes social identity as “the product of social categorization and of identification with the groups we belong to, which then we characterize as part of ourselves” (p. 203) and suggests that the process of categorization is followed by a social comparison to other groups. That is, human nature moves people to gain and maintain a feeling of positive distinctiveness from social identities to which we compare ourselves. Basic human needs theorists, who also view identity as an understanding of self through a scope of comparison with the outer world, suggest that identity becomes more pronounced when it is threatened, devalued or not recognized by people of other identities (Marker, 2003; Northrup, 1989).

Social identity theory aims to explain social change and the motivation underlying this change (Black 2008; Jeong 2000; Spears, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Northrup (1989), since it is in a human's nature to develop a particular understanding of self and a group identity, which provides a feeling of self-significance and purpose, the maintenance and protection of our identity becomes an important element of conflicts (p.63). There are two main theoretical perspectives explaining the processes of identity formation as well as the need for identity in general. Primordial theories purport that primordial ties such as kinship, language and customs, among others, determine one's belonging to a specific identity group, and the perception is that individuals are born into specific identity groups. On the other hand, constructivists argue that identity is manufactured rather than given (Jeong, 2000, pp. 71-73). Primordialists view ethnic and national groups as deeply rooted and do not believe that they can be extinguished. Constructivists view the same groups as constructed for political and economic reasons; these identity groups emerge, rise, fall, and might be replaced by other social formations as the realities and needs of society change (Smith, 1990; Hobsbawm, 1998, both as referred to in Kaufman, 2012). The last approach to social identity formation is more relevant in the frames of this study. Turner & Oakes (1986) explain social identity as a mechanism with the help of which societies, often through conflicting situations, achieve goals, structuring common fields for members and affecting their psychology. On the other hand, following ideas of Smith, Korostelina (2013) proposes the dual nature of identity formation, stating that social identity is a product of both historical processes and conscious manipulations in a society. Mobilization and polarization of identities can often be explained by instrumentalism, when different identity elements such as ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and others are used by elites as manipulative instruments to promote individual or

group interests (Jeong, 2000). The media may become one of the tools used for identity mobilization. However, Black (2008) believes mass media may just assign an explanatory power to identity, which stops the further analysis of the causes of a conflict.

Most scholars agree that identities in themselves are not a source of a conflict, and different identity groups may remain passive. Social, material, or political inequalities (Jeong, 2000), or threats posed by other identity groups (Northrup, 1989) awaken group identity and cause mobilization of resources to maintain that identity. Polarization and ‘extremization’³ of identities happens not only due to comparison to the out-group, but also along with the in-group dynamic through discussions, when the prevailing in-group views are extremist (Wetherell, 1987). In this way, during conflict escalation group identities polarize, exaggerating the image of the opposing party to a point of denial of its humanity, while at the same time increasing the value of self-identity and the importance of belonging to the identity group (Black, 2008). Northrup (1989) proposes four psychological stages of identity transformation during conflict escalation: threat (invalidation of the core identities), distortion (or aggression – response to invalidation), rigidification (polarization, crystallizing and hardening identities, which often includes dehumanization and an outbreak of violence) and collusion (a stage when parties accept the conflict as a part of normal life and collude to behave to maintain it). She argues that conflict may de-escalate during any of these consecutive phases; but the further the conflict proceeds, the less likely de-escalation is to happen (Northrup, 1989).

Since identity-based conflicts are viewed as among the most intractable, related peace processes involve multi-step and multi-level changes, which, along with others, should focus

³ The term appeared in Wetherell (1987).

on identity needs. To find solutions for such conflicts, parties eventually need to change the structure of their society and relationships in order to develop respect for cultural and political autonomy of different identity groups. Such work might be achieved through a facilitated dialogue (Jeong, 2000). Northrup (1989) suggests a three-level model of affecting intractable conflicts: 1) peripheral changes to the identities (changes in external conditions or behavior of participants of a conflict, for example, a cease-fire); 2) less peripheral changes not core to the identities (changes of the dynamics of the conflict which don't affect identities, for example, an agreement not to target civilians during an armed conflict), and 3) changes in parties' identities (transformation of a core sense of self, for example, change of government during an international conflict may result in a different attitude towards a country, perceived previously as an enemy) (p. 77). Level three assumes deep changes; however, most conflict transformation begins from level two, since direct pressure for identity change may feel more threatening. When planning for long-term changes, it is best to realize that there must be some identity shifts for a long-lasting transformation (Northrup, 1989).

Kelman (2006) also proposes a three-process model of social influence, which includes conflict settlement, conflict resolution, and reconciliation; however, the strategies for change in Kelman's model differ somewhat from Northrup's perspective. In this peacemaking model conflict settlement assumes changes, which aim to cover parties' interests. Conflict resolution includes changes in identity through the transformation of relationships of different identity groups. Further, reconciliation promotes negotiation of parties' identities and allows changes to be internalized (Kelman, 2006). This peacemaking process presupposes that all social entities involved with the conflict and seeking peace (including individuals, groups, organizations, societies and collectives) must protect and promote their interests, establish and

maintain their relationships, and affirm and express their identities (Kelman, 2004, p. 267, as cited in Kelman, 2006, pp. 23-24). In this way, the concept of interests, relationships, and identities focuses not only on different stages of the peace process, but also on the interaction between people and groups with the larger system during these stages (Kelman, 2006).

This research aims to look at opportunities for change for the contemporary Ukrainian conflict, which over the last three years has proven to be intractable, deep-rooted and one of the most dangerous since the end of the Cold War (Plekhanov, 2016). To do so it is important to consider the role of different identities existing in Ukraine during conflict escalation, continuation and, hopefully in conflict transformation. This is discussed in the next section.

2.3.2 – National Identities in Ukraine

National identities shape and shift along with the formation of new states and border changes, and with the switch from one regime to another (Billing 1995; Hobsbawm, 1991; Korostelina, 2013), something that happened all around the globe during the twentieth century. In many countries totalitarian or colonial regimes were substituted by democratic or semi-democratic bringing in political competition, diversity of vocal opinions and the opportunity to reexamine the past. Often, even when the major changes were in the past, a group's national identities continued to change (Kelman, 2001).

A number of scholars agree that through its entire history under the Russian Empire, within the USSR and as an independent country, Ukraine lacked a shared national idea suitable for the entire population (Korostelina, 2013; Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016).⁴ The shaping of contemporary identities in independent Ukraine began once again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and, according to a NATO report, “Ukraine has been divided

⁴ For more background material and references see Korostelina (2013).

between an anti-Russian, pro-European West and a more pro-Russian South and East” (Malan, 2011, as referred to in Korostelina, 2013). These two broadly represented national identity groups dominating and in many situations opposing each other, were in some cases viewed as Russians vs. Ukrainians in Ukraine (Korostelina, 2013). In fact, the groups are rather divided geographically as the West and East of Ukraine, with a higher representation of ‘pro-Western’ and ‘pro-Russian’ identities in the regions correspondingly (Flaherty, 2016 a; Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016). Plekhanov (2016) argues that pro-Russian moods are more popular among the general populace while power-holding elites and politically active intellectuals promote pro-Western views (p.5). The pro-Russian group consists of both Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians who, according to Fournier (2002), represent an extended ‘Russophone’ or ‘Russian-speaking’ identity group, which originated from a concept of ‘Slavic brotherhood’, and is based on common linguistic and often cultural traditions. It is believed that the Donbass region is the center of the pro-Russian identity group in Ukraine; however, Osipian & Osipian (2006) argue that people from Donbass represent a separate and mixed identity group characterized by “individualism up to social Darwinism, tough styles of behaviour, respect for force, high value of labour culture, and a focus on issues of material well-being” (p. 498). Yet the identity line between the Donbass region and the rest of Ukraine is not as sharp as between Ukraine and Crimea, where ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians represent a majority of the population and where pro-Russian sentiments are widespread at the mass level (Deliagin, 2015; Wilson, 2016). The pro-Western narrative is more widespread among western Ukrainians where the city of Lvov and some areas of central Ukraine tend to espouse a stronger connection to the Ukrainian language and culture (Flaherty, 2016 a; Plekhanov, 2016). That said, some scholars including Wanner (2014) note that

through years of independence this straight cut division of Ukraine into West and East has seriously faded, with a lot of people preferring to consider the specificities of their multi-identity country to better reflect their interests.

Kulyk (2011) argues that in the Ukraine language identity is almost equated with language use, and thus becomes a predictor of people's attitudes not only towards language policies, but also towards policy makers associating with pro-Russian or pro-Western identity groups. Besides that, cultural identity and sensitivity to different cultural issues such as international policies or history interpretation, is often perceived as resonating with language identity (Fournier, 2002; Kulyk, 2011); but this is not always the case. In general, the diversity of Ukrainian national identities forms on the base of language use and traditions, cultural perception and history. Such historical issues as Holodomor, the OUN and UPA, the Great Patriotic War and post-war time are often used as manipulative mechanisms to promote or deny particular national identities (Black, 2016 b; Korostelina, 2013; Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016).

The two identity groups described above are more explicit, yet they do not represent the real picture of a more diverse, shifting, and complicated national identity map of Ukraine (Flaherty, 2012; Fournier, 2002; Korostelina, 2013; Maltseva, 2016). Korostelina (2013) distinguishes five different shared narratives that exist in Ukraine after more than 20 years of independence: "(1) dual identity; (2) being pro-Soviet; (3) a fight for Ukrainian identity; (4) a recognition of Ukrainian identity; and (5) a multicultural-civic concept" (p.293). These narratives have a coherent structure, their own moral principles and connection to power, and are opposed to others, which makes the coexistence of members of society be perceived as a

zero-sum game, and in turn contributes to the spread of violence, aggressiveness, hostilities and antagonism between different identity groups (Korostelina, 2013, pp. 312-313).

Politicians such as the former president of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, as well as experts, and academics who view identities from a constructivist perspective, recognize a need for greater structural changes that would lead to the formation of a common Ukrainian identity (Korostelina, 2013; Plekhanov, 2016). Still, the question is, what shared national idea could bring a diverse population of the largest country in Europe together? The rise, mobilization and polarization of two dominating national identities happened to a large extent because power-holding groups were trying to find an answer to this question. Thus, nationalists in Ukraine promoted the Ukrainian language, culture and the fight for pro-Western identity as the core of Ukraine (Korostelina, 2013; Plekhanov, 2016). This perspective was not inclusive enough to incorporate the eastern and southeastern regions and the different identity groups broadly represented there, and rather pushed many people, who didn't associate their identity with Ukrainian language, culture, or particular history interpretation towards acceptance of a new narrative (Plekhanov, 2016). Started as a mechanism of nation building in a newly independent state, Ukrainization assumed aggressive methods such as banning the Russian language from official spaces, a campaign to drive the Russian language and culture from public life and the educational system, and assertive rewriting of historical narratives with the promotion of Ukrainian nationalist figures while presenting Russia as an oppressor (Plekhanov, 2016). Some scholars note that in reality, Ukrainization could have the opposite result: instead of creating a common national identity it contributed to a further estrangement between pro-Russian and pro-Western Ukrainians (Wilson, 1997, as cited in Plekhanov, 2016). At the same time, prior to Russian involvement with the Ukrainian conflict and the

Crimean incident, most people in Ukraine continued to perceive Russia as a fraternal country (Plekhanov, 2016). Flaherty's (2016 a) fieldwork suggests that despite promotions and bans some eastern Ukrainian participants of her research became involved with Ukrainian culture only after they moved to Lvov; this may be viewed as a sample, illustrating the incomplete sufficiency or insufficiency of the Ukrainization campaign in eastern regions. The perception of Ukrainian national identities as a zero-sum game, according to Korostelina (2013), also proposes that in the contemporary situation neither identity can prevail over the other, yet neither can a compromise between them be reached. If the situation wasn't written in stone before the conflict (Wanner, 2014), the manipulation of identities and narratives broadly used since 2013 by various parties of the conflict has not assisted in any way in unifying the people. Those active in this movement include, but are not limited to, Russian and Ukrainian governments, which have assisted in polarizing some of the national identity narratives existing in Ukraine, pushing many people once again to perceive the situation as a zero-sum game.

In other words, tensions which arose after the 2014 Ukrainian revolution led by national-democrats and pro-Western leaders were nothing new, but rather another cycle of polarization of identity groups existing in the country (Maltseva, 2016). However, according to Wilson (2016), by themselves, neither Ukrainization, nor the cultural and linguistic identity diversity of Ukrainians was sufficient cause for the contemporary conflict. The fact that Ukrainization, which lasted for many years, and could feel artificial for many Ukrainians didn't result in mass protests (Duncan, 2010), contributes to this opinion. Maltseva (2016) also argues that in 2013-2014 in Ukraine ethnic and linguistic identity diversity, with no one particular group overwhelming others, was not in itself enough to become a driving power for change;

however, the historical regional divisions, which “manifested themselves in support for different institutional arrangements, different political parties and presidential candidates, and different attitudes towards such issues as the status of the Russian language, EU and NATO memberships, or keeping close ties with the Russian Federation,” allowed the conflict to escalate (p. 147). Still, Wilson (2016) suggests that even regionalism in itself was compatible with Ukrainian unity. It was the sometimes indirect participation of elites and their resources as well as Russian intervention in the conflict that were required to turn local clashes into a civil war (Wilson, 2016).

Many scholars agree that even though the Donbass region was known for its calls for autonomy, and the region’s separatism was to some point shaped up by a particular historically formed identity (Osipian & Osipian, 2006), there was no strong will for complete independence, and, especially after the emergence of the conflict, there was rather a hope for a united Ukraine (Flaherty, 2016 a; Wilson, 2016). To support this suggestion Wilson (2016) recalls some statistical numbers reflecting attitudes of residents of Donetsk in 2004. For example, 73.1% of Donetsk residents agreed with the statement, ‘The unity of Ukraine is more important than the needs of separate regions’, and 74.2% of them agreed with the statement, ‘My region has a common fate with the rest of Ukraine’ (Chernysh & Malanchuk, 2007, p. 89, as cited in Wilson, 2016, p. 639). This suggests that neither the people, nor the general political image of the Donbass region has always been “toxically anti-Ukrainian” (Portnov, 2014, as referred to in Wilson, 2016, p.641).

In this way, the Ukrainian map of national identities was formed through history and affected by different cultural and linguistic traditions; attitudes towards language use were often associated with a position towards particular policies and politicians. Nevertheless, in

general the diverse national, cultural, linguistic and historical identities present in Ukraine could peacefully coexist within the united country unless other factors, which were brought to light during and after the Euromaidan revolution, escalated the pre-existing, but slowly fading identity opposition. Korostelina (2013) suggests that the fact that different identities in Ukraine over the history of independence weren't dominating each other, should have been seen as a window for a deep and consistent dialogue, which could allow the development of a ground for a common national identity, "based on unifying ideas, including ideas of civic society and a civic concept of national identity, emphasizing human rights and the equality of every citizen, independent of his or her religion, ethnicity, or language" (p. 313). In reality, starting from 2013 the conflict took the place of this much-needed dialogue, mobilizing and polarizing identities and promoting the idea of a zero-sum game in the country. Altshuller (2017) suggests that in the contemporary situation it should be the West's goal to develop room for the dialogue and to find a permanent solution for the Ukrainian crisis so the Donbass region will not turn into another 'frozen zone'. However, Plekhanov (2016) argues that if the West continues trying to cut organic and economic ties between Russia and Ukraine and completely eliminate the Russian influence over Ukraine, a stronger polarization of identities will escalate the major conflict even more.

Since conflict resolution relies partially on conflict analysis, keeping in mind the importance of social identity, one will need to find out how people themselves see the crisis in Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia. It is important to understand their perspective and try to see if this crisis, in their view, was a product of the clash of identities, or if the deepening and polarization of identities appear to be a product of the conflict.

2.4 – The Role of the Media: Control Paradigm and Propaganda vs. Chaos

Paradigm

Experts, politicians and scholars agree that the military conflict is not the only, if not the least, battlefield in Ukraine. As Maltseva (2016) argues, the information war that goes along with the physical war probably started even before the first hostilities contributed to the polarization and radicalization of thousands of citizens on both sides of the barricades. Some natural conditions, such as a difficult and time-consuming access to somewhat truthful or neutral information (Maltseva, 2016), as well as some strategies employed by participating parties and interest groups, contributed to attitude shifts and helped to involve the masses not only in Ukraine, but also all over the world into this confrontation.

We live during the time when media flows in a 24-hour live stream of accessible pluralistic interpretations of facts, which doesn't know national borders. And this steadily increasing quantity of available information along with similar tendencies in politics and the media economy affect how people, institutions, and societies network with the surrounding environment and each other (McNair, 2006, p.3). In this sense, the role of the media in contemporary society in general, and in conflict situations in particular, can be analyzed within the control and the chaos paradigms.

2.4.1 – Control Paradigm

The control model assumes a linear and mechanistic “control-outcome-impact” process; it underlines the significance of hierarchy and structure which aims to sustain a particular unjust social order and works to satisfy the interests of control-holders who are able to extend their economic influence over media institutions and regulate the outcome of the media process (McNair, 2006, p.3). In other words, media institutions have the capacity to

manufacture news - interpret, exaggerate, conceal or partially conceal facts - in the interests of those affiliated with particular media (for example, owners of mass media, business peers in the conglomerate that mass media belongs to, and advertisers), which, in its turn, influences the public understanding and agreement with state activities (Chomsky & Herman, 1979; McNair, 2006). In this way, according to the control paradigm, mass media produces not journalism but thought control (Chomsky, 1989; McNair, 2006).

In a control paradigm, control over information flow and, thus, over societal attitudes and behavior is based on economic and technological constraints as well as on political factors (state censorship and regulations) and the “cultural power of dominant ideology, internalized or imposed from above” (McNair, 2006, p.35). These filters assure that even without the massive use of direct propaganda or employment of major state censorship apparatuses, oppositional views, even if they make it through, remain marginal and will be received only by a few (Chomsky & Herman, 1979; McNair, 2006). Nonetheless, propaganda remains an important mechanism of the control paradigm and is used to plant a particular pro-elite media bias and ideology, and even to brainwash masses (McNair, 2006).

2.4.1.1 – Propaganda

As Shah (2005) notes, probably every war is fought on the ground and in the minds of people through propaganda. Koppang (2009) seeks a universal definition of propaganda, arguing that there are narrow and broad definitions where a narrow definition is synonymous with lies, and a broad one assumes any promotion of a particular opinion (p.117). He suggests that propaganda in the contemporary world is “organized mass communication, derived from a hidden agenda on mission to conform belief and action by manipulating mechanisms—drawn from a hidden agenda on instrumentality — to

circumvent individual reasoning and rational choice” (p. 121). This communication is created by particular interest groups and spread through numerous media channels, such as various types of television, radio, and the Internet (Koppang, 2009). Propaganda often employs emotional, not logical, semi-truthful argumentation, which affects personal views (Koppang, 2009; Shah, 2005). In such a way, analysis of the employed propaganda machine gives a clue to understanding manipulation of the mass consciousness and consent, and thus helps to see how the few control the many (Koppang, 2009), which may help to resist propaganda. However, the reasons the few plant particular views in most cases remains hidden meaning that even if they resist manipulation, the masses still may serve the hidden goals of a controlling group.

Propaganda campaigns have similar characteristics: propaganda is employed by organized groups; it has a hidden agenda, which distinguishes it from other types of communication such as public relations, advertising and education; it conforms to beliefs and action; and it is based on a combination of rational facts and strong emotional involvement (often activated through the use of emotional language) (Koppang, 2009, pp. 121-126). Propaganda campaigns may employ moral disengagement mechanisms that are used to redefine what can be viewed as human rights violations to make them look like honorable acts. This is done through sanitizing language, legitimization and out-of-context comparisons. Propaganda also employs simplicity and repetition as basic components (Koppang, 2009, pp. 121-126). Mozolin (2007) reviewed research on mass communication and came to the conclusion that propaganda doesn't affect people directly, but rather through a micro group of opinion leaders who have some authority among those micro groups, are interested or involved with the problem, and are able to discuss it and who

transmit the information to other participants of a group. Other people are not influenced as much by media directly, and use second-hand sources, i.e., opinion leaders (Mozolin, 2007). In the end, mass communication affects each individual through a personal interpretation of information spread by mass media universalizing individual attitudes among a group, joining them into a mass opinion.

Propaganda involves numerous, sometimes very creative mechanisms and tactics chosen on the basis of various interests and goals of a particular manipulating group. Shah (2005) surveyed wartime propaganda mechanisms and their main characteristics. For example, among the main tactics Shah (2005) lists: the use of selective stories and partial facts, reinforcement of reasons and motivations, narrowing the list of experts, demonization of the enemy, and the use of a narrow range of discourse. Another list of journalistic tactics for dealing with violent conflict suggested by Galtung (summarized by Schechter, 2001, as cited in Shah, 2005) consists of twelve points: de-contextualization of violence (no attention is paid to the real reasons of the conflict); dualism (representation of the conflict as a problem just between two parties); manicheanism (presentation of one side as good and other as evil); Armageddon (presentation of violence as the only option); focus on individual violence while ignoring structural causes; confusion (concentration of attention only on the battlefield, but not on actors or factors influencing it); exclusion and omitting the bereaved (ignorance to the reasoning behind acts of revenge); “failure to explore the causes of escalation and the impact of media coverage itself”; failure to pay enough attention and explore hidden agendas of outside interventionists; failure to explore and promote possible peace suggestions and outcomes; “confusing cease-fires and negotiations with actual peace”; and “omitting reconciliation.” Cited by Shah (2005), award-winning

investigative journalist Phillip Knightley proposed four stages in a nation's preparation for war, including "the crisis" (unresolvable by negotiations), "the demonization of the enemy's leader," "the demonization of the enemy as individuals," and "atrocities" (some stories about which are fabricated, but others are true, which often makes it impossible for the receiver to distinguish real facts). Shah (2005) argues that it is relatively easy to recognize propaganda in totalitarian countries; yet in democratic states, where propaganda is used no less, it becomes more difficult. In such a way, it's still difficult to identify propaganda within the massive information flow produced in more democratic Ukraine, and in more totalitarian, but somewhat democratic Russia, and the democratic West.

A number of scholars view the conflict and the information war in Ukraine from the position of a control paradigm and pay particular attention to mechanisms of propaganda employed to exercise control (Black, 2016 a; Kurilla, 2016; Maltseva 2016; Plekhanov, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Plekhanov (2016) characterized the contemporary conflict in Ukraine as 'existential', stating that mass media in this case was used as a weapon to affect the conflict development (p.23). Wilson (2016) states that propaganda campaigns started in Ukraine long before 2013, and argues that Donbass regional elites were more responsible for anti-west Ukrainian propaganda than their counterparts were for the anti-east Ukrainian campaign (p.640). Sundiev & Smirnov (2015) argue that since the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine has employed information warfare techniques, largely sponsored by western countries, to separate itself from other post-Soviet states and to create a West-sponsored governing apparatus. Black (2016 a), in his research of the information war in Ukraine, came across most of the aforementioned characteristics and tactics of propaganda applied by different participants of the conflict. Some scholars view Ukrainian revolutionary

leaders and the West, supporting the ‘victim of Russian oppression’, as the ones who started the information war (Plekhanov, 2016); others acknowledge that it didn’t take Russia long to come up with strong responding propaganda tactics (Black, 2016 a). However, as Black (2016 a) argues, by that time strong anti-Russian attitudes were already widespread among Ukrainians, as well as around the world. Among others, control campaigns provided by different parties included: cut offs of oppositional media channels, prevention of oppositional journalists’ access to sites, and the development of new media carrying out ideological messages (Black, 2016 a). Those campaigns gathered pace throughout the conflict and contributed to its escalation and development (Black, 2016 a).

2.4.2 – Chaos Paradigm

Contrary to the control paradigm, the chaos paradigm is based on the notion that in the contemporary globalized and digitalized world the effects of the media are fundamentally unpredictable (McNair, 2006). The chaos model suggests that the context of information production, consumption, and social action can be neither fully predicted nor fully controlled (McNair, 2006). While recognizing the ever-present desire for control over the news agenda and the journalistic process of meaning making, the chaos paradigm claims that today the capacity of elites to receive and retain this control effectively is more limited, since the communication process is affected by numerous and often unpredictable economic, political, ideological, and technological factors (McNair, 2006). Korybko and Haddad (2016) suggest that it is not just the contemporary journalism and media flow that are chaotic, but also the global political system and the everyday unveiling of events in general that may seem very unpredictable. However, they argue that if transformed into a

chaos sequence and then consistently analyzed, a somewhat predictable relationship may evolve – something that is easier said than done (Korybko & Haddad, 2016).

In the world we live in today information flows, spreads, and is interpreted chaotically, producing “unplanned outcomes in media content - dissent from elite accounts of events rather than dominant ideology or bias; ideological competition rather than hegemony; increased volatilities of news agendas; and this routinely, rather than exceptionally” (McNair, 2006, pp.3-4). From this perspective news content can be neither manufactured nor constructed, nor doesn’t just happen, but it arises from an interaction between the parties of the communication environment who are more vocal in a particular media space (McNair, 2006, p.49). The chaos paradigm views relations between reality and its media representation as “holistic and organic”, seeking to understand the dynamics of these relations, their impact on public opinion and the feedback action these relations produce (McNair, 2006, p. 15). This perspective recognizes that media messages do not influence reality by themselves, but are an interconnected part of this reality (McNair, 2006, p.50). Kurilla (2016) illustrates the unpredictability of the effects of the information flow and the interconnectedness of reality and media messages through an example of the creation of new historic narratives influenced by the conflict in Ukraine. These narratives are affected by two simultaneous processes: first, the media, politicians, and bloggers introduce their explanations of the logic of the unveiling conflict; and second, different groups adopt the logic, employ it as their own, and when previous leaders or their comrades leave or die they act accordingly, in this way turning what could originally be propagandistic or completely fake into reality (Kurilla, 2016, pp. 195-196).

McNair (2006) compares the unpredictability of upcoming news to a weather forecast, suggesting that no matter how much information we have, we still cannot with a hundred percent certainty state what is going to be on the news tomorrow and which outcomes will be produced. Thus, chaos and unpredictability might be viewed as one of the characteristics of contemporary society, where control is possible only up to certain limits.

2.4.2.1 – Administered Chaos perspective

Goble (2014) referred to Boris Kagarlitsky, the director of the Moscow Institute of Globalization and Social Movements, describing a correlative perspective of administered chaos, which belongs to a group of conspiracy theories popular among Russians (Goble, 2014; Korybko & Haddad, 2016) and lies between the control and chaos paradigms.

According to the administered chaos theory “the United States, now in crisis, is trying to compensate for its weakness by destabilizing the rest of the world,” and is working to constantly preserve control over situations and to use them to advance America (Goble, 2014). From this perspective revolutions are seen as the best way to destabilize, allowing a cover up of the outer presence and establishment of a particular system which would serve the international interests of the USA (Goble, 2014). In a similar manner, Korybko and Haddad (2016) suggest that the Ukrainian revolution, along with the ‘Arab Spring’, is a part of the American-led ‘chaotic’ operation aimed to maintain USA global hegemony. However, the underlying idea of totally controlled chaos hardly holds up against criticism, since if chaos is assumed to be controlled, it’s not chaos; and the other way around, if it is chaos, then those organizing this chaotic system are able to administer it only to certain limits. At times it can be effectively influenced, but it is impossible to provide chaos in an entirely predictable way (Goble, 2014). Kagarlitsky (as referred to in Goble, 2014) notes

that there is some evidence for administered chaos theory; otherwise no one would fall for it. Yet he states that Washington is just one of the numerous actors and factors affecting global instability, and the USA deals with this instability no better than any other state (Goble, 2014).

Mass media is only one of the factors affecting people's consciousness, and in itself is not necessary or enough for attitude shifts (Mozolin, 2007); however, it still is an influential institution, which can be viewed either as a manipulative mechanism, or as a natural part of a social system affecting reality in only a partially predictable way. Since this research is qualitative and doesn't aim to find the only right answer, but rather looks at personal experiences and perspectives, I will use both control and chaos paradigm scopes, as well as the research on propaganda and ideas of administered chaos theory to better understand the experience of my participants, their representation of the conflict in Ukraine, and their understanding of their sources of information.

2.5 – Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the works of the social identity framework and research of Ukrainian identities; summarized studies on basic human needs and the relative deprivation perspective, which are viewed as driving powers for conflicts, and inquired into the role of media and propaganda in contemporary society from positions of control and chaos paradigms as bases for this research. Different perspectives help to understand the conflict and navigate the research, which focuses on how Russians and Ukrainians living in St. Petersburg see the contemporary conflict in Ukraine, how they understand its causes and development, and how they see possible paths for conflict resolution.

This research focuses on personal visions of the conflict, developed by civilians, who at the time of the inquiry lived far away from the hotspot and received most data on the current situation in the conflict zone from the media and/or their friends and relatives. The original guiding question for the research was formulated as “What are Petersburgers' and Ukrainian immigrants' visions of the common future of the Ukraine-Russia relationship and the Ukrainian conflict?” However, as it happens during some qualitative inquiries (Creswell, 2013), this question was reshaped and turned into a sub-question, since throughout the research process participants became strongly involved with their understanding of the conflict and its causes, as well as with the effects it had on their lives. When I asked about their vision of the future, they were so deep into the topic and real circumstances that it became difficult for them to visualize the future development, and possibilities for the soon conflict resolution were often labeled as utopian. The following chapters describe the methodology (Chapter III), and outcomes and analysis (Chapters IV – image of the conflict; and Chapter V – vision of the future) of the research.

Chapter III - Methodology

3.1 – Introduction

Qualitative research methodology is chosen to collect ‘soft’ data that contains rich descriptions of people’s life situations, understandings, assumptions, visions, and feelings; it does not have a lot of statistical information (Bogdan and Biklen, 2011). This type of research helps to reveal a range of behavior, views, hopes, and fears developed by a target audience with reference to a specific topic (QRCA, 2015). This study uses qualitative research methodology to explore the perceptions of young Ukrainians and young Russians’ living in in St. Petersburg, understandings of the ongoing conflict connected to the contemporary situational challenges they had to face, and their ideas about the future of Ukraine, Ukraine and Russia as nations, and the people there. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the research participants.

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods used to conduct the research; it clarifies the details about the ethical part of the research, data gathering, and data analysis; and it contains the participants’ introduction.

3.2 – Qualitative Research Strategy

Northrup (1989) stresses that when scholars conduct traditional, often quantitative research of conflicts, they focus attention on conditions, while ignoring the value of subjective interpretations developed by participants and placed on those conditions. She suggests that “blending data concerning conditions surrounding a conflict with data about parties’ interpretations of those conditions and of each other should result in a richer base of information for the analysis of conflicts” (Northrup, 1989, p.82). Qualitative research methods were used not only to explore the conditions, but also to focus on personal

perspectives about the issue. The work was intended to bring different types of data together to develop a shared, multi-voice image of the Ukrainian conflict.

To explain the idea of qualitative research Creswell (2013) suggests the metaphor of a multi-colored fabric composed of hundreds of threads and consisting of different textures and materials, while altogether representing a single piece of art. As Creswell (2013) puts it, qualitative research is a study that starts with an assumption based on exploration of previous interpretive frameworks which emphasizes the meaning people or groups of people ascribe to a particular social problem. The qualitative researcher collects data in the field – involving face-to-face meetings with participants, - uses observations, makes field notes and explores documents related to the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, Creswell, 2013). Data analysis is deductive and inductive; it aims to establish the main categories or themes which emerge through research, and then the researcher connects them to the greater field of the inquiry (Creswell, 2013). The final report (in this case the thesis) contains the voices of the participants as well as the voice of the researcher, and represents a multi-dimensional description and interpretation of the suggested issue, concluding with an understanding of the work's contribution to the research field or/and with a call for change (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). This type of research is conducted when there is a need to find in-depth, diverse information on a particular problem or phenomenon.

Qualitative interviews are less structured and more flexible than surveys or questionnaires used for quantitative studies. They focus on participants' experiences and perceptions, providing them the opportunity to share their stories (Creswell, 2013), and thus gathering a better understanding of how their insights could affect their behavior and reactions (Johnson, 2005, as referred in Fast, 2013). As Flaherty (2012; 2016 a) states, a

deep dialogue cannot begin unless interviewees feel that they are heard and their positions are acknowledged, and qualitative methodology provides room for such conditions. Open-ended questions assume open responses, which help to deepen the understanding of the issue and reveal some unexpected and often unpredictable findings about the problem being explored (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). While conducting qualitative interviews the researcher may find him/herself drifting away from the original questions and that is where some discoveries may happen as well. If it occurs, this shift may result in the re-shaping or changing of questions (Creswell, 2013). However, the researcher should keep in mind the final goal, namely the creation of a larger picture of the issue that includes multiple visions, connections, and factors affecting the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

In the qualitative study the researcher is the key instrument. The researcher's goal is to create room for deep dialogue where participants may feel safe and encouraged enough to tell their stories and describe experiences, out of which the researcher creates a multi-voice symphony, broadening the general research on the particular problem. The researcher's voice is also important in the qualitative study, which should not only reflect the researcher's background and personal experiences, but also focus on how the person's culture, history, and experiences shape aspects of the inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

Media and politicians in Ukraine, Russia, the USA, Canada, European Union (EU) countries, and all over the world create particular images of the ongoing Ukrainian conflict. These images strongly differ, and thus develop different conflict-related narratives. Yet, to truly understand the conflict, its causes and aftermath, its development and possibilities for resolution, we need to look at the personal experiences of people connected to this conflict, their perspectives, and their hopes and fears, because they are the ones who live with it and

through it; they are the ones who struggle from it, and they are the ones who, at some point, will need to finish the confrontation, if not on a political level, then at least on a personal level, and live in the post-conflict world. This research was built within the frames of the qualitative inquiry approach – the fieldwork, data-analysis and report writing processes – in order to explore the vision of the conflict developed by affected individuals at a grass-roots level.

3.3 – Case Study Research

This research represents a case study, which assumes the development of “an in-depth understanding of a single case,” where the case exists “within a bounded system, bounded by time and place” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Some scholars argue that the case study is not a methodology, but rather a decision on what is to be researched (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Still, Creswell (2013) prefers to define it as a methodology, which represents “a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as a product of inquiry” (p.97). A case study suggests that the chosen case is examined in real-life settings; it involves the analysis of multiple sources of data and produces a report that contains a detailed case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013).

In this research the chosen case can be defined as the ‘contemporary Ukrainian conflict through the eyes of people living in St. Petersburg, Russia’. This study focuses on understandings of the conflict and visions of the future, both within Ukraine, and between Ukraine and Russia, developed by people living in St. Petersburg, Russia at the time of the research. An analysis of multiple sources of data, such as interview transcripts, field notes and related documents helps to provide a better understanding of a phenomenon. Chapter IV of the thesis brings all the voices together and develops a broad description of the

conflict from the participants' situated points of view, while Chapter V focuses on visions of the future and possible ways out of the conflict suggested by the participants. A large part of data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

3.4 – Semi-structured Interviews

Since the participants' visions, opinions, and experiences were of particular interest to the researcher, the main part of the inquiry was conducted, with one exception, through face-to-face communication with participants. Semi-structured interviews were used as this approach seemed the most suitable for the goals of the research. Semi-structured interviews assume the presence of a guideline in which the main open-ended questions about key topics and directions of the interview are outlined to navigate the process; yet, the dialogue develops in a natural way with room for clarification and extra questions to deepen the conversation. The order of questions also may be adjusted (Creswell, 2013). This method allows for the collection of descriptive data presented in participants' own words, assisting the researcher to understand how participants interpret the issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011).

This research process focuses on the values and meanings participants ascribe to a given issue, as well as on their knowledge, the way they portray the conflict, and the way they see the possibilities for future peaceful development. Semi-structured interviews give participants the freedom to express their views and understandings in their own words, as well as to more deeply explore their perspectives, thus providing more reliable, comparable qualitative data (Bogdan & Biklen 2011; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured technique differs from storytelling; yet some important stories about participants' experiences unfolded in the process of interviewing. Due to research reporting limitations I have summarized and included only some of these stories.

3.5 – Ethical Considerations

To proceed with this study, prior to seeking and contacting potential research participants I applied for and received ethics approval from the University of Manitoba. All of the interviewees were provided with the consent form prior to meeting, allowing them enough time to familiarize themselves with the purpose of the research and topics to be discussed. The transparency of the researcher's goals and interests was supposed to give participants the freedom to decide independently whether they felt comfortable and safe enough to participate. Their rights to withdraw their participation at any time and to change the information they provided during the interview were acknowledged. The consent form also provided contact information for the researcher and the University of Manitoba. The form was discussed and signed by the researcher and by each participant at the beginning of each interview. A separate signature was requested to provide consent for the audio recording of the interview; interviewees acknowledged that they were free to deny the interview audio recording without affecting their participation. At the end of each interview participants received a list of resources in St. Petersburg that could be helpful to deal with stress. Every participant acknowledged that s/he had an opportunity to receive transcripts of their interview to review, edit, clarify, or delete any remarks s/he didn't feel comfortable with.

To protect participants' identities, their given names were replaced with pseudonyms at the time of writing and transcribing field notes. The interviewees' family names weren't mentioned anywhere except for the printed consent forms, which throughout the duration of the research and after its completion were kept securely and separately from the rest of data. Digital voice recordings were kept on a digital device, which is Wi-fi incompatible, and were destroyed immediately after transcribing. Printed transcripts were kept in the

researcher's private room out of reach of other people. All identifying information was removed from transcripts. After the completion of the research all transcripts were destroyed.

3.6 – Data Access and Gathering

Participants of this research were young men and women between 18 and 35 years of age, who can be categorized into two groups: Ukrainian citizens (recently resided in St. Petersburg) and Russian citizens (living in St. Petersburg), all of whom in one or another way feel affiliated with or affected by the conflict. To find participants I developed a simple advertisement, inviting Ukrainian and Russian youth interested in the Ukrainian conflict to participate in the study. The advertisement included a brief introduction of the researcher and the research topic, as well as contact information. The advertisement was placed on social networks (*vk.com* and *facebook.com*) on my personal page, in distinguished social network communities, which provided help to Ukrainian refugees and conflict-emerged Ukrainian migrants, and in social network communities of Sociology, History, Psychology and Journalism faculties of St. Petersburg universities. To post my advertisement I had to receive consent from community moderators/administrators who in this case were my gatekeepers. Access was denied a few times, and once it happened in a quite strict, almost rude way, which once again reminded me that the topic I was researching was a hot-button issue. However, after posting the advertisement I received feedback from a number of people willing to participate. I provided them with the developed Introduction letter, which gave more details on who I was, what I was doing and why I was doing it, as well as some information on what I would ask from participants and how I planned to protect them.

Beginning with the first interview a snowball technique was used in parallel with advertising to find more participants. I provided printed or electronic copies of the invitation letter to all interviewees and asked them to forward the letter to anybody they thought might be interested in the research. The same technique was used among my friends and relatives. All together seventeen interviews were conducted; nine participants found me through the advertisement and invitations, and the other eight were found through the snowball technique.

All interviews, except for one, were conducted in person. The exception was conducted over Skype, since a person willing to participate was out of St. Petersburg and suggested online communication. Interviews began with small talk, which helped to set a friendly unofficial atmosphere, find some common ground, and break the ice (as suggested in Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). In most cases, this small talk naturally developed into a conversation about the topic, navigated with the help of broad, open-ended questions (see Appendix A), allowing participants to freely express themselves. Originally questions were organized in chronological order and were developed in a way to deepen the conversation as it proceeded; however, in reality, the qualitative interviews shaped themselves (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011), and the particular order of the questions wasn't always followed, as best suited the participant.

In-person interviews took place in different locations like cafes, city parks, and even at the supermarket. Participants chose a location and the type of place themselves. My hope and my goal were to provide conditions where each participant would feel safe, encouraged and comfortable to share personal stories and experiences. All interviews were conducted in Russian since it is the common language for participants and the researcher; they were

recorded with an audio-recording device and translated into English while transcribing. Descriptive field notes were taken during the research process to save some observations, narratives and insights I had while proceeding with the fieldwork.

3.7 – Data Analysis

Data analysis assumes a systematic search and rearrangement of interview transcripts, field notes and related documents collected through the field work, which allows the researcher to come up with some findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). To distill my findings I used inductive analysis starting from particular notions and experiences and proceeding to more general perspectives emerging from the research, and then I used deductive analysis to gather evidence and to support my findings and generalizations (Creswell, 2013). I managed a holistic analysis of the entire case, focusing on a few key issues, which help to understand the complexity of the case (Creswell, 2013). As numerous themes were emerging from the collected rich data through data analysis, I developed a coding system using numbers and colored stickers. The coding proceeded in three stages: first, all emerging themes and important quotes were manually coded on the printed out transcripts and field notes; second, the developed list of codes was re-analyzed and narrowed (some themes merged); and third, electronic copies of transcripts and field notes were re-organized according to ascribed codes and merged into one electronic document. Once the coding of the collected data was completed, I tried to abstract from particular quotes and rather imagine the analyzed data as a story that would be interesting to tell and interesting to listen to. In this way, I came to a particular organizational structure of the findings which assumed two broad discussions. The first broader one is dedicated to the participants' perceptions of the conflict past and present, and the second addresses the future. Later,

some deeper literature review was conducted to distinguish some references that support the findings and give a deeper perspective of themes presented in the two findings chapters that follow.

Thus, the chosen data analysis methods allowed me to distinguish, compare and connect major themes emerging from personal stories and experiences, developing a shared picture of the Ukrainian conflict. It also helped to bond the emergent key issues with relevant research and theory.

3.8 – Introduction of Participants

This study focuses on visions of the contemporary Ukrainian conflict, relationships between people affected by this confrontation, and the possible future of Russian-Ukrainian relationships, developed by a group of Russian-speaking people living in St. Petersburg, Russia. Data collection for the research took place in St. Petersburg in spring-summer 2016. While starting the fieldwork I found that the interest towards the topic among the population of St. Petersburg was lower than expected, partially because by then the conflict had lasted for almost three years and was called ‘frozen’ by a number of participants. People who had a connection to the conflict were invited to share their experiences related to the Ukrainian crisis, to talk about life and challenges they faced in St. Petersburg, and to discuss their vision of their personal future and the future of the confrontation. They were also invited to share their perspectives on possible ways out of the conflict and ideas on some opportunities for a peacebuilding process between people and states affected by the conflict.

Out of seventeen participants, six are Russian citizens and nine hold Ukrainian citizenship. Two others lived in Crimea and held Ukrainian citizenship when the conflict

emerged, but shortly after the Crimean referendum they obtained Russian citizenship. Like the first group of participants I hold a Russian passport; yet every time it comes to identifying myself I run into difficulty, since my background is very mixed. My paternal family has Ukrainian, Belorussian, Russian, and Jewish heritage, while my maternal side of the family comes from Belorussia and Russia. I feel that this mixed personal history is valuable and important for my self-identification, and for that reason it is always hard for me to simply say that I'm Russian without explaining other components of my identity. I assume that many people born in the Soviet Union and countries of the CIS have similar feelings. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity I will code all participants of this research who held Russian citizenship at the time of the conflict and the fieldwork as Russian citizens (RC), and participants who held Ukrainian citizenship at the time of the conflict and the fieldwork as Ukrainian citizens (UC). Besides that, for two participants who came to St. Petersburg from Crimea I will use the code (U/RC), since they were Ukrainian citizens in the beginning of the conflict, but in 2014 had already obtained Russian citizenship. The suggested division is simplistic and may not be a major cleavage, yet it underlines the different conflict-related experiences participants were exposed to.

Sixteen of the seventeen participants have relatives or friends in Ukraine. Both men and women's voices are represented in the research (ten to seven respectively). Three out of the eleven (including Crimeans) who were originally Ukrainian participants moved to St. Petersburg before 2013, yet in some ways they were still affected by the conflict. Two participants are apparently older than the age frame suggested in the research (18-35), perhaps in their late thirties or early forties; nevertheless, since this became clear only during the interview process, I decided to include their stories in the research.

To proceed with the findings I need first to introduce people I met during the research. Names used in this introduction as well as in the rest of the thesis are pseudonyms.

The first interview was conducted with Helga (RC), an activist from St. Petersburg who dedicated a lot of her time to helping Ukrainians affected by the conflict after they fled to Russia. Prior to the conflict she had many friends and acquaintances in Ukraine, and many of them became involved with the conflict. She recalled the situation in the following manner:

When the conflict emerged, I appeared to have close acquaintances on both sides as some of them were a part of the Berkut cordon, and others threw Molotov cocktails at Berkut. I was acquainted with the ones and the others. It was terrible.

Since the very beginning of the conflict Helga (RC) has become strongly involved with volunteer activities, providing food, accommodation, and legal support to refugees and forced migrants coming to St. Petersburg. This work began even before the city administration opened programs to support conflict-affected Ukrainians. Together with other activists and friends she created an NGO focusing on the needs of new-coming families with children.

Grigory (UC) became the second participant of the research. This young man, who came to St. Petersburg from Konstantinovka, Donetsk region, Ukraine, was 19 years old when the revolution happened. During that time he was involved with the college in his hometown. Shortly after the revolution when the conflict spread to the East of Ukraine he decided to help with building and defending the barricades. He describes his experience as follows:

We stood by my college protecting the city; we built barricades and tried to prevent them visits. It was bizarre, because I understood that they were trying to climb into

our city and some not normal steps were taken, so we had to do something to prevent it, and the government was pressing us for separatism. We could get five years in jail for wearing a face cover. And a Molotov cocktail would get you a life sentence. Really. Nobody trusted anybody. Everybody was hiding from the cameras.

Konstantinovka had some militia resistance in the beginning; the barricades lasted for a few days, and then the Ukrainian army moved in. At that time, Grigory (UC) was attending classes in college and worked part-time as a bartender, often serving beer to military men. He left Ukraine and came to St. Petersburg in February 2014 to avoid joining the Ukrainian army. During the interview he mentioned that one day he probably will serve in the army, but only if he doesn't have to fight against Russia.

The third participant – Nicolay (RC) – is a Russian citizen living and working in St. Petersburg. He went to fight in Donetsk to protect what he called “his” land. Nicolay (RC) made a decision to become an active participant of the conflict after he saw people being burned in the Union building in Odessa:

I watched an expanded report on the events in Odessa and realized there was no way to stay home. I understood that I wouldn't be able to look people in the eyes, because it was my land, my... The same with Kharkov, Donetsk, and Lugansk. It was my land, my property; my ancestors fought for it, spilled their blood...

He had to work to gain some money for his plans. Then he found some similarly-minded people to join him and later left for Donetsk. Nicolay (RC) had a military background and he felt that he had to protect people in Ukraine:

I'm a retired career military man, a platoon commander. I'm a professional. I'm a warrior. I couldn't not go there, because 18-year-old boys who don't know how to use guns were dying there. Not only they, women were dying there, kids, older people... They can't defend themselves.

Nicolay (RC) spent half a year fighting in Donetsk as a volunteer and returned to Russia after he was wounded and lost “10 cm of triceps.” He decided to be interviewed at his then

work place, the supermarket where he was a security guard. Nicolay's (RC) position sounded very strong and sometimes even shocking to me. When I later shared some of the ideas, words and phrases heard during Nicolay's (RC) interview with some friends, their first reaction was "Why did you decide to include such an opinion in your research?" or even stronger. Yet later most people I talked with acknowledged that they all knew at least one person holding similar views.

Arseny (UC), an engineer from Donetsk, became the fourth participant of the research. He was born in Cherkassy, Central Ukraine, from where his family moved to Donetsk. When the conflict started spreading over the east he felt he had to take an active position to protect the city from the "Right Sector" activists heading there:

I lived in the suburbs. There was a highway exit right by my house, so it was on my behalf to make sure that nothing was happening. I helped to build barricades as I could. [...] We weren't afraid of anything. We were protecting our city, our houses and ourselves.

Arseny (UC) wasn't a part of the militia and didn't participate in warfare, yet he was under bombardment four times and was wounded once. He made a decision to leave after being laid off from his workplace since the manufacturer he was employed with didn't have any orders so he couldn't make a living in Donetsk. He moved to Kiev first but the job there wasn't paying well, and in March 2015, after spending some more time in Donetsk, Arseny (UC) moved to St. Petersburg.

The fifth participant of the research was Maria (U/RC), a young journalist from Yalta, Crimea. In 2013 she was a graduate student in Yalta and worked as a journalist, so she had some insights about what was happening in Ukraine:

At that time Crimea was a part of Ukraine and I was writing on everything happening; it was one of our main topics, so I knew about everything happening there.

Maria (U/RC) witnessed the echo of Euromaidan in Crimea and recalled during the interview a sense of growing danger pushed people there towards an active position:

We just protected borders with our vehicles. We didn't have any barricades. There are not too many borders, just at the neck of land, and everywhere else there was water. So we just didn't let them in.

The referendum on Crimea's separation was, as Maria (U/RC) mentioned, her "first time voting." After the peninsula became a part of Russia, Maria (U/RC) received a Russian passport and citizenship. After prices there became equalized with Russian prices her family realized that it was almost impossible to make a living, so Maria (U/RC) and her husband decided to move to St. Petersburg, where at the time of the interview she was working as a journalist writing on the ongoing events in Ukraine.

The next participant of the research, a Petersburg resident named Cyril, was the only one who stated that he didn't have any relatives or close friends in Ukraine. He is an investigative journalist for a major international television and Internet channel broadcasting in Russia. Back in 2013-2014 Cyril (RC) worked for a St. Petersburg newspaper. Despite the fact that he didn't have a personal connection to the conflict, as an activist for civil rights he was affected by the situation in Ukraine:

Well, everything changed. The agenda changed. Some people just went crazy. A lot of people and projects just disappeared from the agenda. But mainly, I hate war because what I do is completely useless at the time of war. I mean the development of civil society, some civil investigations, projects on ecology, or local business of the day, attempts to develop some local communities. I'm not doing all these, just some, but I'm interested in it. Nobody needs all this during wars.

At some point of his life Cyril (RC) participated in the creation of an NGO dedicated to raising awareness of civil rights, politics and education of youth. At the time of research Cyril (RC) was in Moscow, so the interview was conducted through Skype.

Yelena (UC) – the seventh participant, from Novomoskovsk city, Dnepropetrovsk region, Central Ukraine – called herself a very peaceful person. She stated that she and people surrounding her weren't very politicized and active, so she used the terms “consumers” and “ordinary guys” to describe views shared by her company. Apparently Yelena (UC) was a bit older than the focus group of the research and during this interview she assumed that for people of her age, “stability” would be the main measure of a good life:

If everything is fine with me, if I have stability – stable work, stable money – I'm not too worried about what's happening around, like reforms, as long as it doesn't affect me personally. I'd say most of Ukraine lives like that. At least, I'd say, people of my age group. Youth are more mobile; they are educated differently.

There was no warfare in Yelena's (UC) hometown, yet the war affected them:

[...] when the protest turned into a large scale conflict, it touched everybody. There are two military towns by my city [Novomoskovsk] – Gvardeysk and Cherkasskoye. It means that military bases and military hospitals are located in our city. We were one of the first to see tanks and military vehicles moving over there. It was scary... You don't expect to see anything like that during peacetime.

Yelena (UC) moved to St. Petersburg to provide a safer life for her little daughter. Even though she has a degree in finance, because she didn't have Russian citizenship Yelena (UC) worked as a janitor to make a living in St. Petersburg. She mentioned that this work earned better money than working as a professional in Ukraine.

Another journalist and a specialist in public relations, Janna (RC), decided to participate in the research, partially because the western Russian university she was working for was monitoring Russian media covering the Crimean referendum and sanctions put on Russia due to the situation in Ukraine. When the conflict emerged she was a public relations manager for a government organization and was deeply involved with the media field in St. Petersburg. While the conflict “seemed very far away” for her, she still

experienced some of its aftereffects:

It didn't have any connection to me besides a few moments. For example, Ukraine was producing (...) for us, and we ended up having issues with it, because supplies got interrupted, so the committee had to look for another supplier. [...] They just told us that due to the conflict and due to contemporary and upcoming sanctions we had to break our partnership with this manufacturer.

Another connection to the conflict that Janna (RC) mentioned during the interview was her close friendship with a woman from Ukraine, whom she met while studying in a Western European University.

The next two participants Semyon (RC) and Ksenya (UC) were working for the same international company at the time of the research. Originally Ksenya (UC) worked in the Kiev office, and Semyon (RC) was a system administrator in the St. Petersburg office. They started dating right before the conflict emerged. Ksenya (UC) was living in Kiev, so Semyon (RC) was following the situation closely:

I was in Piter,⁵ and I was very worried about things there, because Ksusha lived in Kiev. And it seemed quite unsafe there at that time.

Shortly after that Semyon (RC) invited Ksenya (UC) to come to St. Petersburg and move in with him. In May 2014 Ksenya (UC) came to Russia. She described her situation as follows:

I was born and raised in Kiev. I want to say from the beginning that when I moved here I wasn't seeking asylum. I'm not a refugee. It was just a coincidence. Everything happened at the same time – I met a boyfriend and my job allowed me to transfer here, so I used that opportunity. So my move here isn't connected to the conflict.

During the interview Ksenya (UC) mentioned that they made a decision to move to St. Petersburg because it would be more difficult for Semyon (RC) to settle and find a job in Kiev, yet it still was an option for them if she didn't like it in St. Petersburg. Ksenya (UC)

⁵ Casual name of St. Petersburg.

left her parents behind, and every three or four months she goes to visit. Every so often Semyon (RC) also goes with her; however, border crossing often turns into challenge for both of them.

Maxim (UC) became another participant. Maxim's mother approached me willing to share her experience of the conflict, but later, reading the invitation letter, she noticed that my focus group was young adults, so she forwarded my letter to her son. Maxim (UC) moved to St. Petersburg from Lugansk, Ukraine before the conflict. At that time he was looking for his place in the world and St. Petersburg became a new home for him and his wife. But the rest of their family, which stayed in Ukraine, experienced changes:

I started hearing from mom, who was still there. She said that the National Security Agency [NSA] in Lugansk was taken over and my wife's father was caught up and held as a prisoner for three weeks. He was an NSA employee.

Maxim's mother stayed in Lugansk until Maxim (UC) moved her to St. Petersburg. It happened just on time:

I moved my mom ... about a year ago, or a year and a half. She actually boarded the last train. After that train they destroyed the railways.

During the interview Maxim (UC) mentioned that a year prior he was involved in similar research on the conflict and people's relationships and published an article in a Ukrainian newspaper. He hasn't been to Ukraine since he left Lugansk in 2012.

Dmitry, a young man from St. Petersburg who has a degree in Political Science, joined the research after he saw my advertisement posted on a social network page for the third time. Even though he doesn't have any direct connection to the conflict, the topic itself was very important for him professionally and personally due to following reasons:

First of all, I am an international logistics specialist; I specialize in foreign-economic affairs. The Ukrainian conflict itself is not very interesting, but I'm

worried about the aftereffects it's causing within the country and within the EU, which is our main business partner. It has very bad and delayed perspectives. And second, I'm interested in how the media world and political institutions brainwash people on both sides, hiding behind this conflict, and how indirectly... through the prism of the conflict they achieve their goals.

Dmitry (RC) also mentioned that this conflict is more relevant to him because Ukraine is closer than other conflict regions.

At the moment of interviewing, Katya (UC), the thirteenth participant, was nine months pregnant with her second child. Her husband left Novaya Kakhovka, Kherson region, Ukraine in a hurry to avoid joining the Ukrainian army, which at that time was in the active stage of the Anti-Terrorist Operation:

He left in February 2015. He was panicking then, because almost all guys got drafted. They cleaned out all villages in the area. There were no workers in the area anymore. They didn't care if they were studying or working, all men age 18-55 ... Even my dad and brothers got phone calls... They even took guys who had two children. Official marriage with two kids... they came and took guys. Even those who were good for nothing before, all of a sudden were counted as able-bodied. They took them to Kherson for medical examination, and then took them away. It was coming closer and closer to us.

Katya (UC) followed her husband a month later. Her family went through a number of challenges trying to settle down in Russia, travelling from the Novgorod region to the Tver region and then to St. Petersburg. At the time of the interview they were still working on their official papers.

Denis (UC) was born in Armenia but his family moved to Ukraine when he was one year old because of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶ Most of his life he lived in Artyomovsk (the city name was changed to Bakhmut after the revolution), Donetsk region. Denis (UC) moved to St. Petersburg in 2012 because he just "didn't feel right" in

⁶ The ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azeri; for more information see BBC (2016 a), *Nagorno-Karabakh profile*, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18270325>.

Artyomovsk. He said he had always wanted to live in a metropolis and St. Petersburg in particular was his dream place. His family was still there when the conflict emerged.

My brother lives in Artyomovsk and my mother and father live in a village by Artyomovsk. When the conflict began they sent my brother over here. Mother wasn't sure what was going on, so she decided to send my brother here. I wanted to go visit on February 1, 2014, but mother said not to come.

Denis (UC) called himself a very sociable person. He had a lot of friends, relatives and acquaintances in different regions of Ukraine. They kept him posted on what was happening there. He received asylum in Russia, and St. Petersburg became his “safe island.”

Oleg (UC) is a young man from Odessa, Ukraine. He graduated from university as a liaison engineer in early 2015 and was working for a university when one day the convoy arrived at his work place to pick up all draft-age men:

My boss comes running into my office – she is a great woman, she always helped out and covered for me. She comes in, I could see she was terrified, shocked. Our office was on the second level and boss and our offices were connected and had one exit. Her eyes were wide open. She says with horror, “Get up, take your clothes and leave through the window.” I asked, “What happened?” She said, “They came for you, for both of you.” They picked us right from work places. [...] It happened on Friday and on Saturday at 9 am I was at the Moldova border.

Oleg (UC) arrived in Moscow on February 1, 2015 and then he came to St. Petersburg. He mentioned that now he is on a wanted list for dodging conscription and betrayal of the motherland; for that reason he hasn't gone to Odessa since that Saturday. His family and most of his friends were still in Ukraine at the time of the research.

My second last participant was Yevgenya (UC). She was born and raised in Lugansk region, Ukraine. She had been living in St. Petersburg for more than ten years. Yevgenya (UC) is the mother of two boys who were staying with her mother in a city in the

Severodonetsk area, Lugansk region, Ukraine. Every two or three months Yevgenya (UC) goes there to visit her family. That's when the war becomes very real for her:

I left in 2014 before the referendum. [...] I came there in July. It was the next day after the militias left and National Guards came in. The city died out. I didn't recognize my city. Before mom and the kids were talking to me from the basement, because they heard some loud noises, so they got scared. Half of our town hid in basements. It was scary. People filled all town bomb-shelters too.

Yevgenya (UC) works in the beauty industry in St. Petersburg. She said nails were her passion ever since she was a child. Despite all challenges life had for her, through the entire interview, Yevgenya (UC) didn't complain about anything even once.

Sergey (U/RC) became the last participant of the research. He was born in Zaporozhe, Ukraine and then moved to Sevastopol, Crimea, where he lived most of his life. He moved to St. Petersburg in 2014 after the referendum in Crimea. Sergey (U/RC) mentioned that it was his life plan long before the conflict. He graduated from the Sevastopol branch of Moscow State University as a historian and moved away. He witnessed the referendum on independence and observed events in the east. During the interview he told me how he became personally connected to the war in Donbass:

It's along the lines of a tragedy of one man. In the end of May, in June for sure, the first refugees from eastern Ukraine came to Crimea. I heard about it. I heard that the Red Cross branches always exist everywhere, but I heard they opened a new one downtown, so people could bring any clothes there. Since I was moving, I was getting rid of some old things, amongst which I had some fall and winter jackets. I came to the same branch twice in one day. The first time I came, workers were very happy to see me, because I brought some men's clothes. "It's a disaster for us, because we are lacking them," they said. That time I brought jackets. I came the second time and brought some minor stuff. I saw a couple there, a man and a woman, they were in their sixties. They were in the process of an interview with some local journalist. She was recording them with a hand-camera. I passed by, so I heard them talking about coming here. And that man was holding my things in his hands. That was an influence. It was the very beginning of the east.⁷ In this

⁷ Meaning protests and following hostilities in Donbass.

situation, I feel sorry for people, they appeared to be between a hammer and an anvil. But that's politics, that's the world we live in.

Sergey (U/RC) decided to become a research participant because the topic was very important for him but, as he mentioned, it was really hard to find anybody to discuss it with because people would fire up, get angry, get into arguments and wouldn't listen to each other. And he thought that going to a counselor to discuss politics was not the way to go for him.

Most of the interviews lasted for about an hour-hour and a half. A few participants became emotional; some spoke more from a political or sociological point of view; others just shared what they went through and the way they saw things without looking for a greater meaning. In the end, I received a great amount of information, insights, ideas, and experiences, which felt like a treasure to me. After the analysis I tried to incorporate most of participants' words into this thesis.

3.9 - Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the specifics of qualitative research methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data used in this research. It has discussed ethical considerations and has briefly described the research participants. The following chapter opens with the introduction of the research location and participants' experiences in St. Petersburg. It proceeds with the discussion of the different stages and dimensions of the conflict in Ukraine, beginning in November 2013.

Chapter IV - The Image of the Contemporary Ukrainian Conflict in the Participants' Words

This chapter consists of six parts including the Introduction, Euromaidan, Crimea, Donbass, International Conflict, and Conclusions. Participants' stories about the Ukrainian conflict are broken down into four manageable parts, each of which discusses a particular page of the confrontation and relative participants' experiences, ideas and understandings. Since conflicts are usually multi-dimensional and multi-causal processes, it is important to analyze key causes, actors, profiles, and dynamics at every particular stage of the Ukrainian conflict. These topics will be discussed in each of the four sub-chapters. The process will help us to better understand the context of the conflict and to find windows of opportunities for the following steps towards intervention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Safeworld, 2004), which are discussed in Chapter V. This chapter opens with the introduction of the setting for the research, which took place in St. Petersburg, where participants brought or developed their own vision of the conflict in Ukraine.

4.1 – Introduction

According to the St. Petersburg and Leningrad region Federal Migration Service Directory data, by August 2014 more than 114 thousand Ukrainian citizens applied for migration registration in the area (Regnum, 2014), with an average of 300 Ukrainian citizens arriving in St. Petersburg daily in the summer of 2014 (Sunjic, 2014). Through the following years even more people displaced by the conflict and Ukrainian visitors came to the second largest city in Russia looking for a safer place for their families. The events in Ukraine were heartbreaking not only for those people directly impacted but also for millions of Petersburgers. From the early stage of the Ukrainian revolution and during the following

conflict, changes in attitudes towards Ukrainian citizens and Ukraine were noticeable in the city. As immigrants coming from the war-affected region were assimilating in St.

Petersburg moods within the community shifted. To proceed with findings it's important first to sketch a picture of the atmosphere in St. Petersburg beginning in early 2014 as described by participants. In this section we will look at mutual perspectives and relationships within the St. Petersburg community, as well as at interviewees' experiences, which frame the research.

St. Petersburg Experience

In early 2014 Helga (RC), Nicolay (RC), Maxim (UC), Denis (UC), Janna (RC), Semyon (RC), Cyril (RC), Yevgenya (UC), and Dmitry (RC) were in St. Petersburg. The first conflict-affected migrants from Ukraine appeared in the city in the early stage of the conflict, and as late as the middle of spring 2014 the wave of Ukrainians seeking refuge became visible for many Petersburgers. Helga (RC) described how she saw the city then:

It was summer time – June-July. These people were everywhere. It was a visible crowd; they were sleeping here in the park, in other parks, and at train stations. People came and had nowhere to go. It was very notable. There were very many of them.

The Russian government developed a simplified procedure for granting refugee status or provisional asylum for migrants from Ukraine affected by the ongoing conflict in the eastern region.⁸ The resettlement program provided federal funding to help these migrants with work, accommodation, pensions, welfare, and healthcare and offered a simpler path to citizenship. Since most Ukrainians coming to Russia, including Ukrainian participants of this research, weren't persecuted personally, they weren't viewed as refugees and could

⁸ More information can be found in Library of Congress "Refugee Law and Policy: Russian Federation" at <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/russianfederation.php>.

only seek temporary asylum, which was granted in many Russian regions according to quotas. Helga (RC) explained the situation:

There is an international convention, stating that a person can claim refugee status only if he or she was persecuted personally. We call them refugees (those, who came from Ukraine because of the conflict), but in fact they are forced migrants. Very few people were awarded refugee status. If your house got blown up, and you packed and escaped, you are not a refugee, but a forced migrant. There are 172 people in Piter, who were awarded refugee status, when all together there were more than 30 thousand forced migrants coming to Piter.⁹

Major cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg received very limited quotas, which were filled as late as summer 2014. In this way, the resettlement program was mainly aiming to populate remote regions. However, according to many participants, the governmental support offered wasn't attractive enough to settle in Siberia or in the Far East. Helga (RC) suggested that even around St. Petersburg there were regions still open for resettlement, but people didn't want to leave the metropolis:

Piter was officially closed for Ukrainian refugees.¹⁰ People tell them: "Don't come here. They won't issue your documents for provisional asylum here. Go to another region, where you can actually get help." I heard, in the Russian Far East, for example, they provide refugees with accommodation, real good relocation allowance, and issued Russian passports faster. But nobody wants to go there. Here, close to Piter, there is Karelia. Come, make your documents, assimilate, and receive a Russian passport... It's very close to St. Petersburg. Or Novgorod region... No! They all want to go to Piter and Moscow, no other options.

When Katya (UC) left Ukraine, St. Petersburg and Leningrad region were already closed for resettlement, so her family tried to settle down in the neighboring Novgorod region, but had a negative experience with the bureaucratic system and with people there. Later they decided to try to settle in St. Petersburg. They were sure that "you can always make it in Piter," but it wasn't their only argument to choose this city:

⁹ I couldn't find any official data, confirming recalled numbers in open sources.

¹⁰ According to Federal Migration Service, St. Petersburg filled its quota by August 2014 (Bumaga, 2014).

I always knew that there are people who think, others don't care, and third ones watch TV. Those who watch TV may boil over, they may say whatever they want, but they absorb particular information and make particular conclusions.¹¹ [...] But here, in Piter, there is a lot of movement, a lot of young people, a lot of extra moments, which can take attention away, so there are fewer people of this kind [third category] in Piter. Piter is more loyal than all other cities I've seen. There you can see a very particular reaction when you say you came from Ukraine. Here 75% of people would say: "Yes, fine, OK. It doesn't matter to me where you are from." It works with employers and with regular people.

Katya's (UC) words suggest that for her it was important to find a place where she would be treated like everybody else and St. Petersburg, in her opinion, could provide this. A number of other Ukrainian participants also suggested that from the financial and social point of view it was more realistic to try to make a living in a big city. St. Petersburg then looked attractive to them, and the perspective of living in a minor city, town, or settlement in a remote region of Russia was scary. However, Helga (RC) suggested that life in St. Petersburg also wasn't an easy option:

I know a lot of people who had come to Piter and didn't survive here. It's very expensive to rent here, so they left. Some went to another region, but not too many, maybe 10%. About 30% settled here. Others went back to Ukraine.

As soon as the first hostilities began in the Donbass region Helga (RC) realized that she had to help people coming to St. Petersburg from the conflict area. She described her experience in the following manner:

I've never done anything like that before, I was scared and I couldn't imagine where to start. I knew a lot of people were coming over, and somehow I had to house and feed them. I was panicking. Then I came across people in St. Petersburg who were ready to help. The days and nights we were on phones; we were monitoring the Internet. A particular group of girls was looking for accommodation. They contacted people who over the Internet offered to accommodate families of refugees for a month, two, three, or however long was needed. They also contacted those who wrote they were coming soon, had nowhere to live, and asked for help. So we linked all these people.

¹¹ Katya (UC) had a negative experience with this 'category' of people in Novgorod region, where she wasn't treated with respect and often felt stereotyped.

Originally supplies and humanitarian help provided by caring Petersburgers were kept in Helga's (RC) apartment, but soon "stocks were up to the ceiling." Helga (RC) explained that during the early stage a lot of people and companies were willing to help Ukrainians escaping the emerging war in Donbass:

Some people were bringing groceries. [...] A lot of very different people were helping here. One man brought over some very nice clothes and shoes; his car costs more than my apartment. There were some older ladies, who would bring a pack of spaghetti and half a bottle of shampoo. It was obvious they gave all they had. There was a big emotional rise at that time.

People like Helga (RC) created a number of non-governmental organizations which were helping different social groups of war-emerged migrants with accommodation, food, paperwork and other issues. In Helga's (RC) experience, many Ukrainians arriving in St. Petersburg in late spring-early summer 2014 assumed that their move was temporary and hoped that the conflict would be over soon and they would be able to get back to their lives. Since Ukrainian citizens may stay in Russia without visas for up to 90 days (but can't work or study) many of them didn't apply for any papers. The conflict is not over yet at the time of writing, so a lot of people remained in the country illegally. Others were so terrified by the conflict they escaped and so frustrated with options for resettlement in Russia, that they decided to hide from immigration authorities, thinking that if they tried to register they would be immediately deported. Helga (RC) had to deal with a number of such cases, helping to legalize people who often could be deported not because they came to Russia, but because by hiding they were breaking the Russian immigration law.

Grigory (UC), Maria (U/RC), Yelena (UC), Yevgenya (UC), Denis (UC), Maxim (UC), and Katya (UC) noticed that they didn't feel alienated in St. Petersburg. They said it was the other way around, especially during the early stages of the immigration wave.

When Petersburgers got to know these participants were coming from war affected regions they were willing to support and help them. Grigory (UC) said that especially in the beginning of his life in St. Petersburg, “many times [he] received help with jobs, accommodation from complete strangers; they took [him] as one of them, and there were no negative moments.” Yelena (UC) recalled how surprised she was with the welcoming atmosphere:

It was very comfortable. I was pleasantly surprised by how kind people were. [...] I haven't met one bad person here. My daughter went to school here without problems. We were in a very bad financial situation at that time, and they provided my daughter with free lunches at school. I didn't even need to get any documents, just filled the application. There was sympathy.

Yevgenya (UC) also mentioned support and understanding she was hearing from people surrounding her:

Everybody knows that I'm from Ukraine and I hold Ukrainian citizenship. I work with people. I talk to women. Vice versa. Everybody was concerned and worried, because they knew I had kids there then. People treated me with understanding; they supported me, always asked about how things were there. I've never heard anything negative.

Maxim (UC) suggested that in general his experience with Petersburgers was positive, and in some situation his Lugansk origin even helped him out:

I get support; people make it adequate. They make some jokes about *khokhols*,¹² but they make these jokes in a good way, not bad. I've never had any conflicts with anybody because I'm from Ukraine. The other way around... Even when the road police stopped me (even though I drive expensive vehicles, I still break the rules sometimes, speed), they were like: “Oh, you are from Lugansk? How is everything there?” And then they let me go.

Although, Maxim (UC) suggested that, in his experience, jokes about ‘*khokhols*’ had a positive nature, in general this kind of joking and rhetoric, which was popular in St.

¹² Slang, derogatory Russian term for Ukrainians, “originally referred to the customary tufts of hair worn by the Cossacks” (Khokhol, n.d.).

Petersburg for as long as I can remember, represents attributes of individual oppression against Ukrainians, which along with sympathy, characterizes the St. Petersburg community. So, in St. Petersburg, being of Ukrainian descent was not always perceived as positive.

Like other participants, Ksenya (UC) didn't have any bad experiences with people in St. Petersburg and noticed that she was always treated with respect and compassion, but she also mentioned that in the beginning she didn't feel comfortable:

I was a bit scared when I moved here – after all there was a conflict and I didn't know how people were about things happening there. So in the beginning I wasn't very vocal about who I am and where I was coming from, but people could still catch my accent. It was in the beginning, until I got used to it and realized that there was nothing to be afraid of.

Ksenya (UC) admitted that in two years in St. Petersburg she learned to control her speech so nobody would recognize her Ukrainian origin. Sergey, coming from Crimea also mentioned, “thank God, [he has] never had an accent, so people don't take [him] as Ukrainian.” This experience suggests that despite the external positive atmosphere, some Ukrainians felt endangered and tried to mask their origin to avoid problems.

The rise of sympathy towards refugees and forced migrants experienced by most of the Ukrainian participants of the research, was in general very noticeable during my visit to St. Petersburg in late spring-early summer 2014. At the same time, participants' positive experience with resettlement in Russia can partially be explained by the fact that they all could speak Russian fluently and didn't look different from the majority of Petersburgers.

Besides a positive atmosphere, a number of participants recalled some problems they faced after moving to a new place. Yelena (UC), Katya (UC), Denis (UC), and Grigory (UC) mentioned job-related issues they came across while settling in St. Petersburg. Often

employers turned the situation with forced migrants to their advantage; so, in many cases Ukrainians holding a provisional asylum status could only get low-wage unskilled jobs. For Katya (UC) and Grigory (UC) it was impossible to get an official job.¹³ Employers hired them unofficially and paid them less or didn't pay at all – all attributes of institutional oppression. Katya (UC) described her experience in the following manner:

[...] it was difficult for us here – we couldn't get an official job, or any job; we didn't get paid for the job we've done, etc. But we can make it. We made a decision to come here and stay because we'll make it here 100%. We had to move three or four times, changed jobs many times, some freelance. At some point we played the guitar on the streets.

Denis (UC) noticed that in 2012 when he moved to St. Petersburg, it was more difficult to find a job without proper documents than at the time of conflict, when, according to his experience, many places were willing to hire both legal and illegal immigrants. This experience, however, may also suggest that after two years Denis (UC) had a better understanding of the situation and already knew how and where to get a job, while newcomers who didn't have this experience were very frustrated.

Katya (UC), Grigory (UC), Arseny (UC), Denis (UC), and Ksenya (UC) recalled bureaucratic difficulties they had to deal with after leaving Ukraine. Arseny (UC) stated that after he made a decision to stay in St. Petersburg, papers became his main problem. Katya (UC) suggested that the process itself is very complicated, but the lack of information makes naturalization in Russia almost impossible:

We wanted to legalize and wanted to do it properly. The main problem was the lack of information. There are a lot of official websites and articles, but if you don't

¹³ Unofficial or partially official employment is a common practice in Russia; that way employers avoid paying taxes and decrease their general employee-related expenses. However, to receive a temporary residency permit, then a permanent resident card, and finally Russian citizenship and passport, one needs to reside in Russia and be officially employed.

communicate with a particular person who is working on it, or, even better, a person who went through it already (and has nothing to do with bureaucrats), you won't understand anything. Uncle phoned, the husband tried to phone... it didn't help. Just to get one answer we had to go to three or four FMDS,¹⁴ spent hours on the phone, recorded these conversations to reference people later. And it still didn't work. There is a big difference between what you find on the official website, what representatives say and what you find in reality.

Helga (RC) underlined that even though the reality that the Federal Migration Service Directorate (FMDS) opened a special department to work with Ukrainian immigrants only, processing times in St. Petersburg still were very long. Grigory (UC) was trying to receive asylum; he spent more than two weeks in line and when he was almost at the end the region closed for resettlement. Later he realized that the line was twisted: some people were booking numerous places in line to sell them later. Maria (U/RC) assumed that it should be in the interests' of the Russian government to find a better way to help Ukrainians willing to permanently move to Russia to settle down:

I understand that Russia can't take care of all those in need, but I believe that there could be a better way to legalize people who are willing to work here, so they could actually pay taxes and live the same life here supporting their elders and kids.

Ksenya (UC) also mentioned bureaucratic difficulties she was facing, but she suggested that these problems weren't exclusive:

There is a ton of paperwork. There are rules that I can't break, and situations I should avoid. It's not because of my Ukrainian citizenship in particular; it works the same for all foreign citizens.

Besides paper and work-related problems, some participants recalled situations when people took advantage of the existing migrant situation. For example, Maria (U/RC) met some swindlers who pretended to be disabled refugees from the Donbass region to gain money, and later people in need couldn't receive help. In general, many Ukrainian refugees

¹⁴ Federal Migration Service Directorate.

and forced migrants faced what Helga (RC) called “big city nightmares,” including fraud with accommodation, jobs, papers, groceries and even license plates. Helga (RC) described the case she had to deal with:

Some people brought their cars over here. Plates on cars weren't attached well. One man was stealing Ukrainian plates and asking for ransom. The problem was that Ukrainians couldn't get new plates here. They could get a permit to get to the border, leave a vehicle there and walk to the their police department to get new plates. Nobody wanted to do that, so we ransomed those plates. He gave us the phone number (left it right on vehicles), so we phoned and then transferred his money. He never took the plates with him. He just hid them. So after we called him to confirm a payment, he told us where the plates were. The average price was five thousand¹⁵ per plates. One day he just disappeared. Probably made enough and left. I tried to negotiate with him, tried to explain that they didn't have money. Nothing worked. Many people, when they faced something like that, gave in and left.

As the conflict in Ukraine developed, more people from Ukraine fled to Russia and slowly attitudes in the community started changing. For example, Dmitry (RC) noticed that the Russian government's favoritism policies annoyed him. He explained that Ukrainian refugees and forced migrants often received valuable benefits, but the government didn't provide anything like that for Russian families living in bad conditions. However, his main concern was the attitude of newcomers, which he described as “you Russians started all that mess in the east of Ukraine, so you *have to* provide us with normal life here now.” Dmitry (RC) noted that he probably wouldn't worry about that so much, but in his opinion, people with this attitude who could fluently speak Russian and could easily assimilate didn't want to put in much effort; they weren't good workers and just expected that everything had to be given to them. Helga (RC) also noted that these types of behavior demonstrated by some individuals affected the general attitudes of many Petersburgers:

[...] the society, originally oriented to help newcomers, has drastically changed its point of view. Now the attitude towards refugees is quite negative. And it's an

¹⁵ Rubles, which in summer 2014 was about 150 CAD.

attitude towards Ukrainians in general. Originally the nationality wasn't important, but now, when lessors see blue [Ukrainian] passports, they just leave without any explanations. They say they don't want to rent to Ukrainians. Employers don't want to hire Ukrainians. They just say no because they hired Ukrainians before and had bad luck. We helped one Ukrainian guy to find a job but he drained the till and escaped.

In contrast, Arseny (UC) suggested that Ukrainians had the motivation to work hard in Russia to settle down, and in his experience Ukrainians were often good workers valued by employers:

People from Ukraine need the job, they want to work and they don't have anywhere to go, there is no home for them. They take any job for even less money than Tajiks, and of course employers value them. I met a lot of Ukrainians who took two or three shifts in a row in construction, without leaving. So within two or three months they made it to foremen. They had a lot of enthusiasm. They were used to hard work at home, but there was no real equipment there. I always had to work with outdated equipment, just some hand tools, so the same job took me an hour instead of 10 minutes. We knew how to do the job without any equipment. Here in Russia everything is available and affordable. I can afford to buy good tools, which would increase my productivity twice or even three times. I'm used to working a lot and I do twice more in one shift here. I did it all without tools, but I have tools now and I'm doing my job faster now than those who always had these tools.

At the time of the interview Arseny (UC) was working as engineer in St. Petersburg, yet according to Helga (RC) not all people she met wanted to work to get what they wanted. She told a few stories of Ukrainian immigrants who yelled and demanded better deals because they were coming from a war-affected area. Sometimes people were willing to help migrants, but there were those who didn't care for the help, and didn't show respect for what was offered or demanded more, not appreciating what already was done for them. Those people were in their rights, yet, according to some participants' observations, these kinds of reactions affected attitudes of some Russian citizens towards Ukrainian forced migrants in St. Petersburg.

Further, at times there was anger expressed in the community because some Ukrainians were breaking Russian immigration and other laws and regulations. Nevertheless, Helga (RC) noticed that the media, which was focusing on criminal cases involving immigrants and was underlining their Ukrainian origin, often fueled the negative attitude among Petersburgers. She suggested that when this tendency changed attitudes in the city and in the country in general would also change:

People here would have forgotten about refugees long time ago: they came, must just live here. But, they constantly get stoked by some hot news. When this tendency is over, society will calm because we are not angry people in general.

This section has summarized experiences recalled by Ukrainian participants' about their arrival and settling down in St. Petersburg, and Petersburgers' experience with conflict-emerged immigrants. Both Ukrainian and Russian interviewees noticed a positive atmosphere and a rise of sympathy towards Ukrainians in the beginning of the conflict in 2014. However, the researcher noticed that some participants mentioned important attributes of oppression against immigrants that presented in the community which were not consciously recognized either by Petersburgers, or by the Ukrainians, and thus weren't addressed as problems. A few Petersburgers mentioned that later in time the originally positive attitude shifted due to a number of reasons, including negative episodes involving Ukrainian immigrants and some newcomers' demanding attitudes. Ukrainian participants underlined that settlement in St. Petersburg was a serious challenge. Job and document-related issues were named among the main problems they had to face. The conflict experience and their Ukrainian origin in some cases made some participants feel welcome in St. Petersburg, but in other situations it provoked a feeling of danger and pushed some participants towards keeping silent about their background.

The following sections describe a picture of the actual conflict in Ukraine as created out of personal stories of participants. Their understandings of the reasons for the conflict and its aftermath and their attitudes towards it partially illustrate an image of the contemporary Ukrainian military crisis existing in St. Petersburg and contribute to larger research on the conflict. The next section will discuss the second Ukrainian revolution named Euromaidan, its causes as suggested by participants, its development, and interviewees' attitudes towards events which later brought the country to a state of military conflict.

4.2 – Euromaidan: Echo of the Revolution

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine began at the end of 2013, when President Yanukovich postponed the signing of an Association Agreement with the European Union due to a lack of funds for integration (as stated by Prime Minister Azarov) fuelling the first riots at the main square, known as Maidan, in Kiev (Khmelko & Pereguda 2014; Plekhhanov, 2016) (for a political map of Ukraine see Appendix B). The situation was escalated by the brutality of the government police forces – Berkut. Soon, demonstrations in the capital city of Kiev received the name Euromaidan in some areas and “Revolution of Dignity” in others. Because participants referred to the revolution as Euromaidan, it will be called Euromaidan in this work. The next sub-sections discuss participants' understandings of the main reasons for the revolution, the image, the aftermath and the attitudes towards Euromaidan.

4.2.1 – Euromaidan: Revolution or a Planned Operation?

Looking into causes of Euromaidan, participants of the research mainly split into two major groups. The first group understood Euromaidan as an expression of the will of the people, which occurred due to unmet basic needs and anger or a sense of deprivation. For example, Arseny (UC), Cyril (RC), Yelena (UC), and Dmitry (RC) argued that Euromaidan was a revolution aiming to change the government, which was supposed to result in an improvement of the economic situation and increase of the standard of living in the country. Russian journalist Cyril (RC) expressed his understanding of the situation in the following way:

They were sick of theft, they were sick of the kleptocracy, they were sick of marasmus... I can't imagine what kind of person one should be to like Yanukovich. That's something... If you are over 60, it's understandable. But if you are 16-25 years old, you naturally can't understand it, there always was a generation gap. Yanukovich wasn't about the future, he was about the past.

In their stories a number of participants mentioned a low standard of living in Ukraine. For example, the Crimean journalist Maria (U/RC), who didn't view Euromaidan as a real revolution, but rather looked at it as at a planned operation, acknowledged that in general “salaries were sad” in Ukraine. As BHN theorists note, if the system is incapable of meeting the ontological needs of the population, it leaves people with a strong will for change. Looking at the economic situation in Ukraine, Dmitry (RC) echoed Cyril's (RC) idea of the inability of the kleptocratic state to satisfy people's needs:

People were unhappy not just with politics, but with the standard of living too. I mean, people don't live well in a kleptocratic state, because some people steal (I mean, enrich themselves by means of the position they take), but others have to obey the law, work at manufacturing jobs or work for somebody who probably won't pay you and tell you to go fly a kite, because he has clout. And you won't prove anything, because in the court they also know this guy really well.

While for many participants a generally low economic standard of living in Ukraine was an obvious problem, for Arseny (UC), who first worked as an engineer in Donetsk and later spent three months working in Kiev, this reasoning was unclear:

I had doubtful ... and weird feelings about Euromaidan. I had doubts. "Are they right taking action in public now?" [...] when Euromaidan started growing I thought "What for? Can life be better? Probably it's better in Europe, but I understand that we are not going to live like in Europe here and join them." So I had a lot of doubts about good outcomes...

Arseny's (UC) frustration can be explained by then President Yanukovich's political relationship with his hometown. Petrenko (2012) states that Donetsk was receiving a third share of the entire Ukrainian budget during the Yanukovich reign. At the same time 'Donbass people' or the 'Yanukovich Family' – residents of the Donetsk region and those who made most of their careers there – occupied the highest number of positions in the entire government structure and were providing protectionist politics for the Donbass region, developing the region (Politics Inn, 2013; Wilson, 2016). So for Arseny (UC) the reasoning for revolution wasn't personally clear because within the previous three years, during the Yanukovych regime, the standard of living in Donetsk significantly increased.

According to some participants, people gathered at Maidan in 2013-2014 because their essential demands for well-being, participation, freedom, and distributive justice, which in their understanding could be provided through Euro integration, were denied. Interviewees also noted that after the first brutal clashes with the Berkut the inability of the government to provide a non-violent dialogue with citizens made the need for safety more pronounced and at that point more important than other demands, thus increasing mass discontent. According to Arseny (UC), the protests were a natural way to demonstrate

disagreement with the contemporary political and economic situation, yet the reaction of the government made its weakness and inability to fulfill people's needs obvious:

It all started as a usual protest, meeting. Every person stood there for own reason. They all wanted to see Yanukovich and his government gone, because, as we thought at the moment, the signing of the agreement on the Euro integration was either cancelled or postponed. A day or two before the signing date, Ukrainian Prime Minister Nicolay Azarov postponed it, so people hoping to live in the European Union came to the demonstration to ask, "Why? How? What was that?" But questions are not acceptable in our country, so Maidan started gathering. People started to burn tyres. Since serious-scale crowd gatherings never happen without blood, the first fights with the police appeared.

A number of participants recalled their positive feelings about the idea of integration with the European Union or at least movement in that direction. Many of them thought that the turn towards Europe would help people to meet their physiological and psychological needs. Yet, for Yelena (UC) from the Dnepropetrovsk region, the idea of going west was more of an allegation than the cause for the revolution. In other words, this focus was an interest, which, according to Jeong (2000), is historically determined and can be negotiated.

Yelena (UC) explained her point of view in the following way:

It wasn't really about going west. They mainly supported the idea of government change, presidential change. I don't think everybody wanted to go west. The majority wanted to get rid of Yanukovich. People were really tired; they hoped the new government – Yatsenyuk, the Maidan leaders trio – would change things, because they were young and ambitious. That's what people surrounding me thought at that time.

For Sergey (U/RC), the historian from Crimea, a demand for a visa-free regime with the EU which brought people to the streets at the first place, was more an immediate cause than an underlying reason for confrontation:

It actually started with one domino about not signing an agreement with the EU on a visa-free zone and maybe free trade; a visa-free regime was there for sure. Who are those Ukrainians out of about 40 million left there who actually will go to Europe? Who will be actually happy to have visa-free regime? Those who went there with

visas will be able to go there without visas, but those who didn't have an opportunity to go with visas...

Looking into deeper reasons, Sergey (U/RC) assumed that Ukrainians' wish to become a part of Europe was driven by the demand for a better economic and social life, and also by the need for self-actualization within a greater narrative:

After ... what was that word I liked... after the disintegration of the Soviet Union there was no adequate myth about who we are and where we are going. And Ukrainians naively assume that they are Europeans in themselves. They hope they'll get help. I think that's the problem. I mean, when the revolution was over, what were they hoping for? They were hoping the International Monetary Fund would give them a trench.

Originally Arseny (UC), Cyril (RC), Yelena (UC), Janna (RC), Ksenya (UC), Maxim (UC), Dmitry (RC), and Oleg (UC) were positive about the idea of Euro integration and a visa-free regime for Ukraine, which they believed were the main reason students were standing at Maidan. This hope for a better future within the European Union resonates with the Relative Deprivation theory. Students' value expectations made them believe that they were entitled to certain conditions of life (Jeong, 2000), yet the government crashed that hope for reasons that remained unclear for most participants. Maxim (UC) (Lugansk) recalled his feelings about the original ideas of Euromaidan:

The ideas were adequate for youth, because it was much easier to bribe youth. Why? Because, fortunately or unfortunately we don't live like in Europe or in America or Canada, and the older generation, pensioners can't afford to travel, but youth – they travel, they are fans of visiting new places. If there would be an opportunity to have a visa-free system in our country... It's hard to understand why they would refuse. Youth were excited about it, so they leaned on their delicate spot.

As relative deprivation theorists note, if people's expectations don't exceed achievement limits, people don't feel deprived (Jeong, 2000). However, if their expectations are high and people believe their government is almost ready to meet these expectations and then

crashes these hopes, major changes become inevitable (Gurr, 1970). Odessite Oleg (UC) noticed that, in his opinion, originally eighty to ninety percent of the Ukrainian population supported the idea of Euro integration and a lot of people, including him, felt disappointed when the Yanukovich government failed to seal the deal. Yet, according to him, the changes in the protest agenda affected mass attitudes:

Leaders of Maidan told people that they'll join Europe, but people will still have an option to keep relations with Russia, so they promised that everything would be awesome. So originally I was very positive about it. Almost everybody was. Later ideology changes began, so people wouldn't care anymore.

In this way, several participants questioned whether there was an actual revolution at all. For some participants Euromaidan was a revolution; however, most people I met during the research strongly believed that events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 were planned and fueled by some global political players. Helga (RC), Grigory (UC), Nicolay (RC), Maria (U/RC), Semyon (RC), Maxim (UC), and Denis (UC) stated that Euromaidan developed according to a particular scenario. For that reason, Helga (RC), the activist from St. Petersburg, tried to convince her Ukrainian friends not to participate in it:

I said, "Look, your Maidan was set up and paid for: you are getting paid for being there (it's an open secret that people were getting paid there), you are being fed, you got tents, toilets, equipment and everything else you need. It takes a lot of money every day." [...] There was no way to convince them; people had their own information. I was sure in my right and they were sure in their right.

Petersburger Nicolay (RC), who later volunteered in the military forces at Donbass, was confident that Euromaidan was not an expression of the people's will: "I'm a rational person, so I understood very well that there was a script for all those events. It was made ahead of time and then it was played out." Grigory (UC), Maria (U/RC), Yelena (UC), Denis (UC), Katya (UC), Oleg (UC), and Semyon (RC) mentioned they believed that

people were paid to be at Maidan, making it clear to them that it was a planned operation.

For example, Grigory (UC) said:

They got money for coming to Maidan, I'm not the first one to say that; everybody knows that. I don't think it was a citizen's initiative. I believe it was paid for.

Maria (U/RC) also mentioned that she knows people who were paid to participate in Euromaidan:

[...] some people I know were paid to go to those protests, so they took buses to get there. They were paid 50 hryvnas a day to join the protesters. They all went for about a week at a time.

Maria (U/RC) thought that low wages in Ukraine at the time might have been a partial motivator for some people's involvement in Maidan. In other words, some people were ready to risk their well-being and to stand against government forces for just five or six CAD a day. Further, for a number of participants the idea of a "money invasion," as Denis (UC) called it, was essential in a conversation about the causes of Maidan. Echoing some of the same perspectives, Semyon (RC) tried to visualize a situation similar to Maidan in St. Petersburg. He said it was hard for him to imagine that people would gather at the main square in winter "just for the sake of it":

I think people forces that appeared at Maidan didn't come there in their own way. It's hard to imagine that in Piter something might happen and that thing would lead to massive protests, when people would hit the streets and start to fight, destroy and smash down everything... If somebody would offer people a free beer, then I know a lot of people who would agree on that. But "Hey guys, let's go live at the Palace square¹⁶ in February. We'll live in tents and fight with police..."

The idea of Maidan being a planned operation was popular both among Russian and Ukrainian participants; however, two out of four Ukrainians who held this view immigrated

¹⁶ This is the main square in St. Petersburg.

to Russia before the conflict, and by the time we met they had been living in St. Petersburg for about four years.

Another Ukrainian, Yelena (UC), originally explained Euromaidan as a revolution, but later her understanding of the situation changed, also seeing it as a sponsored event:

Originally I thought that the conscious part of the Ukrainian population decided to change life. Now I think, and I believe it's right, that it was a sponsored action to destabilize Ukraine. Maybe somebody planned it all to destroy Donetsk and Lugansk, because these cities were economically stable and they actually benefited entirety of Ukraine. It's a huge loss for Ukraine, mines...

In further conversation, Yelena (UC) said that her opinion changed when she moved to St. Petersburg. In general, the conspiracy theories about the Ukrainian conflict were more relative to Russian participants and to Ukrainians who had spent more time in Russia. Twelve participants also mentioned propaganda both in Russia and Ukraine as a major problem. Since this topic mainly came up in a conversation about global conflict. The media influence and propaganda are discussed in more detail later in this paper.

For six participants the interests of authorities became a crucial factor of Euromaidan. For example, Janna (RC), the journalist from St. Petersburg, explained the events in Kiev in the following manner:

I think the attitude towards Russia was brewing up for a long time. Then pro-European people came to power, like Yatsenyuk, Kolomoysky. These people were making good money and they had pro-Western moods. Besides that they found words to make the most people support them after the takeover happened. I think that's why... Because authorities turned towards the West.

Talking about the postponed EU, agreement Dmitry (RC) called Euromaidan a "geopolitical battlefield," expressing an idea similar to Janna's:

[...] it happened so, I guess, that some elites were on, and some were opposed. And there were more of those who opposed it, so they affected the population, but I think people were ready for that, they were sick of it all.

Semyon (RC) noted that, as in any conflict, money became one of the main reasons for confrontation:

My worldview is quite apolitical. I think, some kind of two communities, affecting each other, were splitting the money. I guess the Yanukovich government showed weakness at some point, and people who wanted to take the power used that moment. I always say that they were splitting money because in the end it all comes to money. Power comes to money... Everything that happened there always comes up to this.

Oleg (UC), who in general turned negative about the revolution after the conflict “got f*ng ugly” and spread to Odessa, explained the popularity of the idea of Euro integration in a similar way:

Until now nobody understands why the Yanukovich government abandoned this idea. Chances are he was set on getting closer to Russia. And people who are in power now played this card. They used the idea of being in Europe to start it all.

While working as a journalist in Crimea, Maria (U/RC) conducted a survey among the population, asking people if they had ever read the Association Agreement with the EU. It turned out that most people supporting the idea didn't really know what was written in the document, so justifying the revolution with the failure of the EU agreement, in Maria's (U/RC) opinion, wasn't logical:

Nobody actually knew anything about it for a long time, then suddenly it became a hot topic, it wasn't signed and those, who stayed in a shade before began to protest and campaign for its' signing. But as I said, people didn't really know what they were fighting for.

Maria (U/RC) looked at Maidan as the opportunity for people to spill out their accumulated anger. She expressed her idea in the following manner:

First, I think anger in general accumulates inside us for many reasons like family problems, conflicts at work and any other reasons. People accumulate anger. And then the object – protest – appeared, and people could just pour their negativity, all their bad emotions there. Somebody supported it actively – bombing, destroying, fighting... But others poured their negative emotions in fights with relatives, coworkers. They accumulate it all inside. They made up their opinion and don't

want to have anything to do with rational opinions. I think Maidan let people splash out all their dirt. Things that happened there were scary.

Emergence of anger also falls along the line of BHN theory, according to which, when all basic human needs and sub-needs are met among others anger transforms into self-recognizance (Byrne, 2009; Redekop, 2002).

A low standard of living in many regions of Ukraine, accumulated anger, and a common feeling of deprivation among the youth after the failure of the government to begin the European integration process were named among the main reasons of the second Ukrainian revolution. The possible planned nature of the entire uprising serving the needs of third parties, was also named as another possible explanation of the revolution. The views participants had formed about the revolution at the time of their interviews in 2016 will be discussed in the next sub-section.

4.2.2 – The beginning of Euromaidan: Comparison to the Orange Revolution

The first days of the revolution, which began with minor spontaneous protests on November 21, 2013 weren't noticed by most of the participants. Even the culmination of the revolution on January 25, 2014, when protesters took over the state administration agencies and occupied government buildings in fourteen regions of Ukraine (Duleba, 2014) and mass protests started in Kiev, Chernigov, Kherson and Transcarpathia, still didn't feel very serious for some participants living in St. Petersburg and eastern and southern Ukraine. Cyril (RC) reflects on his vision of the situation:

I didn't think some great historical events that would influence the life of the entire post-Soviet region were happening then. If somebody had told me that then, I would have been very surprised.

Recalling their thoughts and feelings about the first days of Euromaidan eight participants mentioned the Orange revolution. Some of them looked at the first events of Euromaidan through a prism of the positive experience of the previous revolution. Arseny (UC) reflects on his then-expectations on the original minor protests and following Euromaidan:

In the beginning it looked like they would protest for a few days and give up. Nobody really paid attention to it when there were 100-200 people. We were used to such protests. There were cases like this during the Orange revolution in 2006 [2004-2005], I think during the presidential elections. The first Maidan took place then. At that time people came to Maidan [Square] to protest. These protests caused the third stage of elections and reelection of the president. After that people left. We thought this time everything would go the same way...

On the one hand, for Arseny (UC), Dmitry (RC), Maria (U/RC), Ksenya (UC), Oleg (UC) and probably many others, the original spontaneous protests weren't foreseen as a sign of a violent revolution, and their experience of the Orange revolution made people believe that they could achieve changes in government politics by demonstrating their discontent. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, when events at Maidan started gathering pace, the experience of the previous nonviolent revolution doomed Ukrainians who were confident in the positive outcome of protests and decided not to wait for the next presidential elections, which were rescheduled after negotiations between Yanukovich and opposition leaders, and were to happen in what seemed a distant half a year (Dyer, 2014; Plekhanov, 2016).

At the same time for other participants like Sergey (U/RC), Katya (UC), and Yevgenya (UC), the precedent of the Orange revolution was viewed as a negative example.

Thus, Sergey (U/RC) analyzed the situation from a historian's point of view:

My attitude was bad, because in 2004-2005 I saw a similar Orange revolution in Ukraine, when I was living there. What happened in 2004-2005 was very similar to what happened in 2013-2014. The first time it resulted in a decline in the standard of living in Ukraine, and the intensity of emotions, which we had there for first couple winter months, went down in a year, when the new people, new team came to power. And a new broom cleans well, but the set of mind doesn't change – the

same Soviet people come to power, who have some kind of present day manners. After revolutions nobody creates long-term strategies. Everybody lives for today. It's obvious.

Khmelko and Pereguda (2014) argue that the role of the historic and cultural precedent such as the Orange revolution was more symbolic in the case of Euromaidan. In reality, the new revolution unfolded differently from the previous nonviolent civil protest, highlighting and magnifying any splits in Ukrainian society. Oleg (UC) noticed that people, who “have ever said anything in support of Russia and Putin [...], who weren't agreeing or weren't happy [with the revolution] were isolated” and became excluded from the society and decision-making process, “because they didn't support the country during the hard times.” Thus, as Duleba (2014) notes, by January 29, 2014 it became obvious that the revolution, which had grounds to stop before, failed to catch on in southern and eastern Ukraine. At that time Katya (UC) was in the Kherson region (south of Ukraine) and her attitude towards Euromaidan to some extent illustrates this failure:

It was very funny for us, because we couldn't understand what people were doing there. We couldn't understand what was going on and what people were so unhappy about. It was during Maidan. I still don't understand whom, for what, and why.

The peaceful success of the previous revolution left some participants, who were distant from Kiev, unalarmed and not participating in events of 2013-2014, giving grounds for a further split. Duleba (2014) assumes that further conflict escalation could be prevented if the Maidan government would share power with the entity representing the other half of the country, which didn't support the revolution, and would include representatives of the Party of Regions into the decision-making process. But this has not happened.

4.2.3 – Turning Point of the Revolution

Participants experienced Euromaidan at different locations. Cyril (RC), Semyon (RC), and Ksenya (UC) had an opportunity to see protesters in Kiev, while other participants were away from the Ukrainian capital. Oleg (UC), for example, noted the global support that he witnessed in Odessa in the beginning of the revolution:

[...] people demonstrate their support. I mean, you pass by a café you hear a discussion: “Yes, yes, yes... It’s right, right, right...” Rarely I heard some bad words about the beginning of Maidan. Everybody thought it was going to be good.

Diuk (2014) suggests that the turning point of protests happened on December 17, 2013, when President Yanukovich agreed on a deal with Russian President Putin. For some participants and probably for many people in Ukraine the deal was equal to a complete abandonment of the hoped-for agreement with the EU. Resonating with Diuk’s (2014) timeframe Oleg (UC) noted that the shift in people’s moods towards a greater confrontation happened at an early stage of the revolution, when dreams about the visa-free regime with Europe were completely abandoned, yet he felt that the turning point actually happened somewhat later in time:

I think, it happened in January 2014. That was a turning month of Maidan, because then, first, the authorities totally abandoned the ideas of cooperation with Europe, and second, the EU also rejected to review that application.

What looked like nothing major for most of the participants soon grew into a violent unforeseen conflict. Ksenya (UC) shared her astonishment with the way things went:

Before we left [Kiev] – it was the end of February – Maidan was going full power. We had no idea that such a horror would begin. Nobody could think then, that when people hit the streets, came to Maidan, it all would end up the way it did, that it would last for more than a year, that the aftermath would be so serious.

Yevgenya (UC), Katya (UC), and Maxim’s (UC) expectations about the revolution resonated with Ksenya’s (UC). For example, Yevgenya (UC) said:

I think then nobody really thought that it could turn out like that. I think in general people want peace in the world. Nobody wants to leave the house behind and go.

At the time Maidan was gaining power Ksenya (UC) left Kiev and went skiing in the Carpathians, in western Ukraine. Following the news on television and the Internet she was shocked with the drama happening in Kiev. Ksenya (UC) described her feelings as follows:

When the broader Maidan started, not just with students, but when all TV channels were showing that there was a war pretty much there, that they were burning tires, Molotov cocktails and so on, then I was in the Carpathians. My friends and I went there for a vacation and watched it all on TV. It was terrifying, and I was scared. They set up some crazy panic among people. We weren't there, but our parents, friends, relatives were. We didn't know what to think. The way they showed it, it looked like the all of Kiev was on fire, and like the warfare was all over the area...

Soon after returning to Kiev, Ksenya (UC) realized that the panic she witnessed while being in the Carpathians was created mainly by the media spreading rumors and the real situation in town was much better than she expected to see:

Something was still going on at Grushevskogo, but by then people knew what was happening; it was local and wasn't spreading. Everything was happening there. I think it was happening five minutes away from Maidan.

Dyer (2014) states it is almost impossible to turn nonviolent protest into atrocities, and often the point of no return is reached with the help of provocateurs pursuing particular goals. This idea echoes understandings of the situation suggested by Helga (RC) and Nicolay (RC) who both categorically supported the idea of a "planned operation," stating that the Kiev revolution could not have a turning point due to its nature. Illustrating her position Helga (RC) compared Euromaidan to revolutions of the Arab Spring:

During the Arab spring leaflets were used. During Maidan they used exactly the same leaflets, which suggested how to stand, what to do, what to wear, what to take. [...] The scenario was also the same: it started as a regular nonviolent revolution; people came out to wave their flags, to protest and change the government. The bloody accident was needed to start killing people. There, in the East, everything went just the same. A few people from the crowd were killed. The first blood triggered military collisions. The same happened here: a few people of the

protesting crowd were murdered. I don't think any of Berkut can appear in the middle of the protesting crowd, shoot one and escape. I think it was planned, organized, and mastered.

For Grigory (UC), the switch from non-violence looked more like a spill of the crowd's aggression towards the government forces, which were trying to keep order on the streets:

I saw how Berkut just stood there; they had an order to stay still and do nothing, and people were throwing rocks at them, then Molotov cocktails. Later the youth started complaining that Berkut beat them up. There is a boiling point and they probably reached it. In this way, step-by-step, bit-by-bit some kind of mess was starting, and we didn't want to be a part of it. I mean for me, my friends and my relatives.

Among the most popular reasons for a breakdown in nonviolent behaviour Pinckney (2016) names government repressions towards the crowd, yet the switch to violent behaviour is more likely to happen when repressions are “consistently high over a long period of time.”

In the case of Euromaidan the first ten victims of the revolution appeared in December-January, yet this scale of repression wasn't enough to completely break the general nonviolent pattern. Yelena (UC), Denis (UC), and Dmitry (RC) named the ‘Heavenly Hundred’ – the first major victims among the crowd – a turning point of the revolution.

Yelena (UC) recalled thoughts and feelings she had then:

When these hundred people – ‘Heavenly Hundred’ ... I was shocked when they said it was Berkut who had been shooting. [...] They believed that Yanukovich made orders to end the revolution in a tough way, that he didn't want to come to an agreement, didn't want to sign something, and then he left, and that caused casualties.

Later, while some suggested that unidentified snipers killed most of the people among the ‘Heavenly Hundred’ (Traynor & Salem, 2014), the major image of the government forces suppressing the crowd was enough for the nonviolent behavior to breakdown. Sergey (U/RC) looked at the information about victims from an instrumental point of view:

[...] The thing I didn't like even more: a hellish mythological machine that works perfectly during the Internet age – about casualties. There are always casualties in

any conflict. It always was like that. But in our cynical digital age everybody likes to talk about it. My deeply personal opinion as a historian and cynic: nobody cares about the fallen; people forget them. But when I see stories about the 'Heavenly Hundred' quoted over and over again with the number of men killed, and mainly when I see them putting up un-appealable labels about who was to blame for that ... Yes, it's bad when there are casualties. It's bad when people die, bad, but the death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic. It really bothers me that it all gets actively quoted, posted, and that people identify themselves with these victims.

Semyon's (RC) opinion in a way resonated with Sergey (U/RC), as he said that even major casualties could fade away in people's minds if President Yanukovich had not left the country:

The main turning point, the point of no return happened when Yanukovich was evacuated to Russia. Everything else, Berkut attacks and so on, they could allow it to fade away or just like they like to do it here - disperse everybody by power methods and imprison half of them. I think it would be the best way for this situation. Of course, they probably could avoid it all from the beginning.

The complete abandonment of the idea of integration into the European Union and a possible turn towards deeper partnership with Russia, as well as the first appearance of a large number of victims of the revolution and the subsequent escape of the president demonstrated the complete inability of his government to bring the situation under regulatory control. These incidents were named among the main points of no return of the emerging crisis. After these events it was clear to participants that the conflict that started as minor riots would keep growing and would move beyond the capital borders.

4.2.4 – Attitudes towards Euromaidan

Participants' emotions towards Maidan turned into luggage, which they carried over in their lives and some of them brought over to St. Petersburg. This luggage widens the image of the revolution and causes and consequences, which were further developed by the media

sources in St. Petersburg. This section discusses participants' attitudes towards Euromaidan and the reasoning behind it.

When recalling their feelings about the revolution, participants again broke into two groups, as had happened earlier during the conversation about the causes. The majority of thirteen were negative about what happened in Kiev. Four others described their positive attitude towards Euromaidan, acknowledging that while the events that followed were very dramatic, they were not disappointed in the core ideas of the revolution.

Helga (RC), Nicolay (RC), Maxim (UC), and Maria (U/RC) thought that the planned operation developed in the way it was supposed to and turned into a major conflict, which also was meant to happen. Nicolay (RC) described his feelings about Euromaidan in following manner:

Most of my thoughts and feelings are unprintable. I think that the disaster happened to the minds of those people who participated in those events. It was obvious that they were rudely, shamelessly used. It all looked like crud to me and wasn't worth a dime. Twenty-three years of propaganda did its part, so people were sick in the head.

Katya (UC) called protesters "idiots," who "had nothing else to do." Maria (U/RC) echoed this attitude, describing them as "idlers, who connive with those with loudspeakers screaming about government change." She explained her attitude recalling her original reasoning:

I was unhappy with it and definitely didn't support what people were protesting for. I knew that a lot of people went there [to Maidan] for the money.

Grigory (UC) followed the situation at Maidan from the Donetsk region. For him the development of protests into the revolution also didn't look like a natural course of history:

I think they went too far. Later they wanted to have a takeover and change the president, change the government. It didn't look natural. I think in such a short period of time people cannot choose that.

Recalling his conversation with a friend, Grigory (UC) described what happened at Maidan as “absurd.” He didn’t share the protesters’ beliefs, so when the first calls to join the revolution in Kiev came to his city he was frustrated:

At that time, when in two or three months the situation expanded, we didn’t know why we should support them. I still don’t know. I don’t need to support them; I’m a regular honest citizen.

Sergey’s (U/RC) negative attitude appeared sooner due to his view on revolutions in general rather than because of the development of Euromaidan. Repressions often used by new governments after revolutions to stabilize the situation were his main concern:

I had a bad attitude [...] I’m a historian, I know what happens during revolutions and after them, so I realized that when people screamed that police weren’t right, that things should be changed and so on, I realized that when the new government comes together, they’ll set up the same (or not the same, doesn’t matter) police forces, but I mean the new government will start to take some repressive measures.

Like Sergey (U/RC), Semyon (RC) was worried about the development of what he called “pogroms.” He also had conducted some research on the Association Agreement and came to the conclusion that most protesters weren’t familiar with it at all, and didn’t realize how absurd their hopes for Euro integration were:

I had a feeling that the people who gathered there weren’t very good with Geography and Economics in high school and also were quite hypnotizable. I had a feeling that a gang of poor street people took power.

Katya (UC) also found the original ideas of Euromaidan illogical:

At some point people decided that they wanted to be in the EU. It was ridiculous. I didn’t take it seriously. I had a feeling that they chased a bunch of pricks out...

While for Sergey (U/RC), Semyon (RC), and Katya (UC) the causes and effects were the main reasons for negativity, Yevgenya (UC) was concerned about people’s tragedy:

My attitude towards revolution? ... I don't know how to explain. I'm against all these. The guys sit at the top, and people suffer, people die. They just play with people.

In most cases participants who viewed Euromaidan as a planned conflict recalled a mild or strong negative attitude towards the revolution. It happened so in cases of Grigory (UC), Katya (UC), Helga (RC), Nicolay (RC), Maria (U/RC), Sergey (U/RC), Janna (RC), Yevgenya (UC), Semyon (RC), Maxim (UC), and Denis (UC). Oleg (UC) originally was positive about the ideas of Maidan, yet the following expansion of the conflict and especially events in Odessa made him turn negative. On the other hand, Cyril (RC) and Dmitry (RC) who described Euromaidan as a fight against kleptocracy and a struggle for rights expressed a positive attitude towards it. Cyril (RC) explained his feelings in a following manner:

In general, I understand young people who want to travel freely, who fight discrimination. That's the topic that unites young people, and if somewhere they can just come out and speak out, it's positive.

Even though later in time Yelena (UC) came to the conclusion that the revolution was orchestrated, her positive attitude towards the ideas of Euromaidan persisted through the conversation:

[...] we took it as a revolution. It was a nonviolent revolution that led to the government change and reforms, which would fix the economy, the standard of living of people, not government, because the governments fixes its standard of living themselves... in every country [laughs].

Even fatalities, which turned the nonviolent revolution into a violent protest, didn't affect

Yelena's (UC) opinion:

[...] there are no revolutions without casualties. Bloodless revolutions are rare. So people were sorry about the victims, but hoped things would get better.

Ksenya (UC) also was positive about Euromaidan:

In the beginning everybody was for it, everybody was great. People actually really stuck together.

Even though the switch to a bloody conflict made Ksenya (UC) change her position, she expressed a persisting hope that sooner or later the revolution will bring results. Dmitry (RC) was very positive about the original ideas of Euromaidan, yet later he came to an understanding that the group of protesters in Kiev couldn't express the will of the entire country. He explained his attitude as follows:

When Maidan began, I was sincerely happy for Ukraine, because ... [...] I watched it all, and I believed for the first time I saw people's direct will being expressed, I saw them pursuing their right of revolution against the unfair regime. [...] I think it inspired many people at that time. [...] I just felt some kind of... satisfaction because people who are similar in culture, like-minded, similar in education, and in other characteristics to Russians implemented it all. I mean, why can't we do it one day? Then I realized that a few thousands, maybe a few hundred thousand (if there actually were a hundred) can't objectively represent the will of the entire country. Ukraine is heterogeneous. There are southern, eastern, western regions and also northern. Are decisions they make, the solutions they suggest relevant for people, who live in the east of Ukraine, in far western regions? Are they? Then my original euphoria went down.

The following "post-revolution processes, which include dying of institutions, creation of new ones, interested influence groups, different oligarchs who stayed in their places, political figures who stayed in their places" made Dmitry (RC) disappointed, because as he noted, he "felt that everything was over and the energy of those people was used by other interested groups."

In this way, participants' attitudes in most cases echoed their vision of Euromaidan's causes. The group that viewed protests as a 'planned' process had a negative attitude towards it. And those who viewed Euromaidan as civil resistance remained positive about it. In most cases the first group in one way or another assumed that the revolution was planned or sponsored by the USA or the West. This assumption from the very beginning

turns what seemed to be a local revolution into a larger scale international conflict with far-reaching goals, which makes participants not directly affected by the revolution a possible part of a major confrontation between global players. The main enemy in this conflict was familiar to all participants stemming from their previous experience of the Cold War, which they either witnessed, or studied at school as an important part of the recent past. On the other hand, a group with positive attitudes distanced themselves from the revolution and viewed it rather as a positive sign of development of a civil society. In other words, they didn't associate themselves with the conflict, but analyzed it from the perspective of related ideas and saw it as a positive.

The following development of the confrontation and its spread over to other regions of Ukraine changed participants' perceptions, adding other parts to their images of the global conflict.

4.3 – Crimea: A Second Case of the Expression of the Will of People in Ukraine

February 22, 2014, the point when President Yanukovich left the capital to later appear on television denouncing the coup, could have become the final point of the Ukrainian revolution. The government, which had proved its incompetence, was dismissed and a new acting president and a new government were announced. The hope was that they would improve the general social and economic situation. That week probably could have been the last week of the revolution and the beginning of a new era in Ukrainian history.

Unfortunately, the following few days demonstrated the failure of the revolution to include some eastern and southern regions in decision making processes, and consequently the failure to end the conflict. Besides that, the already obvious Russian interests and political involvement with the conflict strongly escalated the situation in the country, and the

appearance of ‘little green men’ or ‘polite people’ who looked like the members of the Russian military (Shevchenko, 2014) in Crimea as early as the second half of February (Haines, 2016), even before the Russian parliament made an explosive decision to approve the use of military force to defend Russian population in Ukraine, heated the inner and international climate.

Ironically, while many citizens voiced outrage at the apparent Russian involvement, it was the turn of those who followed the situation in Kiev from far away to hit the streets when the parliament voted to ban Russian as a second official language. Even though the vote was later overturned, the situation demonstrated the earlier-mentioned unwillingness of the new government to include the interests of southern and eastern regions into their new politics (Duleba, 2014).

Two weeks after the Russian Parliament approved President Putin’s request to use military power to “protect Russian interests” (BBC, 2014), while Russian troops flooded the peninsula, Crimea voted for independence from Ukraine, claiming its will to become a part of Russia (for a political map of Ukraine see Appendix B). On March 18, 2014 President Putin signed a bill on association with Crimea.

Two participants of the research witnessed that time in Crimea. Maria (U/RC) participated in the referendum in Yalta and Sergey (U/RC) became a part of historical events in Sevastopol. Maria (U/RC) talked about people attending the referendum:

A lot of people attended it. There was never before such a turnout. It was my first time voting, and my boyfriend’s, and my mom’s. My mom never voted for deputies or presidents before. Everybody went. A lot of older ladies went to vote, as if it was a holiday, wearing their best kerchiefs, people came in wheelchairs. A lot of people...

Sergey (U/RC) also noticed that on the day of the referendum “the city [of Sevastopol] was celebrating.” Other participants of the research followed the situation on social networks, media and via conversations with friends and relatives like the rest of the world. Not everyone was joyous about the Crimean referendum. A number of Ukrainian participants expressed the bitterness they had when it was announced that Crimea would become a part of Russia. For example, Yelena (UC) said that it was “very hard” for her to accept the referendum. She described feelings she had then:

We were used to the fact that Crimea was a part of Ukraine. I felt very hurt. [...] I felt hurt in a way like you feel when somebody takes away your toy. It used to be yours, but not any more. In this way.

Some of the Russian participants, on the other hand, noted the rise of patriotic feelings they had after the Crimean episode. Janna (RC) recalled changes in her attitude towards Russia:

I think I felt that pride for the country. My level of patriotism was up. I also was working for the government structure, so it wasn't that beneficial, but it was inevitable to be on.¹⁷

The next sections will discuss the participants' understanding of what happened in Crimea in March 2014, the reasons behind it and its global consequences, as well as the participants' emotions about the referendum and further development of the situation.

4.3.1 – Why did Crimea Vote for Independence?

After changes brought by the revolution, post-revolutionary reactions spread over broader Ukraine. The feeling of danger caused by ongoing events as well as by rumors fast spreading among the population were recalled by many Ukrainian participants who were not only in Crimea during the conflict, but also in such regions as Kherson (Katya (UC)), Odessa (Oleg (UC)), Dnepropetrovsk (Yelena (UC)), and of course Donetsk (Grigory (UC))

¹⁷ Meaning that it was impossible to avoid the rise of patriotism.

and Arseny (UC)) and Lugansk (Yevgenya (UC)). According to the participants, after the success of Euromaidan – the revolution mainly supported by western and central regions (less by some southern and eastern regions) – the feeling of insecurity appeared in regions, where people hadn't supported the ideas of the revolution. Yet the situation in Crimea differed from other regions, since for more than 70 years the Russian population there noticeably prevailed: in 2001 ethnic Russians represented 58,3 percent of the population in comparison to 24,3 percent Ukrainians and 12,1 percent Tatars (Lubin, 2014). At the same time Deliagin (2015) notes that many Ukrainians who live in Crimea see themselves as “people of Russian culture” (p. 7). In other words, Crimea was the only region in Ukraine where people identifying themselves as Russians represented the sizable majority, not a minority as in other regions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Maria (U/RC) expressed her vision of Crimean identity and the political situation in the area:

I always thought that Crimea and Ukraine were different. I never saw Crimea as a part of Ukraine. Crimea had its own regulations. It was an autonomous republic; it was a kind of a small state that in some cases obeyed Ukraine. Originally I felt Crimea wasn't a part of Ukraine. We had Ukrainian elections, when we voted for the head of the parliament. When everything began in Kiev our politicians right away said they didn't support it. They asked not to go there. And if people decided to go, they asked not to bring Crimean symbols with them, because Crimea didn't support it.

When Yanukovich fled the country and new people took power, this majority could feel lost and threatened. Plekhanov (2016) argues that people of Crimea, “known for [their] long-lasting preference for the peninsula's return to Moscow's jurisdiction,” used an opportunity and rose against the new nationalistic Kiev government (p.21). Possibly a propaganda machine and/or just regular rumors enhanced the feel of danger and sped up the decision. Sergey (U/RC) described the situation he witnessed in Crimea in the end of February-beginning of March 2014:

[...] we heard that some people were on their way to Crimea to quell discontent by illegitimate methods. Like, there was a precedent (I didn't understand if it was true or not) in 1992 Crimea like almost separated, there was some kind of referendum or something like that, and like some cliques of people came over, which quelled discontent. Such a myth existed. [...] I'm not sure if it was 1992 or 1996, I can't say for sure. Such a thing existed. [This time] I came across some like echoes on social networks, like: we'll come there and we'll end it with you [meaning they would kill pro-Russian protesters in Crimea]. It happened literally a couple times, but I've come across it.

Maria (U/RC) also recalled some rumors she had heard about oncoming danger:

It was scary – it was very scary. In January there was information about columns moving towards Crimea to start a mutiny here. This information was spread by the news media, by social networks. Most of them, Ukrainian patriots, gathered on *Facebook* or *Vkontakte*, they created communities there, sent out invitations and people joined them to go somewhere. So we heard rumors about such groups of nationalists coming to Crimea to take over the local government and administration.

According to Seppala (2012), stress in the face of danger and war, in particular, results in a sense of vulnerability and stimulates people to turn towards collaboration and social connection. Acute stress momentarily prepares humans for resistance, and in the same way the sense of oncoming danger turns people toward a defensive mood (Seppala, 2012).

Maria's (U/RC) experience resonated with this idea. She recalled that as soon as the first signs of a possible revolutionary victory appeared in Kiev, people in Crimea started taking action:

Crimea started to defend as soon as the first clashes began in Kiev. People here understood that they would hit on Crimea because it's a tidbit.

Sergey (U/RC) also talked about early signs of civil disturbance, which he noticed during

Defender Day then celebrated both in Ukraine¹⁸ and in Russia:

[...] it was February 23. We had a terrible uncertainty by the middle of February. There was some power vacuum. I somewhat noticed the protest on February 23rd. I

¹⁸ Starting in 2015 the Defender Day was substituted for the Defender of Ukraine Day holiday and is now celebrated on October 14 of every year.

didn't participate in it, because then I didn't think it would turn into something and that could work out. When a crowd started to chant pro-Russian slogans...

According to some participants' opinions, the victory of revolution in Kiev for many in Crimea meant that there was no more time, and that some collective decisions had to be made to defend people from the danger which emerged earlier. Maria (U/RC) evoked memories about people's moods:

[...] people started talking about the referendum. Originally they wanted to have it in April or May [2014]. Then, mass murders began in Kiev, chaos began, and the president was blamed for that. So they decided to have a referendum in Crimea in two to three weeks. It was all set up within a week pretty much.

Participation in the decision-making process at that time was unquestionable for many Crimeans. Sergey (U/RC), who also took part in the voting process, noted that during the time he had spent at the polling station there had been no paper stuffing, and later he was confident that the announced turnout of the referendum was genuine:

I always recognized the fact that many people, not just many, but the overwhelming majority of people in Crimea identify themselves as Russians and as a part of Russia. If we talk about Sevastopol, it's really almost all Sevastopol. It's a sure thing. I don't have any suspicions about the results of the referendum. And I know a person, who was the head of one of the territorial committees, where the referendum took place. She said their numbers weren't manipulated. They didn't just draw these 90%; it was fact.

Reflecting on accusations of manipulations of the referendum outcomes, Maria (U/RC) described what she witnessed in Yalta:

A lot of Ukrainian outlets reported that people showed up to the referendum with guns at their heads. I didn't see any military people in Yalta. There were some local neighborhood watch volunteers and some police patrols. Nobody carried weapons or guns. I don't even remember any campaigning for the referendum, like local parties normally have.

The Russian military presence and the planned nature of the Crimean operation, which was obvious and mentioned by some participants (Sergey (RC), Dmitry (RC)) but originally

was denied by the Russian government, was acknowledged a year later by President Putin in a movie *Crimea. The Way Home* (2015). Dmitry (RC) suggested that “people with guns” appeared in Crimea, but their goal was to let the referendum happen, not to force people to make particular decisions. He explained his position on what he called the “subtraction” of Crimea in a following manner:

I’m trying to put myself in the place of people who lived in Crimea then and now. When our western colleges say that Crimea is annexed, it’s not very true. I mean, formally yes: Russian military forces were in Crimea. Part of them appeared there because of the right of deployment granted to the Black sea Navy fleet. They weren’t supposed to leave their territory, but there was a danger to their lives and equipment, so they left. Then later we got to know there were some extra people transferred to Crimea. Very polite people, if you take silence as politeness. To be polite with a gun in your hands... But that’s our commander-in-chief’s style - “good should be two-fisted; if you can’t avoid the fight, be the first to hit; Piter or Leningrad gateways gave me a good lesson.”¹⁹ Their appearance in Crimea probably prevented some bloodshed. Maybe, however I doubt it. Mainly Russians and Tatars compactly live in Crimea, yet there are some Ukrainians too... I talk politics. We can’t say, if something could happen there, that’s all theorizing.

The mass attendance of the population for the referendum, according to Dmitry (RC), Denis (UC), Maria (U/RC), and Oleg (UC), was stimulated not only by danger, but also by a feeling that in the current situation Russia could provide Crimeans with a better life than the new Ukrainian government, which emerged after the revolution, provided by people who wanted Ukraine to work towards rapprochement with the European Union, hoping it would give them freedom of travel and improve inner economic situation. Dmitry (RC) recalled his thoughts:

I guess, first that bright image of Europe they were shown – that blue width with stars, the idea that we would be a part of it... it was euphoria. [...] People believed that all they had before was worse than what is ahead of them. They felt they had to make a little step, overcome themselves (many Ukrainians went through it already; they remember the Soviet Union). A bit more and we’ll become free, and we’ll live better, first of all.

¹⁹ Statements made by Russian President Putin in different interviews.

Some participants noticed that after the success of the revolution in Kiev, many people in their Russian-oriented surroundings (in Crimea and in other southern and eastern regions) felt the dissonance between their expectations of the future development and what the new government had for them. As noted earlier, according to Gurr (1970) this kind of relative deprivation may result in anger and eventually lead to rebellion and violence. In the case of Crimea, the presence of military powers and isolation of the peninsula (which physically prevented the presence of the second party) transformed aggression into nonviolent social change. In other words, according to participants, people in Crimea feeling deprived of participation in decision-making reacted in a similar manner as people at Maidan and took action. Besides that, as some interviewees noted, the conditions created allowed them to satisfy their vision of what they felt they were entitled to without violence. In Dmitry's (RC) understanding their decision was determined by the historical closeness with Russia:

I lean towards the idea that, first, they were somewhat worried about events in Kiev; they weren't terrified, but they thought it was better to be with Moscow than with Kiev. Moscow was more familiar, Moscow was wealthier; there was some kind of stability in Moscow.

Oleg (UC) echoes Dmitry's (RC) words, saying that in his "university and in [his] mom's university presidents were positive about Russia. They understood that it was a more advantageous perspective." Following ideas of Gurr (1970), Jeong (2000) states, "rapid social change, especially coupled with uneven distribution of wealth and power, tends to generate feelings of a growing gap between unmaterialized expectations and perceptions about existing economic, social and political conditions" (pp. 69-70). According to Denis (UC), whose words resonate with this statement, turning toward Russia seemed for Crimeans to be a way to gain the conditions of life they expected to have and fill this 'gap':

Nobody wants to be a part of Ukraine again. They understand that if they are under Russia they will have more money, and life will be better for them. Ukraine hasn't invested a penny into Crimea; they just pulled money out of it.

Sergey (U/RC) recalled his thoughts on the then-current situation and a better option for Crimea:

First of all, I was worried that no matter what happens, out of the previous experience and historical experience, it would become worse in Ukraine. So if we connect Crimea to Russia, then both Russia and Crimea will get some little profit from it.

Maria (U/RC) in a way brought two main reasons for the Crimean referendum together, noting that if it had come to confrontation, Crimeans wouldn't have accepted what the new government offered them and would have fought for themselves and their connection to

Russia:

It was obvious that we didn't have any other choice besides joining Russia. If we wouldn't do it, Crimea would be like Donbass now. They would try to take over Crimea, but we wouldn't give up, so a lot of people would just get killed.

In this way, according to some participants of the research, on March 16, 2014 in the face of possible danger, feeling that their safety, rights, identity and freedom were threatened, the majority of residents of Crimea and residents of the city of Sevastopol who attended the referendum, voted for reunification with Russia with all the rights of the federal subjects of the Russian Federation. In the following April, the Broadcasting Board of Governors survey showed that 83 percent of Crimeans thought that the results of referendum reflected the views of most Crimeans, and only 30 percent of the population of Ukraine shared this view (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2014). Ukraine stated that the referendum was illegitimate and refused to recognize its results.

4.3.2 – After the Referendum

As of today only seven members of the UN, including Cuba, North Korea, Afghanistan, Syria (Rosenberg, 2014) and some others recognize the new status of the republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Deliagin (2015) argues that the Crimean referendum was legitimate due to a number of reasons. Amongst others, he states that “the principle of territorial integrity prevails over the right of nations to self-determination only if the state fulfills a necessary minimum of its direct and inalienable obligations to the members of these nations,” and the contemporary Ukrainian government fails to fulfill even the basic needs of its population (Deliagin, 2015, pp.9-10). The contradiction of interpretations of the legitimacy of the Crimean case also rests in the UN Charter, which on the one hand, guarantees the right of ‘self-determination of peoples’ (Article 1.2), yet on the other hand, assures the right of each country to its ‘territorial integrity’ (Article 2.4) (Black, 2016 b, p.228). The European Union, the leaders of the G7, the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, NATO and the Venice Commission called the referendum illegal and blamed Russia for the annexation of Crimea (Zelienkova, 2016). Despite that Janna (RC) believed that today it is not important:

People may say whatever, but Crimea is officially ours now. There are a lot of debates and controversy on it, but one way or another, they have the Russian constitution, the government is partially Russian, they have the Russian language. Nobody would deny that Crimea is a part of Russia now... Even Ukraine. Even though they want to get it back, but I don't think they'll succeed in it. [...] There are a few countries, which did recognize it, but the thing is that it doesn't matter. Doesn't matter what anybody says, there are Russians in Crimea, there are no Ukrainians. Even if somebody doesn't think so, the bottom line - it's a part of Russia.

Janna (RC) explained that by saying that there were no Ukrainians in Crimea, she meant that since it became part of Russia, residents were required to obtain Russian citizenship,

and those who didn't support changes probably left. In contrast, Maria (U/RC) mentioned that there are Ukrainians in Crimea who strongly support Ukraine and have not obtained Russian passports.

For Oleg (UC) it was obvious that the referendum was a point of no return: Ukraine lost Crimea. In his opinion, the Crimean episode became the beginning of the contemporary conflict: "The referendum was the first call and The Union building²⁰ was the last nail in the coffin."

Talking about the time right after the referendum, Sergey (U/RC) remembered the feeling of panic that appeared among people. Stafford (2017) described the economic instability and some social challenges including interruption of water supplies and shortages of various goods the population of Crimea had to deal with shortly after the referendum. NBC News (2015) explored the serious financial struggles that arose on the peninsula within the year following the referendum. This included: the decline in the economy and the withdrawal from Crimea of international companies such as McDonald's, PayPal, Amazon and others, and some Russian banks; the cessation of operations of Visa and MasterCard; the rise of prices; the decline in the tourist industry, and; many other problems (NBC News, 2015). Sergey (U/RC) described what he witnessed after the referendum as follows:

It brought in some unbalance and panic, and what to do... Banks weren't operating, all except for the last one. It was like the last ship going to Turkey in 1919-20, that's how the lines to banks felt, when all banks closed and Sberbank of Russia in Ukraine was the last one operating. They were cutting branches down though, lines were moving according to lists.

²⁰ In Odessa, Ukraine. The accident, when people were trapped in the burning building.

From Sergey's (U/RC) perspective, the most worrying transition issues were resolved in a matter of a couple months when Russian banks opened up and stores were restocked. The policies in Crimea were changing fast. Maria (U/RC) noted that the first Russian passports were issued shortly after the referendum:

In a hurry, they started to bring everything to Russian regulations. They started to issue Russian passports. I received my passport in less than a month after the referendum. April 12 [2014] I already received my Russian passport.

Evaluating the referendum and its aftermath, participants recalled thoughts and feelings they had after the Treaty of the Adoption of the Republic of Crimea to Russia was signed in Moscow. Dmitry, in detail, explained his vision of all pros and cons of this political decision:

I think from a geopolitical point of view the subtraction of Crimea is a victory for Russian foreign policy. Just as a fact. Like the subtraction of Texas from Mexico was an American victory, or a reunion of Germany, or split of Czechoslovakia into Czech Republic and Slovakia, it went perfectly. It was relatively peaceful. The subtraction of Crimea went peacefully. But I didn't feel satisfied. I was thinking rationally (I'm not saying that Crimea is not ours, so give it back to Ukraine). First, Russia is trying to get all big events at a time, like Eurovision, Soccer championship, Hockey championship. Second, with oil going down at that time, another region... And Crimea in general... I have a few acquaintances who go there very often and they were very happy with all that. But the infrastructure in Crimea sucks. As a resort Crimea isn't able to meet competition. When it was a part of Ukraine, people went there because it was cheap. If it will become a part of Russia, prices will go up there. Third, it's a subsidized region. And we already have enough subsidized regions in Russia. There were a lot of them already. And another one. Besides that it will cause ... a storm of protest within the international community. Doesn't matter if I feel good or bad about it, it's a fact. It's not casus belli, nobody will bring troops into Russia and start the war, but it definitely made relations with western partners maximally complicated. That's for sure. So I was unhappy with Crimea. Yes, geopolitically, it was a victory, but in perspective, it will cause serious expenses.

Another Petersburg, Semyon (RC), who followed the situation from Russia, had thoughts similar to Dmitry's. Both men underlined that from technical and action points of view the

operation in Crimea was “beautiful” and profitable for both sides, yet bad for people. Janna (RC) also admitted that the Crimean situation was “difficult on a personal level, but on political and geopolitical levels [...] it [was] great.” Trying to explain his attitude towards the situation with Crimea Semyon (RC) compared the referendum with his experience in strategy computer games:

I had a very ambivalent feeling. On one hand, I understood that it was some kind of farce – it’s not nice to do like that. On the other hand, I had some sprouts of pride for the country, and I had some patriotic feelings growing. I watched and I was wondering: “What the hell?” I have never been a person who would go die for the country, but I got them ... not patriotic sprouts... I liked to play strategies when I was a kid, like Warcraft. Maybe the feeling I had then come from childhood. I just felt how beautiful it all was carried out. Strategically, tactically, from the position of any world overtakes... It was ‘click’ and it’s done. It was a genius operation. [...] In general, it’s quite difficult to take a chunk of land and separate it from another state not slaughtering many people. And here it was just ‘Op’ and it happened. Maybe a pro-Russian mood in Crimea played its role.

Reflecting on the idea of the Crimean connection with Russia, Maxim (UC) stated that despite the fact that the Crimean operation was “planned ahead of time,” what happened in March 2014 was natural and inevitable:

As if it was supposed to be like that. Seriously, deep inside I felt that everything happened exactly as it should be sooner or later. Because Crimea has never been Ukrainian. All my life I went there for vacations – to visit dad, every summer for about eight years, four months every year I spent there. And I felt that it was more like coming to Russia than to Ukraine.

Semyon’s (RC) girlfriend Ksenya (UC) voiced her disappointment, trying to understand the Ukrainian government’s reaction to the situation with Crimea in general:

Sometimes you think that they didn't do enough [...] Like with Crimea... I think they just turned it over [to Russia]. They would turn it over sooner or later anyways. There was no fighting there. I couldn't understand it: we fight and fight, and then just give up Crimea, in my opinion.

The referendum was followed by changes similar to what Sergey (U/RC) and Dmitry (RC) described as a regular post-revolutionary processes. Changes in Crimea weren’t as chaotic

and were happening in a particular order, yet they couldn't happen immediately, so Crimea entered a transition period. On the other hand, these changes probably differed from people's expectations. Yelena (UC) noticed that people around her were gloating about the future of Crimea:

A lot of people gloated: "We'll see, soon they won't have any gas..." I told these people: "Why do you gloat? They are the same, the people there". It's all politics, but mainly children and elders will end up being hurt by all this – the most vulnerable category.

According to a number of participants, as of today the standard of living in Crimea has declined. Maria (U/RC) compared their contemporary salaries and prices with what they used to have while being a part of Ukraine:

When our salaries were exchanged from hryvnas to rubles it turned out that our salaries were quite unpleasant. Utilities went up, prices went up, Ukraine blocked water supplies, blocked goods delivery, so we had to get it through the channel from Russia. And it was very expensive. Now things in Yalta (I went there last year, and this year – a month ago) are more expensive than in Piter. Just to compare, my mom's salary is 8400 rubles.²¹ Just think about Piter's prices... It's terrible. It's good if you get 25 [thousand rubles]. In Yalta teachers get about 15 thousand rubles, policemen – 20-25 thousand rubles, medical men – 8-15 thousand [rubles]. I know one accountant in children's hospital there, her salary is 8 thousand rubles.

The minimal salary in Ukraine now is 1400 hryvnas, average is 2500-3000 [hryvnas]. The prices are much lower in Ukraine. You could live a great life earning 3000 hryvnas few years ago. When I worked as a journalist there I earned 2500 [hryvnas] a month, mom had 2000 [hryvnas]. It was great money. I spent about a thousand hryvnas a month on groceries the most. So I had 1500 [hryvnas] in savings. Now mom can't save anything. Now I send her money so she can have her budget.

These examples illustrate the difficulties people faced shortly after the referendum and still deal with. However, according to Denis (UC), for many Crimeans there were no other options:

²¹ In 2016, at the time of the fieldwork, 1 Canadian dollar cost about 17-18 hryvnas, and about 43-45 rubles. 1 hryvna that time cost about 2,4 rubles.

When it all started with power [electrical], Putin said to take a survey and ask Crimeans if they would hold on for another month or two without power, or if they would prefer to get power tomorrow if they become a part of Ukraine again. They said they would wait. That's it. Then he made this power bridge.

Keeping it all in mind, Maria (U/RC) equated the fact that people haven't revolted yet with an increased level of patriotism towards Russia:

The situation with salaries and prices in Yalta and in Crimea is terrible. It's all held in place by patriotism. People stick to it. I don't see any other explanation.

During the interview Denis (UC) mentioned that even though life in Crimea hasn't improved much the Russian government pays a lot of attention to entertainment:

Now Putin took over Crimea – how much he's built there in these two years... Some things went up. So far Putin is entertaining everybody, makes some festivals there, some shows...

Some participants from different regions of Ukraine heard that contemporary life in Crimea wasn't so bad in comparison to life in Ukraine. For example, Oleg (UC) recalled a story told him by a relative from Crimea:

She came and told us that everything wasn't that bad. The first two months it was bad: they had issues with grocery supplies, with water supplies, power. Now it's fine, there are jobs. Salaries are not too bad. At that time she had 25 thousand rubles in Crimea. And before in Ukraine her salary was about 15 thousand [rubles]. At that time I earned two and a half thousand rubles a month. And we had to make a living somehow. Mom had about four thousand rubles (I change to rubles right away, so you would understand). So when we heard her story, we thought that things weren't as bad there, as we thought.

Yevgenya (UC) also mentioned stories of people from Crimea:

People, who have somebody in Crimea, say that their folks there are happy with Crimea joining Russia. They say they live much better than before.

Stories of Oleg (UC) and Yevgenya (UC) contain experiences of relatives or friends who were in Crimea. These stories may partially reflect the willingness of these people to prove to themselves and others that the choice they made was right or was the only one possible.

At the same time Maria (U/RC) and Sergey (U/RC), who were there during the referendum and visit home every so often, described all the difficulties that emerged after the referendum. Maria (U/RC) talked about the contemporary situation she witnessed every time she goes to Yalta:

What's happening now... Ukraine doesn't supply anything. Goods coming from Russia are expensive. [...] There are fruits growing in Crimea, but it's not enough. And most of them get exported to Russia. We used to import Turkish fruits, now we import Moroccan, Syrian, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Iran, etc. It's not tasty, but it's expensive due to transportation costs. Now most people, despite prices and tourism difficulties just wait for the bridge to open. They hope it's going to change things, because right now most people are in hot water. [...] Utilities come to the Russian level now. Before we paid 250-300 hryvnas for utilities the most (it's about a thousand rubles). Now mom pays about 2500-3000 [rubles], it's three times more. And it's hard, because mom, she has to support my sister, two cats and a bunny. And she has to feed them all, which is scary when you have salary like hers. [...] I phone home all the time. I know, they don't buy meat, sausages, cheese, vegetables. They mainly eat chicken, spaghetti, rice, and soups. All that's cheap. And many people live like that. Another problem in Yalta – there are no superstores, where you could get good deals and sales.

Maxim (UC) and Denis (UC) also mentioned difficulties Crimea faced after joining Russia.

For example, Maxim (UC) described the situation with business:

But now, since there are no people, it's hard to develop business. Seasons are bad. So now it's more beneficial to live in Odessa. But if they build the bridge [to Russia], and if there will be a lot of people going there again, then maybe he'll [his father, who used to have restaurants in Crimea] go back there. I'm sure Russia won't leave this peninsula alone, it'll keep developing it, the investments will keep coming in.

At the time of the referendum Maxim (UC) and Denis (UC) had been away from Ukraine for about two years, so to some extent they could distance themselves from the situation and judge it without feeling as personally affected as Ksenya (UC) and Yelena (UC), who felt that Crimea was a big loss for their country.

From the participants' point of view, what happened in Crimea was connected to the sense of danger people felt compelling them to organize in a short period of time while at

the same time assuming that Russia might better fit Crimeans' needs. Most participants mentioned the Russian military presence, which in their understanding provided peaceful conditions for the referendum, rather than affecting the results of voting. Some participants who lived in other regions of Ukraine experienced great disappointment at the loss of Crimea from Ukraine. Nevertheless, most participants admitted that they did not see Crimea becoming a part of Ukraine again.

4.4 – Donbass: Uprising Against the Revolution

After the victory of Euromaidan thousands of Ukrainians who didn't support the revolution hit the streets. Some participants suggested the Russian involvement with Crimea gave many people in the southern and eastern regions hope for change, and as such escalated the conflict between the revolutionary government and disagreeing activists who started protesting at the end of February 2014. In many cases these people were viewed as pro-Russian activists. In April 2014 the acting President of Ukraine, Turchynov, announced an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO) against pro-Russian separatists in southern and eastern regions and mainly in Donbass. When elected in May, the new president of Ukraine, Petr Poroshenko, continued the operation that continues as of this writing. A number of participants justified the unwillingness of the Ukrainian government to declare a state of war as in line with the need for international financial support. Denis (UC) explained it in the following manner:

[...] if Poroshenko officially proclaims war, then all tranches [credits and other financial support] will stop, because a country that declares war cannot receive any credits. [...] So they called it all the ATO.

As mentioned earlier, the “horrendous massacre” (Black, 2016 a, p. 186) in the Union building in the Black Sea city of Odessa was a turning point in the conflict for many people including Nicolay (RC) and Oleg (UC). On May 2, 2014 pro-Ukrainian activists set fire to the Union building with pro-Russian protesters trapped inside. Over 30 people choked to death or died trying to survive through windows; some pro-Russian protesters made it to the roof of the burning building and were shooting and throwing petrol bombs from there (Amos & Salem, 2014). Oleg (UC) said that for him this moment was a point of no return, when members of the population who were already leaning towards Russia thought that they either had to fight or leave.

In May 2014 activists, often named separatists, in the Russian-speaking regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, situated by the border proclaimed independence from Ukraine (BBC, 2014) (See Appendix B for a political map of Ukraine). Analyzing the contemporary situation in Ukraine, Dmitry (RC) suggested that there was no direct connection between the revolution and the conflict that followed in the east of Ukraine. He explained his position in a following manner:

There is no direct connection between Maidan and a civil war in the East... it's not a civil war... events in the East... Maidan didn't directly cause them, but events that were caused by Maidan: not just instability caused by Maidan, but the success of Maidan... After any revolution there is a short anarchy period. It doesn't last long. Only until some new quasi-government institutions are formed, or until the operating ones are substituted by somewhat changed ones, or taken by new people. At that time there is anarchy. At that time the state is powerless. Nothing works. Telephones, telegraphs, who, what, where, what's happening ... That's a great reason and a great opportunity for other states to either dictate their will, or put some obligations on it, or subtract a piece of territory... like we actually saw in Crimea.

Duleba (2014) recalls the results of a representative opinion poll carried out by the Ukrainian Research & Branding Group in January 2014 (an intense stage of the revolution),

which demonstrated that 86 percent of respondents in western Ukraine supported Euromaidan, while 81 percent of respondents from eastern Ukrainians stated that the revolution didn't have their support. These results illustrated a division in the country, which many believe existed due to historical reasons but was not erased during the 22 years of Independence, as noted in earlier chapters. The compilation of events brought the country to major conflict (Duleba, 2015).

The following sub-section discusses the situation in the east of Ukraine. It opens with the analysis of reasons for this conflict, as suggested by participants. Then, using participants' experiences and visions, we create a picture of the conflict from their perspective. Some participants called this a civil war. Finally, we will look at the aftermath of the confrontation between Ukraine and mainly the Donetsk and Lugansk regions and the situation as described by the participants at the time of the research – May-June 2016.

4.4.1 – Causes for the Protracted Confrontation

A variety of reasons for the conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine emerged during the interview process. Twelve participants named identity differences between eastern regions and the rest of Ukraine (including historical, cultural and language) as among the main reasons for the confrontation. Nine interviewees suggested that this confrontation is a political standoff over the resources of the eastern regions of Ukraine and the circles of influence. Eight participants suggested that there was some conspiracy surrounding the conflict, explaining they assumed the conflict was preplanned by some third parties to satisfy their needs. Twelve interviewees also named propaganda as one of the main instruments used by different parties to gain support for reaching their goals among the

population. Since this reasoning is interconnected with the Russian-Ukrainian/pro-Russian – pro-Ukrainian relationship it will be discussed in detail in Section Five.

The crisis of power which emerged during the revolution and was intensified by economical instability, opened a window for polarization of identities which Sergey (U/RC) characterized as a split typical in Ukraine:

And when there were some crises like the Orange revolution, that line drawn on the map... it always existed. Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhe (hesitating over the abyss), the center of Ukraine (hesitating even more) and Crimea (100% pro-Russian). And Lvov [on the other side of the line]... I don't have any attitudes against them, but they actually always were there...

As described by Sergey (U/RC), the traditional or historical split as one of the possible models of the division within Ukraine was acknowledged by some participants and by many academicians (Flaherty 2012; 2016 a; Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016; Reid, 2003), but it is important to note here that these two conventional geographically defined blocs are not monolithic, but rather consist of various identity groups (Korostelina, 2013; Maltseva, 2016; Osipian & Osipian, 2006; Plekhanov, 2016). Maltseva (2016) notes that, according to the research conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in April 2014, “eastern Ukraine proved a far more politically and socially diverse region than the one presented in the Russian and Western media” (p.146). Besides the original diversity, mechanisms of propaganda employed, and political, social, and economic changes accompanying the contemporary conflict continue contributing to identity-shaping and other shifts in Ukraine (Kulyk, 2016).

The following section looks into identity differences in Ukraine suggested by participants as one of the main reasons for the conflict in the East. In defining these

differences, interviewees distinguished historical, cultural and linguistic aspects of identity formation.

4.4.1.1 – Identity

A number of participants explained the conflict as resulting from what they considered to be major differences between people in the east and in the west of Ukraine. For example, Yevgenya (UC) stated:

Originally there are Russian people there [in the east]. Ukraine is Ukraine, it's Kiev, it's western Ukraine. People are completely different. Take Donetsk, Lugansk, Kharkov, Kiev and western Ukraine. They have different ideas on everything.

Most participants spoke of the existence of two (eastern and western) or three (eastern, western and central) regionally defined identities, splitting people according to their geographical location. They explained this particular division through historical factors, according to them, affecting identity-formation in Ukraine.

History

When asked if they saw any background for the conflict in the east, a few participants recalled historical narratives, stating that in their understanding eastern and western Ukraine hardly had any common pages. In other words, they suggested that people formed different identities not only in different countries, but also in strongly differing cultures: a more Russian identity influenced by Eastern or Asian culture with some borrowings from the West, and a generally more western-influenced culture with more Polish-influenced capitalist leanings. In this narrative the Dnieper River created a natural dividing line.

Arseny (UC) explained his vision of factors affecting identity-formation process in Ukraine in the following way:

It all started a very long time ago. I'd say it started with the settlement of Ukraine. There was a left-bank and a right-bank Ukraine. One part of Ukraine originally belonged to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (I don't remember countries, so I can be wrong here). The Eastern part – Crimea, Donbass – belonged to Russia. Historically, there were conflicts [...]. One day these two halves formed one supposedly united country named Ukraine. But the conflict between former free Cossacks and those who were under Catherine the Great's rule persisted. That's where the roots are, in deep history. The state was formed and then they wanted to build a democracy, but the conflict was there. They may say, "Ukraine is United and independent" as much as they want... It existed only for 20 years and there was always an inner conflict. There have always been jokes about *moskals*²² and *khokhols*. Just jokes, but there was a split in the society.²³

Maria (U/RC) also recalled historical factors, which, in her opinion, affected identity formation in Ukraine:

I'd say historically Donbass was a part of Russia. That's how they identify themselves and they don't want to be a part of Ukraine. And they want to be a part of Russia. [...] Eastern Ukraine and the rest of Ukraine were always a bit different. Russians and Ukrainians are fraternal people, but we are a bit different. Eastern Ukraine in its heart leans towards Russia, and Western (it's formerly Poland and other countries around) has a different history.

Explaining the conflict in the east of Ukraine, Maxim (UC) suggested that there was "some kind of a geopolitical confusion that happened over a hundred years ago and now it's an echo of it." Speaking about identity-formation he also addressed his perception of historical circumstances:

Because there was a split of Ukraine ... Poland took over a part... Even though the Russian empire still existed. Then they split Ukraine and that break appeared. Later Ukraine came together again, but the difference between eastern and western Ukraine persisted. In eastern Ukraine people speak Russian, and in western people speak Ukrainian. In the West they don't like the East, and in the East they are neutral towards the West.

However, living in the middle between the east and the west Katya (UC) recognized a lot of sameness in people:

²² Slang word for 'Russians' or 'Russian-speaking' population of Ukraine.

²³ The same tendencies were noticed by Reid (2003).

In general, I can't say that the eastern part in particular is separate from the western part in particular. When you live down south and talk to people from up north, you realize it's one line, and relations are absolutely normal.

This remark suggests that the polarity of identities recalled by a number of participants may not be as intense as perceived, which resonates with Wanner's (2014) observations about merging Ukrainian identities developed over the years of independence. On the other hand, Katya's (UC) words bring us back to Sergey's (U/RC) earlier-mentioned idea that identities in Ukraine have become more pronounced and important during crises, coinciding with Black's (2008) idea that the value of self-identity and the importance of belonging to one's identity group increases during conflict escalation (p.147). In other words, the conflict and parallel political processes could split newly merging identities once again, polarizing some citizens into opposing groups.

Black (2008) states that in crisis identities polarize and people of opposing groups deny each other's humanity. This idea is to some extent reflected in Nicolay's (RC) words. Nicolay (RC) took the conflict very personally, defining himself as a "warrior" and a "passionarian"²⁴ when it comes to defending Russia and Russian interests, and Ukraine, in his opinion, fell under this category. Speaking about the background of the conflict in the east he stated that there couldn't be any common Ukrainian identity due to what he considered the artificial nature of the state:

By the way, Ukraine is not and has never been a nation. The Ukrainian language is a dialect of the Russian language. Ukraine as a state was created in 1923; Mr. Lenin gifted a part of Russian land to the new republic. Later the western part was added to that same republic, and finally Mr. Khrushchev gave them Crimea. So Ukraine is a

²⁴ A term suggested by Russian historian and ethnographer Lev Gumilev. Gumilev explained passionarity as "an irresistible inner urge to purposeful activity, the capability of sustained super effort in the name of a lofty, though sometimes illusory goal" (Tsarevskaya, 2012).

creation, a product of the Soviet Union. Nothing to talk about. Everybody should be grateful. In fact, there was nothing like Ukraine.

Thus, when it came to the conflict, Nicolay (RC) denied the general possibility of existence of a real Ukrainian identity per se. This opinion resonates with some of Flaherty's (2016 b) findings, according to which some men from eastern Ukraine (which was under the Soviet control for much longer), interviewed during the research, suggested that prior to dissolution of the Soviet Union some reorganization of the USSR was needed, yet they weren't talking about independence necessarily; and some other participants stated that they didn't think about independence at all, because they simply couldn't imagine this happening.

Sergey (U/RC) was not as categorical as Nicolay (RC); however, he assumed that a unitary system wasn't the right one for Ukraine, suggesting that it doomed the country from the very beginning.

Ukraine wasn't built right from the very beginning. It couldn't be a unitary state in general. [...] From the beginning there were different extremes on both sides because of it.

Arseny (UC) echoed the idea of Ukraine being an unsuccessful project:

I think Ukraine is a failed project. It was doomed to be something unclear, an imitation of a state since the very beginning.

Most participants viewed the conflict in the East as the people in Donbass (or in some cases a broader area including some other eastern and central regions) fighting for their right for self-identification and at some point for independence from Ukraine. However, Katya (UC) suggested that a different scenario made more sense in this situation:

The Western part – five or six regions – they are closer to Poles; it's easier for them to find common ground. [...] We should just cut the western part off: "Here is your little state. Call yourself whatever you want, and do whatever you want." Because they don't like any of their neighbors: Ukraine, Belorussia... Central Ukraine is not

a part of it. It's weird, but people in Kiev never cared. Every person holds on to his place and doesn't care in general.

Fournier (2002) and Korostelina's (2013) inquiries, as well as general research on the history of Ukraine, support the participants' perspectives of the role of history in the Ukrainian identity formation process. Yet, as noted by many scholars researching the contemporary Ukrainian conflict or providing anthropological or sociological studies in Ukraine, identity groups formed under historical circumstances can coexist within one country for a long time, until the conflict polarized opposing perspectives (Plekhanov, 2016; Maltseva, 2016; Wilson, 2016). It is important to note that historical interpretation of the identity formation process in Ukraine is one of the many different narratives.

Language

Seven participants mentioned the importance of language as a determining factor of identity and the Ukrainian government policies on the use of the Russian language were acknowledged as another significant factor in conflict escalation. It is important to note here, that since all participants of the research are Russian-speaking people, questions on status of the Russian language for them could not be more vital. In other words, for a number of participants language and policies on the use of language in daily life affected their attitude towards the opposite party. For example, Maria (U/RC) spoke about pre-Maidan language policies and people's reaction on them:

Before Euromaidan there was a draft of a bill on the Russian language becoming the second state language [as opposed to having only one state language – Ukrainian]. Almost all of Donbass supported it, because most people there either speak Russian, or are bilingual, but use Russian as their main language. Western Ukraine, of course, was against it. Because their main language is Ukrainian, they have a lot of Ukrainian dialects, a lot of Polish and Hungarian dialects. These language differences made people clash too.

In the Soviet Union Russian was an official state language for all soviets, but soon after the dissolution of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) the status of the Russian language changed in all former Soviet states, and the Russian-speaking majority of the USSR turned into a minority in independent Ukraine and other CIS states. Chinn and Kaiser (1996, as referenced in Fournier, 2002) suggest that after the end of Soviet times people identifying themselves as Russians or Russian-speaking populations outside of Russia felt that their dominant minority status was reduced to a simple minority, which caused protests. Yelena (UC) echoed this statement, suggesting that when Russians became another simple minority in Ukraine, the downgrading of the status of the Russian language affected many people's moods:

Moods changed when the Russian language officially became the language of national minorities (my older daughter – she is 22 now, had it written in her diploma). That wasn't political at that time, but a lot of people and I weren't happy with this naming. Azerbaijanians, Armenians, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and some others were national minorities in our understanding. It happened in 2005-2006, maybe a bit earlier.

However, Fournier (2002) suggests that the Russian population in Ukraine doesn't perceive itself as an ethnic minority, but rather as a part of a constructed group of Russophones or Russian-speaking people, which includes both Russians and Ukrainians together being a part of a broader Slavic nation, a concept strongly promoted during the Soviet era. Here language is perceived as one of the elements shaping their identity, so it becomes a more important part of people's self-perception, and a threat posed to it causes a strong reaction. For example, Grigory (UC) remembered a feeling of frustration, when after the revolution the threat of losing the freedom to use the Russian language came up:

Then there was the threat that there would be a new law, forbidding official communication in Russian. People couldn't understand what was going on and why we needed to speak only Ukrainian.

Yevgenya (UC) also noted that in her understanding the threat of losing the freedom of language choice was one of the main driving forces of the civil resistance in her area:

How did it all start... when they decided to forbid the Russian language [as an official language], forbid this. Even though our town is Russian-speaking, the city is Russian-speaking, schools. Schools are still using Russian. How can you forbid my grandma, who is 78 years old? She won't start speaking Ukrainian. Yes, Ukraine, but all our life we spoke Russian. These were the first things. It all started with the language...

Most participants recalled some stories in which the use of the Russian language had become a problem in different regions of Ukraine even before the conflict. For example, Helga (RC) remembered her experience in the western regions and in Crimea:

When going to Ukraine we faced some Ukrainians who speak Ukrainian, who didn't want to talk to us. That time there were no signs of this war, but in some western regions there already was that kind of attitude towards Russians. A few times I spoke Russian to people and they wouldn't talk to me at all. And that happened in Crimea too - at that time a tourist destination of Ukraine. I asked some silly things, like how to get somewhere or where to buy bread, but since I spoke Russian, they wouldn't talk to me.

Maxim (UC) talked about a similar experience he had in Lvov, western Ukraine:

If I spoke Russian in the store in Lvov, buying juice or ice-cream, they didn't even want to talk to me. I think it was 2009, when I went there for competitions.

Yelena (UC) stated that even in the beginning of the 2000s, coming from a mainly Russian-speaking area, she felt alienated in the Ukrainian capital:

We are mainly Russian-speakers in the Dnepropetrovsk region where we have our pronunciation specificities like H instead of G or Sho instead of Shto, but not many of us speak the Ukrainian mova [language]. So when we came to Kiev in the early 2000s they called us – people coming from the Dnepropetrovsk region - “*moskali*”. I graduated in 2002. And even then it was difficult to communicate with locals in Kiev.

In this way, according to some participants, challenges to the daily use of Russian in Ukraine existed throughout the history of independence. However, the rise of national moods, intense promotion of the use of the Ukrainian language, and what they believed to

be the threat of total linguistic and/or cultural exclusion of Russophones by the Ukrainian state, which according to participants' experiences appeared during and after the revolution, pushed the Russian-speaking population broadly represented in eastern and southern regions towards defense. However, it is also important to note that despite the importance of the Russian and Ukrainian languages to different identity groups in Ukraine, it wouldn't be legitimate to define participating sides of the conflict through their attitudes towards language use, since as Kulyk (2016) argues, in contemporary Ukraine for many people, identity "is not linked to ethnic origin or language practice but rather [is] based on free choice" (p. 93). For that reason, language preference should be viewed as a possible (but not compulsory) component of identity formation, which may predict some attitudes towards particular policies.

Culture

For a number of participants the Russian culture embodied in a notion of 'Slavic brotherhood' in eastern and southern regions was another important element of people's identity that became threatened after the revolution. Some researchers (Arel, 1996; Laitin, 1998, both as referred to in Fournier, 2002) argue that culture along with language shape the Russophonic identity in Ukraine. This idea resonated with Maria (U/RC) who acknowledged that "the difference in culture was supposed to come out and cause people to clash" sooner or later, and it happened after Euromaidan.

According to a number of participants, people in Ukraine inherited and developed different cultural backgrounds, but during more than twenty years of independence their cultural identities weren't in open confrontation. Jeong (2000) explains mobilization and polarization of identities through instrumentalism, suggesting that different identity elements

such as kinship, religion, language, culture, and others can be used by elites as manipulative instruments to promote individual or group interests (pp.71-73). In a similar manner, six interviewees noticed the instrumental nature of culture in contemporary Ukraine. For example, Yelena (UC) described the sides of the Ukrainization project that she experienced in the mid 2010s:

[...] for the first day in school kids had to wear Ukrainian traditional costumes – vyshivanka, venochek...²⁵ It bothered me, because kids were forced to do so. It was like that in all schools, so it was a government level regulation. There were Shevchenko portraits in all schools. He is a very good poet, a difficult one for me, because his poetry is very dark, you don't want to live anymore when you read his poems. Even though it's beautiful. But there are a lot of other great poets in Ukraine. I felt that Ukrainian culture was imposed from above. It didn't come from people.

Sergey (U/RC) underlined that the politics of nationalization have existed in Ukraine for some time and the contemporary split in Ukraine was a logical development of this politics:

And then the politics of nationalization they had... I can talk for days about how they taught us in school. I went to school in Zaporozhe, it was named after Taras Grigoryevich Shevchenko, there was no room for two opinions. And the opinion we learned was very nationalistic. Pro-nationalistic. You could have a discussion with some teachers, but it didn't affect anything. And schoolbooks, which affect most people, they worked. After a time I realized that they did their job. The nationalization politics succeeded.

However, as the conflict demonstrated, the nationalization politics succeeded only in part.

Other participants also mentioned the role education and the school system had in promoting Ukrainian culture, which to them seemed in opposition to promoting similarities with Russia – something that was important to them. For example, Katya (UC) recalled her feelings on the implementation of Ukrainian culture:

²⁵ In Ukraine there is no law enforcing children to wear traditional costumes to school. While in some cases (like in Yelena's (UC)) the costume could be enforced by school authorities, in general, according to Kropivnitskiy (2014), it is up to parents how to dress their children for September 1st – Knowledge Day.

It's very weird to watch them making school kids learn Ukrainian and love Ukraine, which isn't normal for them. I don't think we are different nations. [...] I don't see the difference between nations, and I don't understand why they stoke tensions after they drew a line between them. [...] Fraternal peoples? Yes, really fraternal. It's much easier to find common ground than even with western Ukrainians, or Polacks, or Turks. Russia was always closer. If you walk in our city, you won't notice the difference between the Russian person and a Ukrainian. There is no difference. My roots are Russian but I hold a Ukrainian passport.

Yevgenya (UC) noticed how school policies changed from the time she attended it:

The school I went to and my mom went to, they never had the Ukrainian anthem, and now before the first class every day everybody lines up and listens to the Ukrainian anthem. They study in Russian, but the Ukrainian anthem sounds in Ukrainian. Before they didn't have it.

It's interesting to note that none of the research participants considered the original Soviet institutionalization of the Russian language and culture as a deprivation of Ukrainian tradition, but the process of the gradual return of Ukrainian heritage and culture following independence was viewed by a number of participants as discrimination against the Russian-oriented population of Ukraine. This might be explained by the particular qualities of the group of interviewees, who chose to live or resettle in Russia and used Russian as their day-to-day language. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement and understanding of these processes is needed for a substantial peace-oriented dialogue within the diverse Ukrainian population. Thus, Oleg (UC), for example, suggested that the future of a deeper interpersonal conflict between different identity groups in Ukraine strongly depends on how the contemporary government will manipulate the cultural and historical aspects. However, he again addressed only one possible narrative manipulation:

I just hope that by then youth won't be too much in love with the government. Mom said that she talked to a few of her graduates, who have kids already. Kids go to school and they are told there that there actually were 'ancient Ukrs',²⁶ and that Maidan was a right thing. The boy is just eight years old, but they stuff his head

²⁶ Ancient east Slavonic tribal union or a tribe.

saying that it actually all was like that, everything is good and the government is good. And he believes it, which is the scariest part.

Denis (UC) and Yelena (UC) also noticed how after the revolution Ukrainian culture became very pronounced and turned massive and popular especially among young people in some regions. Yelena (UC) described the situation in her city:

First, people massively got new haircuts – they were getting the Ukrainian forelock.²⁷ Vyshivanka became the most popular outfit. Mainly young people – 15-30 years old – did that.

Denis (UC) suggested that different identities existed in Ukraine and were more or less pronounced at different stages of Ukrainian history, but in general people of different identities could peacefully coexist within one country until people felt a real threat coming from the state side:

It was a united, unitary country, but it was made salient by Maidan, when that fight was begun. When Posrosenko said that they are freaks [meaning the eastern Ukrainian militia], they are second-class people, when all that mess started, when Donetsk miners went to beat Ukrainian nationalists. It was obvious in 2004 that it was mature, already then it was ready to explode.

From these participant's perspectives, at the beginning of Euromaidan Ukraine was still lacking a common narrative and the revolution made the differences between various identity groups even more salient. In other words, as Plekhanov (2016) notices, Euromaidan and the following conflict demonstrated that the Ukrainization project that had taken place following Ukraine's declaration of Independence in 1991 failed to completely unite people in Ukraine.

According to a number of participants as well as to many scholars, history, language, and culture played an important role in identity formation in Ukraine and are important

²⁷ Originally, a traditional Ukrainian Cossack's haircut. After Euromaidan this hairstyle became popular within some male protesters and supporters of the revolution, while some females returned to traditional braids.

elements of people's self-identification. Yet, instead of appealing to these identity elements, for the purpose of this research I will use the terms 'pro-Russians' or 'Russian-oriented' to address those people in the Donbass region (known for its tight connections with Russia) and other southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, who, according to participants, feeling that their historical, linguistic and cultural identities might have been under threat, mobilized and decided to resist the new revolutionary government.

Identity Polarization in Potential War Regions

Yelena (UC) (Dnepropetrovsk region), Katya (UC) (Kherson region) and Oleg's (UC) (Odessa) stories suggest that many people in eastern and southern areas of Ukraine also went through identity polarization, but their general experience of protesting against their identity exclusion differed from the Donbass experience. Yelena (UC), Katya (UC), and Oleg (UC) came to St. Petersburg from what were considered to be potential war regions. Potential war zones, which in the beginning of the conflict in the east were seen by some eastern resistance leaders as a part of the project named Novorossiia,²⁸ had a military presence and roadblocks that one would see in the conflict zone in the Donbass region; yet there was no warfare. (For a political map of Ukraine see Appendix B). Yelena (UC) described what was happening in the Dnepropetrovsk region:

We also had roadblocks set up at all important properties. There were sand bags, police and fire department forces. We still have it all. Everything was blocked, not to let 'somebody' in the city. But we didn't know who that 'somebody' was.

²⁸ New Russia, a historic term of the Russian Empire, imperial province of Russia that existed north of the Black sea (a part of contemporary Russia and Ukraine). Rebel leaders in Donetsk and Lugansk regions in 2014 aspired to establish Novorossiia (confederation) that would incorporate a big part of Ukraine: namely all eastern and southern regions from Odessa to Kharkov. Later it was narrowed down to a confederation of the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR. Within a year the project was abandoned.

In fact, these regions were separated from the inflamed Donbass region, but for many people, as for these participants, that reality wasn't clear because they were not provided with an explanation for the presence of the military. Katya (UC) recalled what she witnessed in the Kherson region:

That was a highway to Kherson and Odessa. That was the way to Kiev too. [...] They piled up some sand bags, put posts, and brought tires. What for? Nobody knows. They sent someone from the regular army over, so there were some guys with machine guns. But they were looking the wrong way again. They were checking those coming from Crimea first, and then they moved and were checking those coming from Kherson. It was complete bullshit and nobody could explain what was going on. Who were these people and who allowed them to be here? Newspapers kept silent.

Participants coming from potential conflict regions also witnessed changes in people's moods and the polarization of different identities, but since they were caught between opposing groups their experience differed from the eastern or the central and the western regions of Ukraine. These three participants' stories suggest that their connection to a Ukrainian identity was stronger than for others who were categorized as pro-Russians, suggesting that their identity might be categorized as 'dual identity' (Korostelina, 2013). Thus, the frustration mentioned by Katya (UC) and Yelena (UC) could also double the sense of danger, since participants and other people in potential war regions weren't sure who was confronting them and why, so they didn't know which part of their Russian – Ukrainian (summarized by Katya (UC) as Russian-roots Ukrainian-passport) identity could be in more danger. Yelena (UC) noticed that "the population turned very radical" in her region, and Katya (UC) emphasized that many people in her city "were confident that everybody was bad." Oleg (UC) recalled how National Guards (representing to him a

polarized identity who according to Korostelina's (2013) system might be categorized as 'fighting for Ukrainian identity'), quickly suppressed resistance in Odessa:

They also brought the National Guards over – these were brainwashed people, who spoke only Ukrainian and if you wouldn't respond in Ukrainian they would decide that you are katsap,²⁹ – at minimum they would beat you for that. It was scary to be outside. It was like that in Odessa. We were even scared to talk about it among the family. [...] I just told my friends to cover up their cameras or just take it off their computers, and I told them not to text anything to anybody. Because they followed people, humiliated, and annihilated them. They beat people up, brutalized them... It was really scary...

According to Yelena (UC) and Katya (UC), similar situations were happening in their regions, where the Russian-speaking population was noticeable, but wasn't a large majority and the wave of resistance there was suppressed from the very beginning.

Summarizing the conversation about identities, we may conclude that the identity polarization that appeared in different regions of Ukraine during the conflict, pushed people towards choosing a particular status. In the Donbass region some sectors of the population with a more pronounced pro-Russian identity formed through history and often associated with Russian language and culture, mobilized against those supporting the revolution of Ukrainian identity. In other eastern and southern regions identity mobilization and polarization was lower; however, the general situation increased a sense of danger and either turned people to their defensive mode, or made them leave, as in the cases of Yelena (UC), Katya (UC) and many other Ukrainians. Depending upon numerous factors, most likely guided by a sense of personal safety and familiarity, some moved towards Russia and some towards the western parts of Ukraine.

Political preferences of different groups of Ukrainian population to some extent were determined by history, culture, and linguistic identities, and were already noticeable at the

²⁹ Slang word for Russians.

time of Orange Revolution (Osipian & Osipian, 2006). As Osipian & Osipian (2006) note, it would be naïve to assume that millions of votes for Yanukovich (the more Russified candidate) during the original elections were completely falsified. At that time a great percentage of the population of Ukraine (about 44 percent of all voters) voted for Yanukovich – the candidate originating from Donetsk, who in their understanding could represent, among other interests, their identity values (Osipian & Osipian, 2006).

Differences between various identity groups in Ukraine played some part in the contemporary conflict. However, Maltseva (2016) argues that in the case of the Ukraine the regional division manifested through political preferences defined the collective identity through connection to a particular territory, and thus was more important than purely linguistic, cultural or ethnic identification. Similarly, while recognizing the existence of different identities in Ukraine, Janna (RC) suggested that the situation could have remained peaceful if not for geopolitics:

Besides that within Ukraine the society split into eastern and western Ukrainians, it's one nation. They all are called Ukrainians. It's like it used to be in Germany: GDR and FRG. They are people who live on different sides of geopolitics: one lives in the east, others in the west.

In other words, Janna (RC) stated that identity differences weren't as important in conflict escalation as the geopolitical decisions made by authorities. Black (2016 b) states that the civil war in Ukraine brought the importance of territory and spheres of influence back to the main focus of international relations. Participants' ideas about the roles of politics, resources and influence in the conflict's escalation are discussed in the next sub-section.

4.4.1.2 – The ‘Turf War’ and a Fight for Influence

The Donbass region is a heavily industrialized area of Ukraine, a place supported by Ukrainian Presidents through the entire history of independence of Ukraine until the Orange revolution (for a political map of Ukraine see Appendix B). According to Osipian & Osipian (2006), the importance of the area seemed obvious to people in Donbass because of the idea carried over from Soviet times that heavy industries are the cornerstone of the economy. According to some participants, any possibility of losing this region with its resources and industries would not be an acceptable scenario for the Ukrainian government. Besides, taking over the Donbass region bordered by Russia and often portrayed as a ‘rebellious land’, could be viewed by many as the first step in a possible major Russian expansion plan (Sakwa, 2015).

In such a manner, nine interviewees explained the confrontation in the east of Ukraine as a fight for resources and political influence. According to Oleg (UC), from the very beginning it was obvious that Ukraine will not let the Donbass region go because of its resources and its part in the Ukrainian budget:

We have a centralized budget in Ukraine – all money came to Kiev and from there they distributed it. They lost probably their most moneymaking region – the Crimean resort. And now Donetsk and Lugansk want to leave – regions, which have coal and gas productions, and all other power manufacturing. All these were ready to get away. Mariupol is the only working shipyard in Ukraine, and it also wanted to leave, because people there wanted to attach to Russia. So it was obvious that it was not going to be over soon, because nobody would want to lose these areas too.

Wilson (2016) argues that identity clashes and historical factors were a baseline of the conflict, but weren’t enough in themselves to lead to war in Donbass. He suggests, “elites and the resources they provided were the keys to converting a marginal movement into a mass phenomenon” (p. 644). This idea resonated with Helga (RC) who assumed that the

confrontation with the government wasn't as important as a fight between some bands for zones of influence. She expressed her opinion about the situation in the Donbass region in the following manner:

[...] among rebels there were a lot of bright, colorful individuals, who used to raise people, and then they quit. When the land carve-up began, they left, because they realized it wasn't a fight for ideals anymore, but a turf war. It was a re-allotment of land and property between cliques. Not everyone wants to participate in that kind of war. It's one thing when your homeland was attacked and you defend your home. And it's totally another when you stand up for some bandit and defend his interests.

Katya (UC) recalled geography classes suggesting that even school children know how resource-wealthy the eastern part of Ukraine is. And Yelena (UC) assumed that some invisible parties may have planned the operation, aiming to destroy the region:

Ukrainian authorities wouldn't be interested in that, so other countries' authorities did it. They finance it and make sure it keeps going. War is always money laundering. War has always been beneficial; even in eighteenth century kings started wars when their treasuries were empty. If the economy is in ruins, one needs to start a war.

Maria (U/RC) suggested that the contemporary situation in Ukraine demonstrates whose interests the conflict served:

I think it was to somebody's advantage to start these protests. Two years later we actually can see how many foreigners we have among contemporary Ukrainian policymakers; we see how Donbass land is getting destroyed, despite its fertility. If I were a serious international player with my own interests, I probably would do the same. I would start chaos in the country [...] and then turn it into agrarian state, just land that can be used for one's own needs. And one wouldn't be able to do so with normal policymakers in place who care about the country. Now the government is changing, prime-ministers are changing, life is getting worse, and now it's very easy to manipulate this country, offering it money or help in the form of credits and loans in exchange for the cultivation of its fertile land.

In a similar manner Dmitry (RC) assumed that probably the original scenario of the Donbass region was close to that of Crimea, yet the escalation of the conflict in the east was enabled due to a possible disagreement between Russian authorities and policymakers:

There are different influence groups, elite groups in the Russian government. And their points of view don't always coincide. They may state that they agree, but they still may differ. And every so often some groups get a chance to affect things.

Plekhanov (2016) notes that in reality in the beginning of the conflict in Donbass the official Russian Kremlin was signaling Kiev that it wasn't interested in the breakup of the country, suggesting reforms to resolve the crisis instead of suppressing the rebellious regions by force. Cyril (RC) referred to policy makers' roles in the conflict, yet, in his opinion, the escalation happened not due to Russian interests, but due to dissonance between the Ukrainian government and leaders of the uprising regions' ideas about the future:

I guess both sides [Ukrainian government and leaders of the rebels] want to develop and build a state project that is preferable to each side. They want to spread their project over the entire state. The state that existed within particular borders for a long time cannot just all of a sudden crack. This wound would slowly grow, which is happening now. People don't want to accept the fact that they lost their home, something that was whole before. That's why they are in war. They just want to dictate their politics to everyone.

In such a way, some participants believed that resources of the region and the influence associated with them intensified polarization of different geographically determined groups causing an extended confrontation between the leaders of the eastern resistance and the Ukrainian authorities. Some participants also suggested that the support, which both sides receive from external players interested in those resources, allowed the conflict to spread and turn into a long-term confrontation. However, a number of interviewees believed that without the chaotic and intense information flow, involved authorities wouldn't be able to trigger and mobilize people to the same extent. The discussion on the role of the media in spreading chaos and turning people against each other will take place within the frame of the global conflict analysis in section five of this chapter.

In this section we discussed the participants' perceptions of the main causes of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, which included predefined identity differences shaped by

historical circumstances, language, cultural belonging, and resources and/or influence circles, which were of interest to different authorities affecting the situation. The image of the conflict in eastern and southern regions developed by the participants is described in the following sections. Due to the limited scope of the research and also since the participants' experiences with the conflict were very fragmented, we will look at their general vision of the confrontation rather than analyze the military conflict in detail.³⁰

4.4.2 – The beginning of the Resistance in Donbass

Major anti-government protests, an aftermath of the Ukrainian revolution, started in different cities of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in the end of March 2014. Soon, protests in the Donbass region, where there was no previously apparent militant pro-Ukrainian mood (Wilson, 2016), escalated into an all-out movement. For Grigory (UC) the first signs of the major conflict emerged when aggressive nationalistic strangers from other regions started coming to Konstantinovka, Donetsk region:

I got a feeling of danger when minor cliques started coming to our city. They picked places like nightclubs, some bars, where there were a lot of youth. They came asking why we weren't joining them and kept sitting on our butts. When they came there were flare-ups, they beat up young people, there were conflicts. After that barricades appeared. Civilians stood against them: "Why do they come like that and beat our guys?" That's how the mess started.

Arseny (UC) suggested that when the 'Heavenly Hundred' were killed the aggressive focus shifted to eastern regions which weren't supporting the revolution. He explained:

Somebody had to be blamed. Who shot them? Obviously, these were Donetsk, Yanukovich, pro-Russians, so everybody in the east was jackasses and scum.

³⁰ For more information on the contemporary conflict in eastern Ukraine see CSIS, (n.d.), "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline" (from February 2015 up to today); O. Bartelsen (Ed.), (2016), "Revolution and War in Contemporary Ukraine: The Challenge of Change"; C. Kaspar de Ploeg, (2017), "Ukraine in the Crossfire"; J.L. Black, M. Johns & A.D. Theriault (Eds.) (2016) "The Return of the Cold War. Ukraine, The West and Russia."

Maxim (UC) noted that the original protests in the eastern regions and in particular in Lugansk weren't very vocal and the media didn't pay much attention to them:

[...] first, some fighting started in Lugansk. The news media didn't talk about it. Something was already happening there: it wasn't like real warfare, there were no military people, but there were some disorders.

Katya (UC) also recalled that “Maidan began in winter, and about half a year later mental ferment began.” This timeframe may suggest that the post-revolutionary process did not affect Kherson, one of the potential conflict regions, until later in time.

Arseny (UC) stated that original protests in the east, which started after the victory of Euromaidan, weren't of a separatist nature, and rather were in opposition to the European integration, which was supported by the revolution:

There were pro-Russian protests too. We originally ran up a Russian flag opposing their Euro flag. We also ran up Ukrainian flags, they were at the same places with the Russian. We didn't want to separate and build the wall. Those running the Euro flag wanted to go there, but we just wanted to stay here, where we were before, so we had two flags.

Russian support of eastern Ukraine affected attitudes towards Russians helping Ukrainian refugees and forced migrants. For example, Helga (RC) stated that she and her colleagues volunteering to help people coming from eastern Ukraine never supported ideas of independence of the Donbass region, yet they were often blamed for separatism. They turned it into a joke:

We call each other separatists as a joke. We can say “hi terrorists, separatists” when we meet. Of course, none of us ever wanted any separation.

The threat felt to be coming from the “Right Sector” activists pushed Arseny (UC), Grigory (UC) and thousands of other people, some of whom they knew, into defense mode. Both men helped build and protect barricades in Donetsk and Konstantinovka correspondingly.

Arseny (UC) explained his motivation in the following manner:

We wanted to be ourselves, to live on our land and we didn't need the European Union. So there was a decision to build barricades on all central city entrances, not to let any extremists in, in particular to keep the "Right Sector" away.

Maltseva (2016) notes that in general the Maidan movement never had broad support in the Donbass region and in other eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. Grigory (UC) also noted that the goal of the barricades was to prevent the visits of radical "Right Sector" activists (in some cases referred to as 'Banderites'³¹), which according to Arseny (UC) and Grigory (UC), usually ended up in blood. Grigory (UC) shared his experience:

We set up a barricade to prevent these visits. We had our reasons: there were victims among our acquaintances. People on the barricades were blamed for separatism, and it was said that they came from Russia. There were my friends and acquaintances on the barricades. And I was there too.

Wilson (2016) recalls the results of the poll carried out in the Donetsk region in late March 2014, which asked people to identify the main threat for Donbass: over 60 percent³² of locals suggested that these were "radically-minded inhabitants of Western Ukraine — 'Banderites'" (p. 643). This data suggests that participants' opinions resonated with many other inhabitants' of the Donbass region. Grigory (UC) and Arseny (UC) said that the first fights with "Right Sector" activists and the first blood fueled a greater confrontation in the

³¹ A term is often used in the conflict rhetoric (especially by Russian and pro-Russian media) to describe radical nationalists in Ukraine. Original meaning: a member or one who ascribes to the ideas of the political movement of Stepan Bandera (a leader of revolutionary OUN-B faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists); more generally, a far-right nationalist in Ukraine.

³² The research was conducted by the Donetsk Institute of Social Studies and Political Analysis on March 26-28, 2014, and involved a sample, said to be representative of the entire adult population of Donetsk, though in 2013-2014 the total population of the Donetsk region was about 4.5 million people (European Union, 2014). The respondents' selection was based on a multi-level quota sample. After controlling the field data, 500 survey questionnaires were accepted for the analysis. Limit error of results $\pm 4,5\%$ (with a significance level of 95%) (Kipen, 2014).

eastern regions, forcing people to expand the barricades. Arseny (UC) recalled his experience in Donetsk:

A week later activists started gathering in the suburbs to build barricades. I came back home after a night shift and took my dog for a walk. In the back yard there were a lot of people. I asked what was going on. People there told me that when that student was killed there was a huge fight. “Right Sector” activists, radical pro-Ukrainian people lost in that battle and had to leave, to escape. But they promised to come back for revenge, they said there would be no Russia here ever, that it wasn’t the end. They told us to wait... So people there decided to wait properly and kind of agreed on war. That’s how they came up with a decision to make barricades not to have any unwanted surprises. They didn’t want to see 100-200-300 young fascists, who would beat everybody at the central square.

At the time of conflict Maxim (UC) was already in St. Petersburg, but his relatives were still in Lugansk. When the conflict expanded it affected his family members, when, as mentioned earlier, his father-in-law was arrested and kept as a prisoner for three weeks.³³ In his interview Arseny (UC) noted the feeling of frustration that people and government organization workers had when the post-revolutionary power vacuum emerged. In his opinion, the inaction of police forces let pro-Russian riots and protest movement gain weight:

In general, people were confused and didn’t know what to do. There had been governance before, but now it was gone. They didn’t know who to obey. The same with police – militsiya. They also didn’t know what to do. They obeyed Ukraine before, obeyed Yanukovich. And who is there now? There is nobody in ministry. They didn’t know who was supposed to pay their wages and what they were supposed to do. So policemen just walked around and did nothing.

The separation of Crimea from Ukraine and following annexation to Russia discussed earlier, according to some participants, gave people in Donbass and other Ukrainian regions a push. On April 7, 2014 groups of rebels who occupied the Regional administration building and the City Hall of Donetsk proclaimed the creation of the Donetsk People’s

³³ The participant didn’t specify who arrested his father-in-law.

Republic (DPR). A few weeks later on April 27, 2014 protesters in Lugansk declared the establishment of the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR). And on May 11, 2014 the referendum on the status of Donetsk and Lugansk regions was held.

4.4.2.1 – Referendums in the Donbass Region

The referendum in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions purportedly aimed to legitimize the establishment of self-proclaimed republics. For Arseny (UC) the referendum, first, was a way to defend their identities and values, and second, was a way to express the people's will and exercise their right for freedom speech:

After the first blood and when people from the “Right Sector” had been spotted in town (that's a Central and Western clique), the decision was made ... They were here already, and blood was spilled already, so we realized that it's going to be more than one student... They burned the bus in downtown Donetsk, some vehicles were damaged; they beat some old people and killed a guy. That wasn't normal. We had lived here and then they came and started to suppress our stated wish. “You want to be a part of the European Union? They have freedom of speech there. Why don't you let us express our wishes, thoughts freely?”

As for Arseny (UC), for Grigory (UC) the referendum was seen as an expression of the will of people who didn't support the revolution and didn't elect the new government. In his opinion, people also wanted to defend their language use, which in Ukraine, according to Kulyk (2011), often correlates with language identity and thus predicts group support of particular policies and developments. Grigory (UC) explained his vision of the referendum in the following way:

We voted for separation from the new government, which we didn't elect and we didn't know who did. Maidan elected it and, I think, our votes were manipulated. We voted on the establishment of the DPR and LPR and had a referendum to separate from the new government, not to have laws prohibiting the use of Russian language etc. The results of the referendum were positive [...].

In Yevgenya's (UC) understanding, the referendum was seen as a way to provide people with safe living conditions and to assure that the language use and their language identity would not be under a threat:

People didn't want anything. They just wanted to have a calm life. Nobody went to Kiev to fight or demand. Nobody went to war in western Ukraine. The referendum was about a calm life. People wanted to use the Russian language as they did before. They wanted to live as before.

Like Grigory (UC), Yevgenya (UC) and Denis (UC) underlined what they saw as a high turnout of the referendum; however, Denis (UC) questioned the logic of the process:

I saw the pictures - in my city all polls were packed. People came to vote for the Donetsk People's Republic, they actually believed it could happen. But how can you even try to separate a piece of land from the country and try to do something with it?

Wilson (2016) suggested that in March 2014 more than 20 percent of the interviewed inhabitants of the Donbass region thought that the threat was coming from Russian citizens present in the region helping to organize protests as well as from Russian politicians and the army. Following the situation from the Dnepropetrovsk region, Yelena (UC) acknowledged the Russian presence in the conflict escalation. The knock-on effects of the referendum were one of her main concerns:

Before the DPR and LPR we thought that some third party invaded the country to take over, something like Crimea. We thought they were just terrorists maybe from Dagestan, not necessarily Russia [Dagestan is a federal subject of Russia]. Later we saw their powerful weapons on TV and realized that 'just terrorists' couldn't have such a potential, so we realized that there was some significant financial support, because Donetsk and Lugansk couldn't resist the Ukrainian army on their own. On the other hand, people thought that if Russia were interested in taking over these two regions, it just would do so using the power and weapons they have. On the third hand, Russia wouldn't do so, because it would lead to the third world war. I think Russia finances [the conflict] to some point. Russia supports Russian-speaking people there who don't want to be a part of Ukraine. On the other side, if you don't want to be a part of Ukraine, then any region may go independent... in any country. Then it will be a geopolitical redistribution all over the entire world.

Katya (UC) noted that even though she and her friends in the Kherson region realized that the way chosen by the DPR and LPR was dangerous, they supported it:

[...] recalling geography classes we realized that even if they would become an independent state, they would succeed in general. So inside ourselves we supported them, because people actually knew what they wanted and saw the goal, and it didn't matter if they were ready to take help or not. I mean at that time it didn't matter for them to be with Russia or be independent. Russia couldn't agree to take them officially, and Ukraine didn't let them go officially, so they were left on their own. And even this fact didn't break them down. I was very glad to see it.

Katya (UC) viewed the possibility of expansion of resistance over to her region as a scary but attractive option then:

We thought: "Well, it can make it here too... Scary... But on the other hand, just 300 kilometers... and they are lacking land there. They have the resources there, and we grow wheat here..." We had such thoughts, that it would be great, if it would make it here... People screamed: "Novorossiia". We thought: "Why not?"

Militia troops (military rebel power) were formed to defend a proclaimed independence right after the referendums. Grigory (UC) noticed the support for changes he witnessed happening amongst people:

After the referendum, the militia was formed. They took up residence in one of the administration buildings. To tell the truth, you could see by people's faces that they were for it [independence]. We had celebrations when militia stood on top of administration buildings and communicated with authorities. Authorities were for them, with them.

Analyzing the situation, Petersburger Dmitry (RC) explained his vision of this referendum and the following events:

A particular information image was created in the country [meaning the Donbass region]: these people were standing against fascists, who had been killing people in Kiev [...] And in the east people expressed their will. And there is a contradiction: people expressed their will at Maidan, so now others do the same here – they don't want to be a part of Ukraine. But they didn't receive direct support like Crimea, I don't know why. Maybe it was like a snake trying to bite off more than it could swallow – regions are big, and there are a lot of different heterogeneous groups living there. And then, if to take them, it will be a direct front with... That was a high risk of a direct clash. So it was easier to cover up by a piece of these people.

That's why maybe they had some support, but it was under-active. They received just enough not to fail completely. I have a feeling that western partners support Ukraine the same way.

The referendum results showed more than 96 percent support for self-rule in the Lugansk region (Reuters Staff, 2014) which, resistance leaders claimed, had a 70 percent turnout in the city of Lugansk and 81 percent turnout in the Lugansk region (TVN 24, 2014), and an 89 percent support for self-rule in the Donetsk region with a 75 percent turnout according to rebels' leaders; however, these results could not be independently verified (BBC, 2014 a). On May 12, 2014 the leader of the DPR, Pushilin, declared the sovereignty of the DPR and expressed a wish to become a part of Russia and consolidate with the LPR to form Novorossiia (Gazeta.ru, 2014). The same day, as the news agency Interfax reported, the Lugansk Regional Council demanded the immediate federalization of Ukraine, suggesting it was the only way to save Ukraine as a single country (Interfax-Ukraine, 2014).

The Ukrainian Constitution (2004) presupposes that any territorial changes in the country may occur only through a Ukraine-wide referendum.³⁴ Goncharenko (2014) suggests that in addition to their unconstitutional nature, the southeastern referendums were illegitimate because: they were proposed by illegitimate public authorities; there were no official poll-books; no independent observers presented; it was impossible to secure the appearance of all voters in regions, and; the voting took place under a threat of military violence. The results of referendums were recognized neither by the Ukrainian government and other countries nor by Russia. Ukrainian authorities stated that the referendums were illegal. Additionally, a number of countries including the USA, Germany, France and the UK indicated their lack of legitimacy and unconstitutional nature. The Russian government

³⁴ Articles 72-73 of the Constitution of Ukraine.

stated that it respected the results of the people's will for expression (Sonne & Shishkin, 2014).

Ukrainian participants of the research who were still in Ukraine during the referendum and after it, experienced the aftermath of the referendums or its echo at home. However, within a year after the Donbass referendums, all research participants living in Ukraine at the time crossed the Ukrainian border, leaving the ongoing war behind. Ksenya (UC) left Kiev at the time of referendums in May 2014. Katya (UC), Oleg (UC), Grigory (UC), and Arseny (UC) moved out of Ukraine in February-March, 2015, and Yelena (UC) came to St. Petersburg in August 2015. Crimeans Maria (U/RC) and Sergey (U/RC) moved to St. Petersburg in summer 2014. Three other Ukrainian participants came to Russia before the conflict. The rest of the participants observed the situation from aside; however, most of them noted that the longer the conflict continued, the less attention they were paying to it. Altshuller (2017) also noticed that this was a global tendency, and stated that although tensions between rebels and the Ukrainian army are still present, the conflicts in Donbass have currently turned into “another forgotten war” (p.7).

4.4.3 – The Horrors of War

After the referendums pro-Russian protests in the LPR and the DPR escalated into armed conflict between self-organized militia troops (militia) and Ukrainian government forces (Ukrainian military). Protests also proceeded in other southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. In May 2014 representatives of the DPR and the LPR signed an agreement for the creation of Novorossiia, which assumed the incorporation of southeastern Ukraine regions into a confederation. Besides the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, the project of Novorossiia originally included major cities and southern and eastern regions such as Odessa, Kherson,

Nikolayev, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhe, and Kharkov (Babiak, 2014), which were mentioned earlier in the research as potential war regions. During the summer of 2014 these regions were cut from the DPR and LPR, inflamed in war. Katya (UC) (Kherson region), Yelena (UC) (Dnepropetrovsk region) and Oleg (UC) (Odessa) shared their experiences of military presence in regions where there was no war. Katya (UC) noted that even at the time of the interview (May 2016), the military presence in her region was still noticeable and strongly affected life there:

[...] they told me that the last tension in our city happened about three months ago. A lot of people wearing uniforms with no identification marks came to the city, and there even was some shooting somewhere. They sit there and expect that something may still happen.

However, the main armed conflict with the growing number of casualties at that time was happening in the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR. Oleg (UC) remembered how the echo of war also reached him in Odessa when his grandmother who lived in Donetsk region phoned him:

It was summer. I won't recall the month. Grandma phoned. I could hear she had been crying earlier. She said she was packing because there were bombardments around. Donetsk and Lugansk stated they wanted a referendum and decided to conduct it by themselves. So bombardments began. They were just bombarding people. I could hear explosions on the phone [...] She said bombardments were coming from Mariupol area and from Zaporozhe area. They were bombing everything – houses, buildings, roads – just a missile shower.

Yevgenya (UC) and Grigory's (UC) home towns appeared to be in the areas first under control of militias, but shortly after the referendums the Ukrainian army regained control over those territories in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions. Yevgenya (UC) described the chaos she witnessed during the change of authorities:

I think the peak point was when people [militia forces] were leaving – militia, when it was close, when there were air strikes. There is a river – Donetsa – people were swimming across it without documents, they were fleeing with just what they had

on. The city sits at a higher point, so we could see it from our garden. The next day I went to town. People there were selling tablets and whatever else they had, because they needed money. They were just leaving. That was a peak point, I think. It was 2014. Summer 2014.

Grigory (UC) shared his war experience:

One of my friends has a farm just out of town. At that time he wasn't using it, because the Ukrainian army took over it to set up the GRAD³⁵ directed towards the city. After a time I was able to understand by ear when they were shooting towards us, when the opposite way, and when bullets were just flying by.

Petersburger Nicolay (RC) personally participated in the military conflict in the Donetsk region, fighting side by side with hundreds of other volunteers from Russia and local militias. He noted other international presence in the area:

There was an American presence, Polish presence, and Lithuanian presence. My scouts reported where they were located, how and how many of them.

Five participants were confident that international military forces, and most prominent of all Russians, participated in the conflict in Ukraine. Petersburger Semyon (RC) was "pretty sure there were our people there" and Janna (RC) acknowledged that one of her acquaintances went to the Donbass region to fight. She didn't know who he was fighting for, but she knew money was one of his main motivations:

He gets paid really well. So many people go there to get wages. I don't know who pays them. Somebody. I guess somebody from the government, some government representatives.

However, Dmitry (RC) suggested that Russian military support of militias has never been properly proven and is not really needed as long as Russia provides other help:

Russia supports eastern separatism in an informative way; it supports eastern separatism in a humanitarian way. There was a funny thing when they were checking humanitarian convoys, they didn't find anything. But what is the simplest

³⁵ The BM-21 Grad (*hail*) multiple launch rocket system entered service with the Soviet Army in 1963 (Gurov, 2006-2017).

thing a convoy could bring? - Fuel in their huge tanks, which later could be used for tanks and other military equipment.

In Russian rhetoric, nationalistic supporters of the revolutionary government and Ukrainization were often presented as ‘fascists’, while in Ukrainian rhetoric people performing the pro-Russian resistance in the Donbass region were often called ‘terrorists’ (Black, 2016 a). Some participants adopted the ‘terrorist’ term in the beginning of the conflict. Denis (UC) explained his vision of the roots of this terminology:

That’s what all Ukrainians were told: Russian troops illegally made it to Donetsk region and began this mess. They blocked Donetsk and Lugansk. So they are negative about Russians, Ukrainians who move to Russia, and about Putin personally.

Grigory (UC) didn’t deny Russian participation in the conflict, yet he tried to understand why some international forces were addressed as terrorists, and others were fine:

I don’t have any doubts that Russia helped. Does the negative attitude form only because of that? We had Ukrainian soldiers in our city who didn’t look like Ukrainians at all. Some of them had American flags; they were contractors. Why is it OK for them, but help from Russia, from our brothers, our relatives, is terrorism? I don’t understand.

Dmitry (RC) underlined that ‘terrorist’ rhetoric is very controversial:

Normally terrorists are those who blow up houses. Here it’s hard to call them terrorists; they don’t blow up civilians, they fight with military men. On the other hand, they stand against their contemporary government. On the third hand, they didn’t choose this government. It all is held in place by half-truths, and that is very easy to manipulate.

The idea of fighting against terrorism in the east of Ukraine was popular with people joining the army in the beginning of the conflict. Looking at what confronting parties were fighting for, Yevgenya (UC), Yelena (UC) , Helga (RC), Nicolay (RC), Arseny (UC), Maria (U/RC), Katya (UC), and Grigory (UC) explained that militia were defending their positions. Yevgenya (UC) summarized this idea in the following manner:

They just did it themselves to protect their land. Militias don't go to Kiev or anywhere else. They are in their land, they fight for their stuff, just don't let it go.

Participants said that Ukrainian soldiers, on the other hand, originally were fighting against those they viewed as terrorists. Yet, as time went on, according to Yelena (UC), the attitude of many Ukrainian soldiers has changed:

In the beginning guys joined the army themselves because they wanted to fight for the country, but later, by 2015, they realized that they didn't know whom they were defending the country from. From volunteers? These guys were lost.

Yevgenya (UC) expressed the frustration people in her city experienced when the Ukrainian army took over the region:

National Guards? In the beginning they were saying they came to defend us. But what were they defending us from? These were their first words: "We are defending you." "What are you protecting us from, if you originally came to the territory, which was not yours at the start?" It's a closed circle.

Maria (U/RC) and Grigory (UC) noted the growing discouragement among Ukrainian soldiers as the conflict was unfolding. Grigory (UC) told a story of an "adequate"

Ukrainian officer, who was a regular customer in the bar he worked at in Konstantinovka, which soon after the referendum was retaken by Ukrainian forces:

[...] he had too much to drink, he asked me "[Grigory], I'm sorry for the personal question, in this contemporary situation do you support Russia or Ukraine?" First, I took that question as a normal one, but then I started doubting, what if it was a provocation. I couldn't be sure, because I didn't know this person that well. I decided not to open up, but answered truthfully. I said, "You know, all I want is peace. I don't care Russia or Ukraine. I want it to be safe in my city and wish peaceful skies for my relatives and friends." He stood with his head down in his thoughts and then he said "To tell you the truth, I serve here for how long already... I'm for Russia. I'm not very happy with the Ukrainian government." And I believed him. Maybe military people were also in harsh conditions, when they had to pick sides... He is an adequate man, may God give him health. I asked him, "What if militia will come back to the city, sorry for the personal question, what are you going to do?" He answered, "That's fine. Our plan is to retreat. We have an order to hold positions, but some guys in our military unit don't really want to fight – most of them. We don't understand this conflict and we don't want to shoot our

relatives.” I understood at that moment that there were normal people both on our and on their side.

Recalling the data she collected for the media source she worked for, Maria (U/RC) said that the discouragement among Ukrainian soldiers was caused by the conditions they were living in as well as by an absence of an idea to fight for:

For a long time the Ukrainian army hasn't been getting enough financing. They actually publish photos of their food – it's garbage, sometimes there are worms in it. It's gross... They get drafted, but then they have to buy their own uniforms. Their guns are old. They sleep in some kind of kennels. The conditions in the army are very bad, and the morale is shattered. Donbass fights for the idea they are defending their land, but Ukrainian soldiers don't know what they fight for. They were told to fight Russian terrorists-separatists, but that doesn't appeal anymore. A lot of draftees are either afraid to join the army and just hit the road to Russia (there is a new law in Ukraine: draftee age men are not allowed to leave the country. But they still find their way and leave), or they unwillingly join the army. And then they yield themselves as prisoners. And those who stay have to fight. They don't want to, and many of them start drinking. There are a lot of deaths due to alcohol, due to venereal diseases, due to simple tuberculosis or lung diseases. Very bad conditions. A lot of people die because of alcoholism.

Eight participants were negative about the situation with the draft system. For Yevgenya's (UC) brothers, as well as for Oleg (UC), Grigory (UC), and Katya's (UC) husband the total draft for the ATO was the main reason to flee Ukraine. According to them, especially in the beginning many people willingly joined the army, but as Arseny (UC) noted, many others didn't want to participate in war, which never was recognized as a war by the Ukrainian government:

The second stage of military draft was on at that time. A lot of people were forced to join the army and to go to war; I mean to join the so-called counterterrorism operation. At the same time our president Petr Poroshenko stated that thus far there was and there is no war in the country. It is counterterrorism.

Ksenya (UC) explained her attitude towards the draft in a following manner:

When you get drafted, there are high chances that you'll be forced to fight against your cousin. It shocks me, so I can't understand how somebody could make it all happen.

At the time of the interview Denis (UC) confessed that he was afraid to go back to Ukraine, because he didn't want to be forced to join the army. However, he noted that at that time the draft call up was over:

My acquaintances who live there said that a draft call up happened in 2014, and then in 2015. Now Poroshenko called for a fourth mobilization – Russians call it gravization,³⁶ but it sounds like my friends don't receive more draft notices.

For Oleg (UC) the day Ukrainian recruits came to his work place to enlist all draft-age men, including him, became his last day in Ukraine. He described his experience of the recruitment methods used by the Ukrainian government. Katya's husband also had to leave in a hurry to avoid the draft. Participants said that the recruitment regulations in Ukraine became a real reason to leave the country for them and many others. Oleg (UC) also noted that the draft system affected the employment situation:

Mom quit last October [2015]. By that time women were registered as plumbers and mechanics at her place. And these were women who already work there. In reality men just came and did the job, because it was just scary [for men to remain officially employed].

Helga (RC), Ksenya (UC), Grigory (UC), Arseny (UC), Yevgenya (UC), Oleg (UC), and Maxim (UC) said they lost friends, relatives or acquaintances in the government-named Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO).

The disgust towards the government was not all one-sided. Ksenya (UC) shared her story and feelings about the government pushing people to war:

Many people don't just hate Russia due to what has happened, but they hate their own state, because their sons, brothers, friends never came back... Unfortunately, I miss some people too... he wasn't my close friend, more of a buddy... he didn't come back... But I knew that person. Yesterday he was still alive. And it doesn't

³⁶ *Mogilizatsiya* (Russian) uses word play. The letter “b” in “mobilization” is substituted with letter “g,” turning the core of the word into “mogil”/a, which means “grave.”

matter how close we were! So how can you recover from such a thing quickly?! [with a wobble in her voice].

Oleg (UC) also mentioned two of his classmates, who decided to join the ATO, the Ukrainian forces, and died in the operation:

Two of my classmates left for Donetsk to participate in warfare. They were crazy “Right Sector” supporters, so they joined the National Guard. They didn’t come back. I mean didn’t come back alive. In the beginning I felt sorry for them, they were smart guys, good professionals. But later I felt malevolence. It didn’t happen just like that. Just use your head, look around, read, and think first. Don’t listen to what you are told.

Thirteen participants either experienced the Ukrainian military and/or militia presence in their cities, or heard a lot about such experiences from their close ones and neither the presence of militia nor the Ukrainian army presence was recalled as a positive experience.

For example, Denis (UC) noted the destructive nature of militia rule, which his relatives and friends witnessed in his hometown:

I know that whenever militias were present, the criminal level went up. They stole kids from wealthy families. My classmate’s father has a good business, so they threatened him, saying they will take his kid away – blackmailed him. Now there you are either paying militias, or you are paying the Ukrainian authorities. In cities where there are militias, they don’t set fire when they get paid. So if somebody paid them, they won’t touch any of that person’s buildings or areas.

Grigory (UC), Arseny (UC), Maria (U/RC), Katya (UC), Denis (UC), and Yevgenya (UC) talked about military people, both Ukrainian army soldiers and militants, overusing alcohol while still wearing uniforms and having guns on them. Visiting home, Yevgenya (UC) watched National Guards driving a tank to a liquor store, and her mother told her that they do it quite often. Grigory (UC) and his girlfriend had a narrow escape when drunken, armed Ukrainian army soldiers threatened them in the park, seeking to demonstrate power and fight. Besides his personal experience with war and bombardments, Arseny (UC) shared a

story of his mother's close call when a drunk militant crashed a vehicle into the kiosk she worked at a few hours before she arrived:

Mom used to work in small kiosk selling water. Her birthday is in winter. And that year at 5AM on her birthday her kiosk (she was supposed to come to work at 8 AM) got smashed by a drunk driver. He abandoned the car. Later they found a machine gun and bullets there. We realized that this car belonged to one of the militants. It was a stolen car. Police weren't really working, so cars were stolen here and there all the time. A lot of government employees fled the country, leaving their houses and vehicles behind. There were a lot of marauders.

Working at the bar Grigory (UC) experienced many situations involving drunken Ukrainian military men:

I had a lot of stressful situations with Ukrainian military officers. They offered to sell me grenades for 200 hryvnas, or when they said they would send a bullet through my leg, because I refused to sell them beer – the revenue agency prohibited selling liquor to military officers wearing uniform, it was a law. They come in, already very drunk, inadequate [not in control of all their faculties] and with a machine gun, and say “Hey, kiddo, pour us some.” I tell them about that law, so I can't help them when they wear uniforms. I suggested they ask the cab driver to come in and buy what they needed. Right away the aggression came up and they said they would send a bullet through my leg.

This situation resolved peacefully with the help of Grigory's (UC)'s boss; however, many other similar episodes did not end as well. Yevgenya (UC) recalled stories of how the National Guard exercised power over some people:

Relatives of those who joined the militia – husbands, fathers, sons – it's impossible for relatives to live there, they just abandoned their houses and left, because the National Guard came over... and all that. They could just pick a guy in the middle of the street and beat him. My brother's friend – they kidnapped him for three days and beat him: “You have a relation to the militia...” Even though he wasn't anything like that, nothing. Then they let him go.

Yevgenya (UC) also noted that she heard that when the National Guards took over her city the number of rapes significantly increased, but reporting rapes was useless because nobody was willing to take care of that. The International Massmedia Agency (IMM, 2017) published an investigation on rape and sexual violence in the Donbass region affected by

the conflict, in which they note the unwillingness of Russian and Ukrainian authorities to investigate sexual violence cases associated with the conflict, since they often involve their own intelligence agencies. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (The UN OHCHR, 2017) published a broad report on human rights violations in Ukraine, including Crimea, committed from March 2014 to the end of January 2017. It documents cases of “beating, electrocution in the genital area, rape, threats of rape, and forced nudity” involving both men and women, as well as cases of detention and threats of rape or murder of relatives and especially children, aimed to increase the pressure on victims (p.4).

In this section we looked at the participants’ visions and feelings about the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which some of them experienced personally; others felt its echo in their regions, and the rest followed and analyzed from Russia. We addressed the participants’ observations of and attitudes towards international military presence in different regions. A number of participants focused on militants’ and Ukrainian soldiers’ motivations, analyzing the change in people’s spirits as the conflict progressed. The draft system in Ukraine, which strongly personally affected some participants, was another point of concern in this section. Any military presence was recalled as a negative and destructive experience. Participants mentioned forays, drunken incidents, and sexual abuse among the most noticeable side effects of Ukrainian military and militia involvement in the conflict. Their experience of human rights violations was supported by the data from research provided by OHCHR and the International Massmedia Agency. The next section looks at the situation as of May-June 2016 in war-affected regions described by participants.

4.4.4 – “Aftereffects” of the Conflict

The Minsk II Agreements reached in February 2015 suggested an immediate and full bilateral ceasefire in eastern regions of Ukraine (agreed to by both sides on in September 2014, but not sustained), the withdrawal of all heavy weapons, effective monitoring and verification of implementation of agreements in the war-affected region, and the beginning of dialogue on local elections and more (BBC, 2015 b). Since then, at the time of this research, some improvements had been made in the region: the general ceasefire was holding, but often was interrupted by violations; most heavy weapons had been pulled back from the contact line; and there had been a number of prisoner exchanges between the sides, but fulfillment of other important points had stalled (Sputnik International, 2016), resulting in a ‘frozen’ conflict situation in the region. At the time of the research the participants in St. Petersburg were still hearing the echo of the war from their close ones living in Ukraine and from the Russian media, which was still paying significant attention to the Ukrainian crisis. In this section we will look what the participants suggested were the residual effects of the conflict at the time they were interviewed.

During their interviews eight participants addressed the current economic situation in Ukraine and in Donbass. Referring to the *New York times*, Altsuller (2017) notes that the standard of living in eastern Ukrainian regions affected by the conflict is very low: there is no government support; there are a lot of administrative obstacles; there is hardly any work; prices have increased; and people’s spirits are down. Denis (UC) illustrated this statement with his description of contemporary Donetsk:

Empty streets, stores are closed, nothing works, banks are closed... [...] They have a nighttime curfew now. They turn off the water at 11 pm now. [...] I see what happened to Donetsk, to Lugansk – these cities were just destroyed. In 2012 when I was leaving, some committee called Donetsk the wealthiest city in Ukraine. Now,

Donetsk city³⁷ is empty, the city itself is empty, businesses left, people left. At that time the “Donbass arena”³⁸ was one of the best stadiums in Europe, now it looks like a tin can in the middle of Donetsk. What have they done to the airport...

During the interview Denis (UC) mentioned several times the salaries and pensions his relatives and friends were receiving in war-affected eastern regions or in Kiev. He stated that some prices there were as high as in St. Petersburg, and the money people made often wasn't enough to even pay utility bills. Yevgenya (UC) also addressed this problem:

People suffer here and there... Just when you look at pensions, prices of utilities, prices for medication... I don't know how to live... For example, Grandma... Her pension is 1160 hryvnas.³⁹ And it's not enough for anything... They pay it, but utilities and everything else, groceries...

Besides high prices and low wages Yevgenya (UC) also noted that some companies try to take advantage of people, which makes life there even more unbearable. Yelena (UC) noticed that humanitarian help doesn't reach its destination, which, along with budget cuts, increases the existing gap between wealthy people and those living below the poverty line:

Humanitarian supplies provided by Ukraine or Russia, I don't know, never made it there, some people told me. War is money for those who hold power or have access to it. Supplies were taken by some power holders. They became wealthier. Many of them immigrated and live a good life now. Even military people [...] Recently the government significantly cut the low-income family support budget. It hurts single mothers and families with many children. Now most people in Ukraine are below the poverty line, and especially the vulnerable groups, who have no savings or any extra sources of income. So whoever has an opportunity to leave, they leave.

The continuing conflict in the Donbass region and recession in the Ukrainian economy also resulted in a serious decline in the standard of living in the entire country. Morelli (2017) notes that the cuts in energy subsidies, and the accompanying increase in electricity prices, along with the common rise of prices, resulted in public discontent and a decline in

³⁷ Modern downtown area of Donetsk.

³⁸ Stadium built for UEFA 2012, cohosted by Ukraine and Poland.

³⁹ About 60 CAD.

government support. Participants' experiences affirmed these tendencies. For example, Katya (UC) emphasized that the current life in Kherson region was economically unbearable:

The only thing I know for sure – it's impossible to survive there now. My parents survive now just because they grow their own food in the garden, can it, etc. [...] Financially... prices went up so bad, that I really don't understand how people survive. It feels like there is some kind of depopulation happening – whoever survives – good, whoever doesn't – great, we'll have more room. I don't know how grannies survive. I receive 860 hryvnas a month for the baby. A pack of diapers costs 300, a package of good baby food – 110, and not a very good one – 75 (it lasts for two weeks). It's unreal. Ok, let's skip babies. A minimal pension (and almost everybody there get a minimal pension, of course, after the collapse of Soviets) is 1100 hryvnas. My mom had 1500 hryvnas utility bills in winter. I don't understand how it works, how they make it, how they survive...

Semyon (RC) noted that even in the Ukrainian capital the standard of living had been reduced. Ksenya (UC) also stated that the conflict financially affected her family in Kiev, and emphasized that despite the revolution for change, with the conflict ongoing she had not yet noticed any general economic or social improvements in the country:

So far I just see that life became more difficult for my parents. They just live, buying the most necessary things; they can't even afford to go for a vacation. I actually don't know when people will live better. I mean those who live poorly now. Maybe there are some changes, but all I see is that they changed some street names, brought in some new laws, brought in some new reforms, but when will it pan out?.. Of course, nothing happens just like that, but I so far don't see... When has it happened? Two years ago... So far it's getting worse in means of day-to-day existence.

Besides the growth of utility prices, Oleg (UC) remarked a significant decline in the tourist industry in the Black Sea port-city of Odessa:

In 2013 we had about 100-150 cruise liners a year. This year [2016], mom checked the schedule; we had two, both from Bulgaria – not the most advanced country. Before we had cruise liners from Italy, France, and England, even from the USA sometimes. The city used to be a tourist destination. Now nobody wants to go there.

Reflecting on her own knowledge about the contemporary situation in Ukraine, Maria (U/RC) assumed that if the situation did not change soon, Ukraine might experience another revolution:

I feel that soon the rest of Ukraine may start protesting. They are overloaded with utility prices - it's just unreal. They have to pay about 2500 hryvnas for utilities a month, and the minimal salary is 1400 hryvnas. They cannot afford to pay even half. [...]. Eventually people will understand that that's the end, they will revolt. Then the entire country will be in a state of war against the authorities, which will try to use the army against people, but the army may revolt too, because it affects them too.

Yelena (UC) recalled a conversation she heard on the bus, which also illustrated the decline in public support for the government:

Once, in 2015, I was on the bus and there were a few guys sitting by me. "Instead of fighting against Donetsk, we should turn and oppose Kiev," one of them said.

In contrast, Cyril (RC) said that perhaps the conflict actually holds the rest of Ukraine together now and prevents another revolution:

I believe there is a break in the society there. On the one hand, some people are not very happy with the government, but on the other hand, they are told: "We are in a state of war now, so let's deal with it first, and then you will demand. You'll have all the right to demand, but right now we don't have time and energy to listen to you guys, we are promoting the country. Now it's the time to stick together and consolidate around this imperfect government."

Sergey's (U/RC) comments seemed to summarize what he saw as the contemporary economic situation when he said, "Ukraine has completely turned into a third world country."

In the participants' opinions, the general situation in Ukraine at the time of the research was no better than the financial one. For example, according to some participants, the ceasefire was often violated in conflict-affected regions. Grigory (UC) recalled what he heard from his uncle:

My uncle is a DPR deputy. He says that there is a lot of shooting. Just recently another village in the Donetsk area was bombed. Uncle is our source of information. He says that we shouldn't even try to come back for at least a year.

According to Yevgenya (UC) the signs of recent war are still very noticeable in the areas of hostilities:

Look at our city: it's all crossed with trenches. Everything is dug up there. Why do this?

Yelena (UC) noted that in her city in the Dnepropetrovsk region at the time of the research, a lack of law and order was quite common due to a lack of police control:

The Cossacks became very active. They do nothing, but drink. My husband says that there is anarchy in the city now. Quite often the mayor can't get to his work place; people don't let him get there just for the sake of it. People do whatever they want. Every other night some people rob stores, and policing doesn't really work. It still exists, but it doesn't really work.

Yevgenya (UC) and Denis (UC) described a system of roadblocks set up by Ukrainian servicemen or militants (depending on the area) in Donetsk and Lugansk regions at all cities and towns entries and exits. These roadblocks were seen by participants as another struggle faced by people in the eastern part of Ukraine. In agreement, Maltseva (2016) notices that the regional permit system, separating rebellious areas from the rest of the country, strongly contributes to the humanitarian crisis in the region. On a personal level, Denis (UC) and Yevgenya (UC) suggested that the existing permit system between Ukraine and the LPR and the DPR limits travel and roadblocks often increase a sense of danger.

Yevgenya (UC) described her experience, travelling through the region:

Just when you go... there is a roadblock. Everybody has to come out of the bus and show documents, passports. And there is... walking. Is he adequate or not adequate [meaning are they in their right mind or not – would they start shooting without provocation]? He has a machine gun on the shoulder. You think: "What?.. What can he be? Maybe he isn't in a normal condition." And they decide if you can go further or if you are staying here.

Helga (RC) stated that to her knowledge, “the conflict is still ongoing and it’s very hard to assume when it will be over;” however, she underlined that in general there is some progress in the DPR, but things there are not happening fast enough to lift people’s spirits:

In the DPR they are setting up a passport system, setting daily life, setting supply, they are opening malls, kindergartens, schools, i.e., people are trying to get on with a peaceful life. Actually, people there are tired to the point when they don’t care if they are called Russia or Ukraine. They don’t care; they just want to live with no fear.

Helga (RC) also noted that in contrast, in the area called the Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR), there are hardly any improvements due to poor governing. Still, Yevgenya (UC) suggested that in those parts of the Lugansk region under the control of the Ukrainian government the situation is no better. She commented on what she saw as the absence of any gradual steps that might help to stabilize the region:

They just assigned some people. Transferred them here and assigned them. [...] They assign and then take the person away, assign again, and take away again. [...] they didn’t rebuild anything. The chemical plant is frozen, as it was before, because they don’t have something. No work, pretty much.

All seventeen participants of the research were skeptical about improvements happening any time soon in Ukraine or in the self-proclaimed People’s Republics. Most of them noticed the serious decline in the economy, which strongly affected the standard of living in the country. Participants also addressed the difficulties the populations of the war-affected regions were facing, including the ceasefire violations, military presence, poor governing, lack of police control and along with challenges with the roadblock and permit systems.

Closing the conversation about the situation in Ukraine, it is important to note that despite the participants’ often-negative current experiences, any post-revolutionary development, economic and social changes take a significant amount of time. According to Morelli (2017), the contemporary government of President Poroshenko and Prime Minister

Groysman is slowly moving in a positive direction, fighting widespread corruption, improving the economic system, and achieving what some call the most substantial reform wave Ukraine has seen in the last 25 years. However, these reforms aiming to improve life in Ukraine in the future, are probably not very noticeable for millions of Ukrainians in the moment, as they, like the research participants, have to face financial and social challenges in their daily lives such as those described above.

As noted earlier, the fragmental and fragmented war experience described in this section is not representative and cannot be viewed as a full-scale conflict analysis. Nevertheless, I found it valuable and suggest that it contributes to broadening the picture of the conflict in Ukraine.

In the next sub-chapter, we zoom out from Ukraine and look at the broader scale of international conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, which some participants suggested were actually between Russia and the USA or the western world, and in which Ukraine was often placed as the battlefield.

4.5 - Conflict between Russians and Ukrainians or between Russia and the West: Information War

Exploring the history of Ukraine and its relations with Russia in her book *Borderland* a decade before the conflict, Reid (2003) suggested that in ten years, at worst, Ukraine would be “a fragile, poverty-stricken buffer-state in a new divide between an introverted West and an aggressive, unstable Russia” (p.232). Unfortunately, she wasn’t far from the truth.

Thompson (2017) suggests that the Ukrainian crisis, which by appearance started as an argument over the trade agreement, so far has been the bloodiest conflict since the fight over Yugoslavia. Although in Russia the conflict is mainly addressed as a local crisis or a

civil war in Ukraine, in international discourse it is often portrayed as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Since the early stages of the revolution, Russia emphasized that it didn't support the revolutionary way of change of the Ukrainian government. (See earlier chapters for details.) Later, it provided military forces to separate Crimea from Ukraine, evacuated pro-Russian President Yanukovich from Ukraine, and admitted it had provided humanitarian support to the Donetsk and Lugansk regions against the central government.

The self-proclaimed DPR and LPR received humanitarian aid, major informational support and the presence of Russian 'volunteers' – Russian citizens who decided to take part in the conflict, helping 'fraternal people' to defend their interests; however, Russian authorities continue to deny their official military involvement with the conflict and justify the incursion as defense of the Russian-speaking population in the Donbass region (The Interpreter Staff, 2016). In contrast, Russia has been accused of violating international law and breaching Ukraine's sovereignty (Amnesty International, 2014). In response, starting as early as March-April 2014, a number of countries, including Ukraine, implemented economic sanctions against the Russian Federation, in particular against some businesses and individuals, aiming to isolate Russia and thus affect its politics in Ukraine. Shortly following, Russia implemented counter-sanctions, banning some international goods from its market. All sanctions were expanded over time and are still in effect at the time of writing. Even though Russia has never recognized the international nature of the conflict, economic and diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Russia, as well as between Russia and the Western world, have drastically changed.

The participants suggested possible explanations for the conflict escalation. Among them were: the economic and political interests of Russia, Ukraine and other countries;

continuous post-Cold War confrontation between the USA and Russia and the accompanying armaments drive; and a desire to weaken Russia as a global threat. Cyril (RC), Dmitry (RC) and Sergey (U/RC) assumed that interested authorities at some point couldn't come to an agreement about future politics, later bringing Ukraine to a state of war. Cyril (RC) also suggested that Russia was trying to save a partnership with Ukraine and keep revolutionary leaders away from power, supporting the ex-president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich; however, Yanukovich was unsuccessful in 'doing his part' and failed to suppress protests:

Politically, Russia gave Yanukovich some warranties, reassuring him that it will support him to the end and that it was ready to completely ruin the relationship with the West to keep him in power. He thought he had enough support to finally crush protests, so he decided to do so, but he didn't succeed. He did all he could to crush the protest, but it wasn't enough. There were too many people on Maidan, and probably by that time his security agencies already had an inner break. He played an all-or-nothing game and he lost. And the game actually meant that they were ready to sacrifice [anything, including people].

The revolutionary government, and later-elected new president and parliament were in opposition to Yanukovich's "Party of Regions." They considered Europe as the main potential economic partner and generally saw Russia as an invader. As discussed earlier, a number of participants supposed that more than these two countries were involved with the conflict. Dmitry (RC) assumed that all possible conflict participants – openly acknowledged and invisible – might be interested in its continuation:

Sometimes I have a feeling that it's profitable. I mean a slow conflict is rewarding for both sides – for Russia and Ukraine (or maybe the EU). Ukraine from the very beginning has quite a bad geopolitical location – like Poland before World War Two. Two spheres of interests, two spheres of influence collapsed and tried to play the card in Ukraine.

It is not only the global scene that has changed because of the conflict, but relations between Ukrainians and Russians have also changed. Yet, Semyon (RC) and Maxim (UC)

suggested that war exists only between the states and politically involved citizens, while ordinary people are not a part of it. For example, Semyon (RC) said:

See, I don't see a conflict between people, I see a conflict of interests between some states. At that, as I understand, what's happening in Ukraine is not a conflict between Ukraine with somebody, it might be a conflict between Russia and America, might be between pro-Russian and pro-American powers, and might be between pro-Russian and pro-European. Something like that. Ukraine is the chosen battlefield.

Dmitry (RC) also supposed that the list of possible parties not directly involved but interested might be much broader than many assume:

There could be some forces which didn't participate in the conflict directly. There could be some Russian nationalists, some Ukrainian nationalists, Belorussian nationalists. By the way, Belorussia benefited from the strain in relations between Russia and Europe. They are rolling in clover now. We have Belorussian oysters, Belorussian mussels, Belorussian anything. All cargo traffic, which used to go to Russia through Ukraine (which wasn't little by the way), it now goes through Belorussia. Then about 80% of companies keep using shady schemes for their import transportation. Russia exports pretty much everything, besides probably books published somewhere else, not in Russia. Belorussia received enormous benefits, even being a part of the Customs Union. Besides that, due to international tensions, all sanctions were taken off Lukashenko. I mean, the beneficiaries there could have no direct connection to the confrontation between Ukrainian citizens.

Since this research aims to explore personal experiences and perceptions and doesn't aim to come to independent political conclusions, this section will look at the way participants shared their understandings of confrontation between 'pro-Russians' (or 'Russians') and 'pro-Ukrainians' (or 'Ukrainians') as units of people representing opposing parties of the conflict. We also will look at mechanisms of propaganda, which, according to participants, operate in both countries and drastically affect people's perspectives of each other.

4.5.1 – The ‘Wall’ between Peoples Once Perceived as Fraternal

Walls separate people. There is no room for dialogue when there is a wall. According to participants, the invisible wall started rising when people in many regions didn’t support the enthusiasm of revolution, and in some extreme cases those people were viewed as traitors. But it grew much bigger and was strengthened separating Ukraine from eastern regions and from Russia when the ‘terrorist’ rhetoric spread from particular invaders supporting resistance in the east (‘terrorists’ from Russia), over all militants confronting the new government, then over the population of eastern regions, and then over Russians. At the same time, ‘fascist’ rhetoric strengthening the wall from the Russian side spread related to much of central and western Ukraine and especially related to the “Right Sector” and its followers.

Sergey (U/RC), Maxim (UC), Semyon (RC), Janna (RC), Grigory (UC), Yevgenya (UC), and Maria (U/RC) stated that in general their personal attitudes towards both Ukrainians and Russians haven’t changed. Some participants said they felt sorry for those who unwillingly became affected by the situation, or felt proud and happy for people being vocal and defending their rights. Comments of this kind were made during conversations about Euromaidan, Crimea, and Donbass. However, some interviewees felt that in general relations between Ukrainians and Russians and their perspectives of each other have changed. Katya (UC) noticed that the shift of focus of aggression from revolution to Russia was very fast and had a patriotic nature:

These people who never cared about politics at all, all of a sudden started speaking Ukrainian, and started running around with “Don’t buy Russian goods!” banners. The moment when aggression switched from Maidan to Russia was so delicate and imperceptible that we actually were shocked by that change.

Denis (UC) also noticed the increase of Ukrainian displays of patriotism described by Katya (UC); and Janna (RC), Helga (RC), and Dmitry (RC) observed a similar tendency in Russian society. Yelena (UC) suggested that in Russia there are a lot of people who are very negative about Ukraine:

The idea that Russia is pretty much an enemy was planted into people's heads. A lot of people in Russia are against Ukraine and think Ukrainians are very bad.

On the other hand, Helga (RC) supposed that many Ukrainians feel the same towards Russians:

A good while Ukrainians were fostered; the hatred of Russians was cultivated in them.

It's interesting to note here that Yelena (UC), a participant from Ukraine, was talking about attitudes of Russians, and Helga (RC), a participant from Russia, addressed the situation among Ukrainians. When both of them were talking about their personal attitudes towards the other country's citizens they said that they didn't have any hatred for people who weren't actively involved with the conflict.

Semyon (RC) opposed the views of Yelena (UC) and Helga (RC), suggesting that the 'wall' between people exists only because it's wartime:

If you take away the ruling top, and bring all people to some kind of a field, they won't kill and slaughter each other. They don't have a bitter hatred of each other – at least within the frames of this conflict. Maybe there are some personal issues. But as long as there is one person on one side saying that we need to kill red ones, and on the red side there is a person who says to kill blue ones, obviously they will keep killing each other, as it happens during any war.

Nevertheless, fourteen participants reported experiencing breaks in relationships and/or told stories about similar experiences of their friends or relatives. In their own personal conflicts, people polarized against each other as representatives of 'Russians' against 'Ukrainians' or 'pro-Russians' against 'pro-Ukrainians'. Breaks in relationships seemed

related to geographical distance or due to different views; however, personal connections could be more important than the general situation in the region for a given party. Just mentioning the fact that they do or don't support the revolution or protests in the east made people turn their backs on each other. In some cases like Oleg's (UC), his decision to leave Ukraine for Russia was viewed as support of the enemy and betrayal of his own country. Maxim (UC) summarized the general relations between people in Ukraine, which can be extended to the dialogue about the conflict between Russians and Ukrainians:

There is no neutrality in Ukraine any more. It's like the way Russia doesn't have a middle class – either poor or wealthy. And there they don't have neutrality in the same way – either 'for' or 'against', no third choice.

Below I cite a few examples of 'walls' rising between participants and the people they know.⁴⁰ Oleg, who acknowledged that he felt lonesome in St. Petersburg, emphasized that antipathy he feels from people he left behind makes his experience even harsher:

The most difficult thing for me now is to talk to people who stayed there. I feel disaffection right away when I talk to people who are really interested in authorities. I talked to my grandma after I moved here. I could hear it on the phone (I didn't have a fine camera then to talk on Skype with video). I could feel her disgust towards me... [...] This disgust was about my thoughts, my vision. And those weren't the last people in my life. I call home for a reason. I feel their bile and dislike. And it's hurtful, because I didn't do anything to them, but they hate me already. And when I talk to people who understand and support me, I feel sad and sorry for them, because they stayed there.

Oleg (UC) said he lost about 80 percent of his friends and acquaintances because of the conflict and the associated attitude changes in people. In a similar manner, Katya (UC) lost half of her broad creative company, which consisted of about 20 friends.

In some cases, participants admitted that they were the ones to cross out people whose actions or views weren't acceptable for them. For example, Helga (RC) recalled her

⁴⁰ The total number of similar stories collected during the research is much higher, but due to volume limitations some of them are not included in the thesis.

feelings about some friends who actively and aggressively supported the revolution and fought against Berkut soldiers, some of whom she also knew:⁴¹

When everything turned out to be serious, I think it was January 19th [2014], when the first Molotov cocktails, shots and so on happened, I tried to convince myself that these people have left and I don't know who took their places. I tried to believe that those who I used to know got sick and don't exist anymore. When everything will be over, when there will be peacetime there and here, I think I won't be able to talk to them again.

Like Helga (RC), Maria (U/RC) admitted that she decided not to stay in touch with some people who demonstrated strong support for the new Ukrainian government. And Maxim (UC) distanced himself from some of his friends in Ukraine because of their anti-Russian views:

Those friends of mine, whom I have known since being a kid, they are political experts now, many of my classmates are deputies' assistants. They say such things about Russia. I'm not fine with them anymore. Even though we were friends.

Grigory (UC), coming from the Donetsk region, recalled a story of his friend who lived in Kiev and didn't support the revolution and because of this choice even his best friends turned against him, teasing, jibing and viewing him as an enemy. Grigory (UC) also described how the 'wall' of misunderstanding affected him personally:

[...] people on social networks. Some of them I didn't really know, but they unfriended me, which wasn't a big deal for me. I tried to react adequately: every person has an opinion... But relatives... Mom has two sisters. One of them has a son, my cousin. And the other one shares the same views, at that time she was very miffed at us. Grandma's apartment (she was dying) was supposed to be inherited by these three sisters. My cousin's mother said that she gives up her share to my mom, because since we lived in one city she [his mom] took care of grandma for years. But the third sister said: "If you vote for independence, I won't give agreement and we'll have to go through the partition of the apartment". Grandma was still alive

⁴¹ It's important to note that this research suggests that the general idea of a 'wall' between people assumes the break of relationship because of different views or locations, not because of actions. Nevertheless, I found Helga's (RC) comment valuable for the general conversation about relations between Ukrainians and Russians and included it in the thesis.

when she said she would break up with us if we kept supporting it. So we didn't talk about it much.

Similar interpersonal conflicts appeared in Russia. For example, Nicolay (RC) said his wife left him because she didn't share his opinion about the situation in Ukraine and didn't support him in his decision to participate in the conflict. Maria (U/RC) suggested that often the difference in views became a cover-up to spill otherwise-present aggression:

That misunderstanding that started in 2013 is just gathering pace. When a person speaking Ukrainian meets a person speaking Russian and is vocal about his views downtown, they easily may start a fight. What does it mean? People now have somebody to hate. "Donbass is Russian" - that's like a red flag for them, there they can call people names (the least scary) or shoot them (the most scary).

Arseny (UC) from Donetsk said relatives in Central Ukraine let him stay with them during his three-month visit to Kiev and relations were fine until he made the decision to move to Russia:

I had a fight with my relatives in Central Ukraine. I don't stay in touch with them anymore. They told me that I triggered the war and that I was hiding in their place, and then you [I] came to Putin personally. They are 26-27 years old. There was no room for discussion.

Janna (RC) stated that she had to work out some rules to protect her relationship with a new friend from Ukraine. For example, to prevent conflict they allowed themselves to share negative opinions only about their own countries:

We decided from the very beginning, that it would be stupid to discuss the topic and become personal on geopolitics. One thing what they decide up top there, and the other thing is when you and I sit at the table and talk. [...] We could actually talk about it, I could say something bad about ours, and she could say something bad about hers...

Ksenya (UC) (Kiev), Maxim (UC) (Lugansk), and Dmitry (RC) (St. Petersburg) also experienced situations when political topics related to Ukraine were banned to prevent escalation of the conflict between people. When the conflict emerged, Denis (UC), who

had moved to Russia before the conflict became a ‘representative’ of his country of residence for many of his friends, and for that reason he experienced many negative situations:

Ukraine going down shocked me less than what was happening to people’s brains. People unfriended me without explanations, didn’t write anything. One girl asked me why I respect Putin, but they pretty much called me ‘*vatnik*’.⁴² I told them that every person could do what he wants. I live in this country now, and I wasn’t in opposition or anything, but at that moment I could understand Putin’s politics. She worked in a bank in Ukraine, and I worked in an eatery in Petersburg. Why do we need to fight about Putin and Poroshenko? We have no relation to all that. All these empty arguments, empty fights...

Dmitry (RC) suggested that only “not very sensible people” bring the conflict over to their families and friends and spoil their relationships with close ones. This research involves a very small group of seventeen randomly selected people; nevertheless, even this small illustration of a part of the general picture suggests that the problem between people not only exists, but it may be more widespread than some might assume. Summarizing his ideas about relationships between people affected by the conflict Oleg (UC) stated:

[...] from the beginning and till now I didn’t think that there would be a border, line, wall between people. Because now those who support or have ever supported pro-Russian leaders are black sheep. That’s how strong the propaganda is.

Spears (2012) refers to ideas of Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens (1988), suggesting that in-group participants showing discontent related to values that are important for the group are judged “more harshly” than out-group members, and this might be viewed as a protection of group identity (p. 215). In other words, those Ukrainians who showed some support for the ideas of revolution, but at the same time supported some of the Russian policies, became strongly differentiated from the pro-Ukrainian group. According to a number of

⁴² The Internet meme, word with negative connotation, which emerged during the conflict means strong Russian patriot.

participants this effect was intensified via the global information flow. Thus, Oleg (UC), Yelena (UC), Helga (RC), Maxim (UC), Dmitry (RC), Denis (UC), Nicolay (RC), Maria (U/RC), Grigory (UC), Janna (RC), and Arseny (UC) suggested that the invisible wall discussed in this section was built mainly with the help of media and propaganda. Mozolin (2007) develops Lasswell's (1927) approach and suggests that propaganda, which is viewed as the control over public opinion realized by means of social symbols, aims to mobilize and consolidate the masses around a particular goal, yet consolidation of the masses mainly has a negative nature, since it is achieved through hatred towards some common enemy, who is represented as the main hindrance on the way to the goal (p.3). The operating mechanisms of propaganda, and its role in clashing 'pro-Russian' and 'pro-Ukrainian' people against each other, are discussed in the next section.

4.5.2 – Controlled Propaganda or Natural Chaos?

According to a number of research participants, people's negative emotions towards each other appeared mainly in response to propaganda mechanisms operating both in Russia and Ukraine, serving power-holders whose final goals were not obvious to regular people. Rephrasing Koppang's (2009) words cited in the Literature Review Chapter, propaganda assumes broad, multi-level and multi-dimensional influence on mass consciousness and unconsciousness, serving some unnamed goals, and media becomes one of its main tools in planting a particular image. Yelena (UC) stated that she realized how skewed the media flow could be only after she left Ukraine:

When I moved to Russia, I realized how much TV news there [in Ukraine] differs from Russian news. There everything is 100% opposite to what I see here.

Ksenya's (UC) experience with Russian media resonated with Yelena's (UC):

Here [in Russia] they were telling people that there was some type of horror happening there [in Ukraine]. Some things were really exaggerated. In the eyes of an ordinary guy it wasn't as scary as Russian media were describing it online and in TV news. I can't say anything about events in the east [of Ukraine]. But sometimes it's really funny for me to read what Russian websites write about events in Kiev. It's a complete lie.

As Shah (2005) argues, in many cases war is not inevitable, but propaganda is used to move parties closer to a full-scale military conflict if it is in interests of elite groups.

Resonating with this idea, Ksenya (UC) also stated that she didn't fully trust Ukrainian media, because in her experience, media sources served the goals of owners often affiliated with politics and this tendency remained in place even when the new government was elected. Still, Ksenya (UC) felt that the information flow from Ukraine was more objective. Semyon (RC), on the other hand, felt that Ukrainian media sources were completely unreliable:

The masses' opinion is mainly formed by the media world. I don't trust our TV, but what they show on Ukrainian channels... it's like watching the "Avatar" movie. It has nothing to do with the reality. I watched Ukrainian channels when I was there. We sit in the kitchen, watch news and everybody laughs. Everybody understands that the reality can't be even close to what they show.

Denis (UC) acknowledged the existence of propaganda machines in Russia and Ukraine but with different purposes, suggesting that Ukrainian propaganda aimed to unite people, while Russian propaganda tried to cover up the Russian incursion into Ukraine:

There was propaganda in Russia and in Ukraine. In Ukraine they raised the level of patriotism and blamed Russia for everything. And in Russia they were talking about how Ukrainians kill each other, about civil war. [...] I thought, "What kind of man would believe that Ukrainians just kill themselves?" It wouldn't work out without an invasion. Like if there is no sliver in your body, it will do nothing. How can such bullshit appear without an external invasion?

Maria (U/RC) suggested that the media flow she observed in Ukraine was so massive and well structured that it was very easy to succumb to its influence:

There is a very strong influence on people in Ukraine. During the long weekends in winter I had spare time, so I first turned the TV on to watch some news, then I got on Ukrainian *Yandex* and started reading Ukrainian news media. If I wasn't a journalist and just came across that *Yandex* news on the history of the conflict in Donbass, if I was an obtuse person, I probably would believe that there are terrorists, armed insurgents, separatists, and Russian fighters in Donbass. There was a lot of dirt, a lot of pressure, and this dirt comes out of the official media sources.

Grigory (UC) and Arseny (UC) remembered that when they left the Donetsk region and went to Berdyansk and Kiev (correspondingly), they also felt that they were ready to believe that all they were witnessing and experiencing at home was a lie.

A number of participants noticed that mass communication often addressed 'pro-Russian' and 'pro-Ukrainian' identities, explaining events from polar opposite points of view. In other words national identities, which are a "product of both (1) ethnic history and identity of the community, religion, and belief system, and (2) dominant ideology and conscious manipulation, including commemoration, ideology, and symbolism" (Smith 1991, 2009, as cited in Korostelina, 2013, p.293), were expanded in this conflict and turned into 'pro-Russian' and 'pro-Ukrainian' identities. Spears (2012) notes that stereotyping can become an instrument used to justify and reinforce prejudice in identity conflicts. In this way, in our case, people could be unified into stereotyped groups based on their identity features, and addressed as confronting masses. Maxim (UC) suggested that methods of mass manipulation were uncovered and identified a long time ago; nevertheless, in the contemporary situation they are still very efficient:

I read a book - *Psychology of peoples and masses* by Le Bon⁴³ written a long time ago. Hitler and Stalin used his ideas in their governance. It describes how you should rule a group of individuals as a subject, not a group of different subjects. It describes how to manipulate people, masses, and it's all used a lot nowadays in the

⁴³ In Russia the translation two books by Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples* (1894) and, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) are often published as one book.

media world. Check Ukrainian and Russian news media: they would represent the same situation in two completely different ways.

Black (2008) suggests that media may assign an explanatory power to identity, turning it into a deep-rooted identity and this process stops the further analysis of the causes of the crisis. This school of thought is based on the idea of social identities as formed by primordial characteristics, so they are essential and are used by the media as “objective” causes of a crisis (Black, 2008, p. 149). Explaining how the ‘objective’ representation of the conflict may be used to manipulate people’s perspective, Maxim (UC) gave an interesting illustration:

There is a picture on the web: there is cylinder and two lights, one shines in a way that the hat's shadow looks like a circle, and the other one makes a rectangle. Both images - the circle and the rectangle are truth, but only the cylinder is a fact. Same here, Ukraine pulls its way, and Russia pulls its way, but facts and the truth are somewhere else.

There was no particular question about propaganda or its instruments; however, as participants described the information flow they witnessed, they identified a number of techniques in the process. Thus in ‘terrorist’ and ‘fascist’ rhetoric discussed above (in Ukrainian and Russian media correspondingly) Cold war style name-calling was used to dehumanize the opposing party when any means used against the enemy could be justified (Black, 2016 a). Furthermore, Helga (RC) and Ksenya (UC) noticed a tendency of the media to exaggerate facts. Ksenya (UC) gave one example:

I remember there was some funny news on TV, when there were 15 people marching down the street carrying a Russian flag, but they were filmed as a huge crowd.

Black (2016 a) underlines that exaggeration and omission were used in Russian and in Ukrainian media to encourage their own people and to demonize the opposing party. As such, Helga (RC) noticed that sometimes information was condensed and some important

facts,⁴⁴ which didn't serve the greater goal, were left without attention. Pointing out the obfuscation of some information, Grigory (UC) and Denis (UC) recalled examples of Russian and Ukrainian television news, when a voiceover didn't correlate with the video. Additionally, Grigory (UC) compared western Ukrainian news with eastern Ukrainian news:

That was the big difference between the west and us. What we saw on TV was out of what western Ukrainian television showed. Our TV broadcast real victims and real fights between Berkut and students (in the beginning), but western TV broadcast absolutely nothing – some fields, cars, barricades... and the voice was talking about numerous victims and wounded people, but they didn't prove anything with the video. It looked weird.

Black (2016 a) noted that at times western broadcasting companies went even further, using film bits from Soviet times or other military incidents that had nothing to do with the accompanying news stories.

Dmitry (RC) noticed that the masses in Russia became very interested in events in Ukraine when the order of the day was switched away from the internal Russian issues to Ukraine:

[...] they switch the order of the day from inner Russian issues to inner Ukrainian issues. They broadcast news as if we lived in Ukraine. Why? The first, second, third, fourth news stories are about Ukraine, and then Medvedev told something to somebody. Or Barak Obama said something to somebody and then about the sun, that the winters are colder in Russia.

According to Dmitry (RC) this manipulation of the daily agenda in television news and on the Internet distracted Russians from their own problems. He noticed that following the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine many people surrounding him and in Russia in general had become frightened of any kind of protest or revolution, saying that even a poor life

⁴⁴ Helga (RC) acknowledged that she had well-known friends and acquaintances who held leading positions among militias. They were one of her main sources of information.

(which didn't feel too bad in comparison to what they watched about Ukraine) in a corrupt country (which didn't look as corrupt to them as what they were seeing broadcast about Ukraine) was better than war. Denis (UC) noticed the same tendency in Ukraine:

They, Ukrainian authorities, blame Russia for everything. That's how they explain bad, poor life, they say it's all because of the conflict at Donbass, and it's all Russian fault.

Janna (RC), Katya (UC), Sergey (U/RC), Maria (U/RC), and Dmitry (RC) noticed that often Russian and Ukrainian news items were very repetitive and overloaded people with particular information. Janna (RC) described her experience with Russian television flow in the following manner:

My husband that time was mainly watching *First Channel*. At some point I said, "Switch channels, I'm going to get sick. They keep repeating the same things over and over again". I'm a thinking person, so I can't watch all this propaganda, I get sick and bored of it, because I can say it's pure garbage. Mainly...

Katya (UC) noted that since "there is a television in every house, there is a radio in every house," people unconsciously were adopting specific views suggested by the local news sources. According to Sergey (U/RC) news repeated about the 'Heavenly Hundred' had the effect of inflating the value of the casualties (which he viewed as a natural entity of any conflict) and helped to escalate the confrontation. Dmitry (RC) suggested that, in general, repetition of 'information' increased the level of trust people had in the truth of that information:

It's bad to say "people hoover", but people can resist it for some time, but not constantly. A falsehood repeated many times, even not a lie, but a half-truth painted in the right colors, recedes in a person's consciousness as something like "where there's a smoke, there's a fire", so one thinks if it might be true. *RTR [Rossiya]*, *First Channel*, even *STS*⁴⁵ makes jokes about it, so it's probably true. [...] As for me, it's like any faith. Faith is something you accept without proof. You take it as it is.

⁴⁵ See the Context section for the information on the Russian media.

Dmitry (RC) also stated that a contrasting situation existed in which liberal-minded people in Russia took what he considered to be another extreme, saying that the official Ukrainian position was free of propaganda and illustrated the real situation. Black (2016 a) suggests that in this information war each protagonist stated that the other side was using propaganda and lies, thus proving that they were revealing the only truth. Similar to Janna's (RC) description of her Russian television watching experience, Arseny (UC) commented that Ukrainian authorities used the media and repetition on multiple occasions to imprint an 'enemy' image of Russia into people's consciousness:

There are a lot of people like that, radically minded. It all is also supported by the authorities fueling the hatred. In every president's address – for Easter, for New Year, doesn't matter – there are such words as 'Russia', 'death', 'aggression', 'war' and of course 'Putin'. There is no freedom of speech; there is no freedom of mass media. There are no independent media sources. You don't discourse, you just receive the finished opinion and you believe it.

Dmitry (RC) noted the same tendency in Russian media:

All traditional holidays like Victory day, National Unity Day [...], May First got a different color. Plus, some events in Ukraine gave a reason to speculate on it. Like events in Odessa, things happening in Donbass in general, and Donetsk and Lugansk, Ukrainian politicians' statements were a hit – it was very popular to quote Klichko, it was a meme. A lot. That flow didn't weaken for a while, so people formed a particular point of view.

Katya (UC) viewed celebrities' involvement into political agitation as yet one more mechanism of propaganda:

At that time mental fermentation began. Obviously they tried to reach to as many people as possible with Ruslana [Ukrainian singer] running and dancing like crazy, with Klichko [Ukrainian professional boxer, starting June 2014 mayor of Kiev] trying to make a smart face and read something. These were well known people. Not everybody watches the news, but pretty much every Ukrainian watched Ruslana's videos. Even without a TV we knew who those people were. It's normal. If they use celebrities, they want to achieve something. Who are they? Of course, we don't know it and we never will.

A number of Russian celebrities were also involved with the conflict in Ukraine, advocating for different parties; however, within the frame of this research it is difficult to distinguish personal motivation of well-known people from political strategies.

Dmitry (RC) and Denis (UC) noticed the existence of a tactic, which Yakovlev (2015) described as practiced by the KGB - the “method of rotten herring.” This tactic involves the media broadcasting a complete, but very dirty and scandalous lie, blaming somebody for something, to cause broad resonance. Later the lie may be uncovered but the remaining aura taints the blamed one like a smell of rotten fish. Dmitry (RC) described a similar tendency in Russian and Ukrainian media:

There was some talking about genocide committed by Ukrainians. There were such stories on the news. Now they try to pretend that it never happened and they’ve never shown anything like that. About a crucified boy, about some people who were found in the ground with tied hands... Anyways, they were creating a particular enemy image. It happened on both sides. There were “Russian separatists” who raped packs of Ukrainians on one side and ... I’m smiling, because it all was a bad played theatre. Yes, there were some victims, yes, there was warfare, but mainly it was an effort to demonize the opposite side in the best traditions of Goebbels. And it was done on both sides.

Denis (UC) recalled a Russian-developed media story, which, according to him, was an obvious lie but left a bad aftertaste calling for identity mobilization in the face of threat:

You know, when the Russians started propaganda saying they [Ukrainians] beat or shot [people] for [speaking] the Russian language in Donbass, I didn’t believe it. I lived there for how many years, and they’ve never had anything like that. The only problem I had was in Lvov, when I spoke Russian there, and they looked weirdly at me. I lived in Donbass, and when one speaks Ukrainian there people look at a person weirdly. But to say that they tied to posts or shoot people for speaking Russian ... It’s bullshit, it has never happened and it never will.

In addition to recognizing the presence of propaganda aimed to spread particular views serving goals of opposing parties, some participants also acknowledged the general chaotic nature of the information flow. A number of interviewees described the sense of frustration

about the situation first at Maidan and later in the east of Ukraine, which they saw as existing in part because, despite their will, elites could sustain neither total control over the situation, nor control over information about these situations. Thus, some participants' experiences resonate with concepts of the chaos paradigm, which suggests that chaos is a natural characteristic of contemporary society (McNair, 2006). For example, Katya (UC) recalled the information chaos she witnessed when the then president of Ukraine Yanukovich fled the country:

Then something is happening to Crimea, and where is Yanukovich? Yes, of course, tons of pictures on *Vkontakte*, but nobody actually knows where he is and what he is doing. Nobody understood who took his place, who actually did that switch and on what grounds. And there was a lot of empty talk on this topic. You read the news and realize it's all bullshit... it all was a game. But whose game was it? Who ruled it? You don't know, and never will. It scared me a lot.

The interviews didn't include a particular question about Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17. I assumed that a number of participants would mention this moment as an important page of the conflict; however, in reality Dmitry (RC) was the only one who addressed this episode of the conflict history. His vision of the incident and parallel information flow gives another bright example of information chaos created around the conflict:

I heard the tones of conspiracy theories. For example, someone said that actually people in that Boeing were already dead [through the entire flight]. I don't know if the pilot was dead too, and how he flew the plane, not clear. Another: Ukrainians on purpose directed the plane in a way, so it would get under... how should I call them... rebels' fire... or federalization supporters. Another: Russians consciously directed this Boeing and shot it down in a way so Ukraine would be a main suspect. Another: it was a Russian plane that shot down that Boeing. Another: it was a Ukrainian plane that shot down that Boeing. Another: it was an American plane that shot down that Boeing. Another: these were Israeli missiles. Like UFO-logists when they see a shadow – a person stands by a Mars rover. Some serious scientists from Antey concern, I think, they conducted the research, which showed that most likely it was shot down from the Ukrainian side [of the border]. I just remember, how happy one of the rebels was when they shot down something, but then... oops, it was a civilian plane... I don't believe we'll ever get to know who actually shot it

down. There was a lot of talking about SA-11 Gadfly (BUK), given to the rebels by Russians. Then about a SA-11 Gadfly that rebels grabbed from Ukrainians...

Black (2016 a) notes that the MH17 tragedy caused a wave of some of the strongest embellishments in the history of the conflict.

McNair (2006) states that contemporary chaos in the media is a result of some natural tendencies, such as its availability, which “reached saturation point,” as well as the very high speed of circulation of news and the accessibility of journalism through blog-writing (pp. 2-3). Oleg’s (UC) words correlate with this idea:

[...] in principle I don’t watch TV, and on the Internet, you know, anyone can write and say anything, and people will believe it, especially if you are some kind of a news resource.

Dmitry (RC) also noticed the tendency to trust the Internet more because there is freedom of information that doesn’t exist on television, but in reality the Internet information flow is even more chaotic, influential, and manipulative:

A lot of people try to analyze the information they receive, but they actually have a particular point of view, and then they will surf the Internet for particular information to support their point of view. When they hear counterarguments, they say that others are lying. Some objective facts – it all was fabricated they say, or it might be possible, but it’s one particular example, but in general it’s different...

Speaking about the Russian-Ukrainian information war, which frequently divides people into confronting ‘pro-Russians’ and ‘pro-Ukrainians,’ nine participants suggested that the United States might be involved with this war no less than the other-mentioned parties, and Janna (RC) assumed that Americans were involved “maybe even more than Ukrainians.” Interestingly, Black (2016 a) notices that in Russia anti-Americanism existing before the conflict reached a new level during the conflict. He recalls the results of a 2014 survey which suggested that then 77 percent of Russian respondents blamed the USA for destroying eastern Ukraine (Black, 2016 a, p. 183). These numbers resonate with

administered chaos theory described by Kagarlitsky (as referred to in Goble, 2014), which explores the Russian obsession with America's part in contemporary conflicts. Addressing similar ideas, Helga (RC) noted that people in Russia and Ukraine are fed particular images of the conflict which serve the interests of a third party:

I think it benefits somebody. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the war in general were advantageous for somebody. Everything is done to not let us make up. We are getting stoked, and they too.

Goble (2014) summarizes ideas of Kagarlitsky, who suggested that the USA uses revolutions to destabilize other countries, creating chaos and chaotic information flow, which covers their participation in inner politics. Through his entire interview Nicolay (RC) seemed like minded, underlining numerous times that “the center of all this shit is America.” He suggested that from the very beginning the United States had its own interests in the conflict:

Maidan was needed to separate Ukraine from Russia. That was the realization of a plan to cause a quarrel between three kin republics. Mister Otto von Bismark (he was a rational man) said once: “We will never win over Russia in a direct confrontation. We can take a part of the Russians and put into their heads the idea that they are not Russians. Then we can give them ammunition and with their help we may achieve something.” He didn't say that they might win; they only will achieve something. One of our bloggers, El Murrud, said: “America will never let Ukraine go, since it's such a good bloodletting instrument against Russia.” Look, the Ukrainian economy is in a very bad shape, but the country still gets the credits, recourses, weapons, etc.

Semyon (RC), Maxim (UC), and Helga (RC) suggested that it might be more proper to talk about a Russian-American conflict, where Ukraine became the chosen battlefield; however for Helga (RC) the particular choice of Ukraine wasn't clear:

I don't know the majority opinion, but my friends and I talk of Ukraine as of a range of fire where the interests of the USA and Russia clashed. It just happened. My husband tried to answer a question “Why Ukraine? Why not Moldavia, for example?” He didn't succeed.

Semyon (RC) explained his understanding of the current Russian-American confrontation through a historical prism:

There were examples like that in history. The weak party, which tried to survive in between two powers... High chances that it was a flare-up between Russia and the USA, and it still is, I mean between pro-Russian forces and pro-American forces. I'm not sure, but I lean towards this idea. Obviously, as soon as Ukraine became weaker, they started to carve it up. I can understand Americans who probably want to have as many spheres of influence by Russian borders as possible. I can understand Russia, the political framework provided by both states looks like a light extension of the Cold war. It's strategically wrong to let a possible enemy come so close.

The popularity amongst Russian participants of the idea of American involvement (five out of six either admitted they share that idea or acknowledged its existence and popularity in Russia) may suggest that the media successfully played a role in the resurrection of a well-known enemy from the Cold War. Maxim (UC) described his vision of a global confrontation in the following way:

In my opinion, these were the States. They were pressing. Originally, why? To create a long-term buffer zone like Trans-Dniester.⁴⁶ To separate Russia from the rest of the world. Ukraine was like a kind of a window into Europe. It was in between. And now they staked it out and now they are trying to prevent further conflict escalation, because there always was a cold race. It used to be between the USSR and the USA, and now it's the USA and Russia. This cold race was always there and it keeps going now.

American participation in the conflict was acknowledged by participants and is recognized by researchers; however, as Kagarlitsky noted (as referred to in Goble, 2014), to help to break the endless circle of American involvement it would be useful to step away from this conspiracy theory.

⁴⁶ A self-declared state, which broke away from Moldova after a short war in 1992, remains in tense relations with Moldova and economically and politically is supported by Russia. For more information see BBC (2016 b) *Trans-Dniester profile at* <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18284837>.

In such a manner, participants' experiences suggest that despite the apparent chaos in the contemporary information war, the impact of propaganda on conflict escalation is much greater. Participants named often-widespread mechanisms of propaganda instigated by all participating groups as among the main reasons for the escalation of interpersonal confrontation. Among methods of propaganda, participants named a tendency to saturate media, repetitiveness of news, switching of the daily order of news on television and on the Internet, a tendency to blame the opposite party, the use of big lies to demonize the enemy, dissonance between video and voice over in television news, exaggeration or omission of facts, and involvement of celebrities. Black (2016 a) provides more illustrations of misinformation and disinformation techniques used in the information war in 2014.

The results of this small inquiry suggest that: first, propaganda machines did operate in Ukraine and Russia at the time of the research; second, propaganda was aiming to consolidate and polarize 'pro-Russian' and 'pro-Ukrainian' identities, which promoted a broader involvement of the masses with the conflict and conflict escalation; and third, the chaotic nature of the contemporary world didn't allow elites to gain total control over the information flow. However, some results were achieved. Thus, as Dmitry (RC) noticed, in Russia the example of the Ukrainian war decreased the level of discontent with the contemporary Russian government and raised the level of Russian patriotism. Some goals to some extent were also reached in Ukraine, where, as some participants mentioned, propaganda also strongly helped to raise the level of patriotism and worsened attitudes towards Russia. Participant-mentioned American involvement in the conflict also suggests that there may be many other goals that power-holders were trying to achieve using propaganda. Since the term propaganda in itself assumes a hidden agenda, we may

conclude that most of the real goals of those exercising propaganda are out of the vision of regular people who are influenced by politics.

In the next sub-section we look at the sources of that influence, analyze the participants' sources of information that affected the formation of their visions of the conflict, and discuss interviewees' strategies to resist propaganda.

4.5.2.1 – Sources of propaganda

It's important to mention that originally the research was aimed to explore what affected the participants' meaning-making processes and their vision of the conflict, but due to limitations of people's understandings of their real sources of information and since I had not anticipated nor received ethics approval for research methods other than semi-structured interviews, this topic will be covered incompletely and can become a topic for further research.

Most participants acknowledged the presence of propaganda operating mechanisms in Russia and Ukraine and suggested that television was its main source. Here we come across some interesting findings: all participants except for Yelena (UC) and Nicolay (RC) stated that their main source of information was not the television; they both also mentioned other information sources besides television. For Yevgenya (UC), Dmitry (RC), Janna (RC), Ksenya (UC), and Denis (UC) television was a minor source of information, since they assumed that the government used it to spread propaganda. Janna (RC) explained what affected her attitude towards Russian media:

Since I graduated from the Journalism faculty, I know what propaganda is and I know how our mass media work. So I clearly understand that one cannot rely on them or trust what they say. In general, I don't trust mass media. One may listen to them, understand what they are talking about, but still has one's own opinion.

Oleg (UC) and Katya (UC) claimed that they avoided television in general, and Grigory (UC), Maxim (UC), Helga (RC), and Dmitry (RC) said they watched television sometimes, but didn't trust it and received most of their information from alternative sources. All participants stated that they always tried to use propaganda-free media sources among which Nicolay (RC), Arseny (UC), Yelena (UC), Ksenya (UC), Katya (UC), Maria (U/RC), Cyril (RC), Denis (UC), and Sergey (U/RC) mentioned the Internet, including on-line media (Sergey (U/RC), Maria (U/RC), Dmitry (RC), Helga (RC)) and social networks, among which participants named *Vkontakte*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* where they were following friends' feeds or different thematic communities (Nicolay (RC), Maria (U/RC), Cyril (RC), Katya (UC), Denis (UC), Sergey (U/RC)). Yet, as mentioned by one of the participants earlier, the Internet, which has potential to deliver propaganda-free information, often becomes an even worse manipulative mechanism due to its chaotic and accessible nature and due to people's tendency to surf for confirmation of already formulated opinions, which is to some extent confirmed later in this section.

Despite the generally proclaimed certainty about the propaganda-free nature of at least some of their sources, Dmitry (RC) assumed that even if one consciously tries to resist propaganda, the information flow would still silently reach and affect him:

People start to believe, just not to think through and analyze this constant information chaos and information flow, flow, flow, flow... Even when one doesn't watch TV, this flow will catch him anywhere – at work, when colleagues will be talking about it. [...] Colleagues, newspapers, you still use the Internet, you visit *Yandex*, and see “In Ukraine... In Ukraine... In Ukraine...”

Some participants tried to compare different sources possibly affected by propaganda (including printed media, on-line media, social networks and more), analyze them and develop their own opinion (Yevgenya (UC), Arseny (UC), Janna (RC), Dmitry (RC), and

Denis (UC)). Nine interviewees stated that they mainly received conflict-related information from other people they knew – people they judged to be more knowledgeable and had an understanding of the real situation – people who could witness events, participate in them or live in the area or close to the area where things were happening, or at least in the region or country. Some participants witnessed different stages of the conflict themselves. For example: Euromaidan – Ksenya (UC), Semyon (RC), Cyril (RC); Crimea – Sergey (U/RC), Maria (U/RC); military presence in potential war regions – Yelena (UC), Katya (UC), Oleg (UC); conflict in Donbass – Arseny (UC), Grigory (UC), Yevgenya (UC). Their experiences helped them to navigate through the information flow. However, Grigory (UC) admitted that it still was not easy:

I try to keep my mind balanced in the middle, but I have a feeling that Russians are not brainwashed, but people's opinions probably affected me. I used to live in a city where the majority was for Russia, and I probably joined that majority. But I saw the Ukrainian officers' attitude, that's not brainwash; there were real threats, attitude against us. I was shocked.

The analysis of information sources named by participants suggests that they were receiving their information from completely different sources (people, different online and other media, friend feeds and different thematic communities on social networks, different television channels including international), so their perception of different stages of the Ukrainian conflict was shaped by differently presented information. However, the participants' visions of the conflict could be grouped and often resonated with each other. The analysis of interviews makes one question if participant-named information sources did or did not correlate with their general perspectives. For example, participants who viewed Euromaidan as a revolution which happened due to unmet basic needs, were following feeds on social networks (Cyril (RC)), watched television (Yelena (UC)), and talked to

people in Kiev (Arseny (UC)). Now, how did they choose which television programs to watch, which people to talk with, and which feeds to follow on social networks?

The general sameness among the views of people who don't know each other leaves us with a number of conclusions. First, there is some truth under each hypothesis, which was more or less relevant to participants, and mechanisms of propaganda were just manipulating the reality, turning it into a needed half-truth. Second, this empirical research once again shows that conflict between people is more complicated than people in general and some participants in particular want it to be. It cannot be simply explained by the effects of propaganda influencing the person's understanding of each particular situation; it also shaped by a person's other characteristics, origin, class, surroundings, job, and other, as we've seen in previous sub-sections. However, in this case propaganda might be viewed as a factor aimed to escalate the conflict. And third, even when people try to avoid propaganda, it affects them. Out of this research, we may conclude that the main instrument of propaganda in the particular cases of our participants wasn't directly the television or other mass media channels, but people who were viewed as witnesses and weren't questioned about their sources of information and strategies to resist propaganda. This resonates with Mozolin's (2007) suggestion that mass communication reaches people's minds through opinion leaders, whose views, in their turn, are shaped by a situation's dominating representation of facts and existing circumstances. The same can be said about the role of Ukrainian participants in the St. Petersburg community where they could be viewed as witnesses, experts, or 'opinion leaders/representatives' of the conflict due to their origin. In this way, the recipients of their stories could view them as propaganda-free illustrations of the conflict.

Summarizing the conversation about propaganda, it is important to note that in this research I didn't try to track participants' words to media sources, since in the contemporary broad and very inclusive media field one may find any type of information. Thus, I felt that if I tried to confirm particular views with media statements to situate them or make more valuable, it would be a manipulation. In my attempt to be objective in this research, I tried to avoid manipulation.

4.5.3 – Aftermath

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, at the time of the research in early 2016 the general interest in St. Petersburg towards the conflict in Ukraine had diminished somewhat in comparison to 2014. However, relationships and attitudes between Russians and Ukrainians continued to change from the beginning of the conflict. Though not necessarily in the case of all individual relationships, 'Russians' and 'Ukrainians' slowly turned into confronting groups and were being put forward as such by many media sources. The original Russian rise of sympathy towards eastern Ukrainians often was substituted by a sense of irrelevance and in some cases annoyance with the situation. In general, when the media forgot about the situation in Ukraine (Altshuller, 2017), along with the media many people not involved with the conflict also put the situation aside. Ksenya (UC) noted that even coming from Kiev and being personally related to the conflict in Ukraine, at some point she got tired of the constant negative information flow:

I was checking news websites, just watched. And at some point here I just quit reading the news. At some point I just got tired of being horrified by everything written. I had that period of time when I just didn't check anything at all. If somebody told me something, I could check it online, but I didn't follow any news purposefully. I made a break from negativity, because you actually get really tired. You keep an eye on things, keep an eye, keep an eye, but you don't see what's

happening in the reality, so you start to work yourself up, and your imagination firms up the picture... It's tiring; it's hard morally.

That can be said about many people in St. Petersburg. It's important to note that in general the conflict in Ukraine affected moods and civic stances in the city. Analyzing people's behavior under the weight of propaganda Dmitry (RC) compared the development of propaganda and its effects to children's progress in handwriting: first it is clumsy, yet after a time it becomes better and better. He said it is similar with propaganda when through the years of the conflict the ruling top was becoming more and more skilled in implanting particular views:

Now propaganda works much better... And for our citizens it gets more and more difficult to resist, especially considering the upgrading penalties for different kinds of statements and different laws, which restrict citizens... It's a cause, but on the other side I'm glad, because they are afraid now. By "they" I mean the government, which realizes people in Russia may have exactly the same reasons to express their discontent as people in Ukraine. They will try to stand against it from the very beginning. Anti-Maidan, different institutions, youth organizations... History repeats itself. The fight against counter-revolution... and it's sad that they learned how to resist.

Summarizing the conversation about propaganda Denis (UC) stated that in his opinion, so far Russia was winning in the information war against Ukraine:

It was obvious that they [Ukrainian sources] had biased articles here and there, here they do propaganda, and there, too. I'm not a pro at it, but I'd say Russia won the propaganda war. Because the number of Russians who believed the Russian propaganda is very different from the number of Ukrainians who believed Ukrainian propaganda, because just a few Ukrainians went insane, and Russians went insane globally.

Adopting Denis (UC) and Dmitry's (RC) ideas we may suppose that the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation served Russian authorities well. Despite the economic decline in the country itself, Russian civil society became even more passive. Janna (RC) stated that the Russian "population is very passive; everybody protests and rebels on the Internet", and in real life

many Russians put on a patriotic face of unity. Dmitry (RC) also noticed that Russian people who don't have personal experience with the real situation in Ukraine, developed a very strong negative attitude towards Ukrainian government politics and decisions:

[...] people who've never been there and have never participated in the conflict, people who are here in Russia, they often have much stronger emotions. They have strong negative emotions towards the Ukrainian army's actions. When I offer them a counter-argument:

- Let's imagine the same situation in Russia. One of Russian regions decided to become independent. Who are they after this? Separatists and terrorists, right? Right. So what will the federal army do? It will put to rights. Oh, now you name it different. Who is our army after this? Fascists, terrorists, Banderities, etc.?
- Everything is completely different here, - they say. – Nothing like that may ever... and blah-blah-blah.

I think that's the biggest threat to Russian citizens, living in Russia people – this influence on their brain.

According to some participants, Ukrainian propaganda was also serving its goals. The economic situation in Ukraine where the military conflict is ongoing, is very difficult. However, they said, the population accepts the need to 'hold on' and wait with their demands for better and safer life until the conflict fueled by Russia is over.

Looking at the greater political and economic situation in Ukraine and in Russia, we may suggest that relationship between the two countries, described by Plekhanov (2016) as “organic connections – historic, cultural and linguistic – as well as deep economic ties” (pp. 14-15), are now in ruins. And for many people who have relatives and friends across the border, whose businesses depend on the Russian-Ukrainian relationship, whose lives were affected by the conflict, it is tragic. Ksenya (UC) described her feelings in the following manner:

...All this conflict was quite unpleasant. And everything that happened makes me really sad, because look at it from my personal emotional point of view; because I don't understand how one may bring two neighbor states up against each other.

Oleg (UC) didn't foresee any great changes in Russian-Ukrainian relationships. He noticed that the Ukrainian government doesn't try to restore relationships, and when people try to change something at a grass-roots level, most of the time they come to a dead end:

So far I don't see any translucence, any light. The government doesn't do anything for it. Of course, people are trying to do something, but it's easier to give up, let it all hang out and leave, because everything gets blocked. All contracts with Russia, something else, private companies that partnered with Russia... they just can't get through customs, they don't let the goods go across the border, they don't let employees go for consultations or conferences. They don't let one do anything if they hear "Russia".

Opposing Oleg's (UC) experience, Dmitry (RC) stated that the company he works for still keeps a relationship with its Ukrainian partner, but it is more difficult now. Semyon (RC), Ksenya (UC), Yevgenya (UC), and Maria (U/RC) travelled to Ukraine a number of times between 2014 and 2016. None of them called crossing the border a pleasant experience, yet in general, they underlined that despite the difficult political relationship, Russia and Ukraine are not completely separated. Helga (RC) noticed that the main damage was made to people's perspectives of each other, and even when the war is over and the political relations are restored, people will need time to accept each other again:

We can stop the military conflict, but we cannot erase the information that was nurtured in people's heads for years. Yes, they will stop fighting, but they won't leave their specific thinking. They will need time to heal; they'll need time to overcome this "hangover." It will take a lot of years to bring this relationship back to how it used to be before 2013.

In this section we analyzed the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and relationships between states and citizens, not from political, but from personal perspectives. We looked at the participants' personal experiences of 'walls' rising between them and their close ones because of the conflict and explored the often negative attitude between Ukrainians and Russians noted by interviewees, which most of them chalked up to globally spread

propaganda and/or the chaotic nature of the conflict and related information flow.

Moreover, we discussed some mechanisms of contemporary Russian and Ukrainian propaganda and its role in the current situation. We also looked at the participants' sources of information. The analysis suggests that the information war between Russia and Ukraine and/or Russia and the USA (or the Western world), which is happening along with the military conflict, is more influential and probably has broader and worse impacts than the actual physical confrontation. This information war has resulted in thousands of broken relationships between regular people. It has also drawn a thick line between many 'pro-Russian' and 'pro-Ukrainian' people, highlighting perceived differences and often splitting them into two confronting groups according to their physical location, views, and/or actions. And, as noted, even when one day the physical conflict is over, the aftermath of the information war, which is far from being over yet and may bring new problems for people, will take many years to fade from people's consciousness.

4.6 – Summary and Conclusions

The vision of the Ukrainian conflict developed by the participants and described in this chapter should be viewed as a fragmented illustration of people dealing with crisis – something which existed and developed within the St. Petersburg community. There are a number of significant findings that emerged throughout the research and were identified within various sections of this chapter. In the next section I summarize these key points.

4.6.1 – Summary: Key Findings

Reflecting on their experiences, the participants suggested that many Ukrainians, including those of whom were part of a visible refuge-seeking crowd in St. Petersburg in the spring-

summer of 2014, either assimilated, or left St. Petersburg due to a number of reasons. First, it was suggested that the Russian government resettlement program, aiming to populate distant regions, had such a low quota for resettlement in St. Petersburg that it was reached in summer 2014, making settlement in St. Petersburg problematic or impossible for many Ukrainian migrants. Second, according to a number of participants, life in St. Petersburg was very expensive and difficult: paper- and job-related problems, as well as negative experiences with fraud were recalled. Third, personal and institutional oppressive attitudes towards Ukrainian forced migrants, often not even noticed, made their lives even more difficult. The fact that some participants were willing to hide their Ukrainian origin to protect themselves from extra problems or possible danger might be a sign of internalization of the oppression towards Ukrainians in general present in St. Petersburg. Those migrants who, as Ukrainian participants of the research, decided to settle in St. Petersburg witnessed a change of the attitudes of locals. According to the interviewees' observations, the rise of sympathy and support originally experienced by Ukrainian forced migrants slowly was substituted with a sense that their plight was irrelevant or that they were generally annoying. The interviewees also noted that as the conflict proceeded, this attitude spread towards Ukrainians in general, and it developed along with the escalating conflict in Ukraine, which began with protests later named Euromaidan.

Their understanding of the rationale for Euromaidan split participants into two main groups. One group suggested that protests in Kiev were a part of a major planned operation that served the goals of some power players invisible to regular people. Knowing that some people received money for participation in protests, for these participants, was evidence of what they saw as the sponsored and organized nature of the entire process. On the other

hand, the second group viewed Euromaidan as a revolution which happened because people's needs weren't met and because people felt deprived. The revolution was sparked by the decision to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union. A 'planned operation' version was more popular among participants who lived in St. Petersburg or stayed here longer than others, suggesting that this explanation of events in Kiev could be a vision of Euromaidan generally cultivated in St. Petersburg or in Russia.

A number of participants originally viewed Euromaidan through a prism of previous experience of the successful nonviolent Orange revolution, so they didn't expect this revolution to turn violent. Complete abandonment of the idea of integration into the European Union and a possible course towards deeper integration with Russia, as well as the first major casualties ('Heavenly Hundred') were suggested as two main turning points, after which escalation of the conflict became inevitable. Most participants, who viewed Euromaidan as a planned operation, had a negative attitude towards it in general. And most of those who viewed it as a revolution remained positive about the rise of civil society in Ukraine and the ability of people to stand up for their rights.

According to a number of interviewees, the failure to include some southern and eastern regions in a new revolutionary government led to the conflict's spread and escalation. Besides that, the strong Russian involvement with inner Ukrainian policies and processes was acknowledged as an important factor contributing to the conflict escalation.

The Crimean episode was suggested as a second major page in the history of the conflict, since this precedent drastically changed domestic and international relations. Explaining people's motivations to attend the Crimean referendum and vote for

independence from Ukraine, some participants assumed that the Russian-speaking majority of Crimea who didn't support the revolution felt threatened and decided to take action to defend themselves. Moreover, it was suggested that Crimeans probably felt that in the then current situation, Moscow was a better option than revolutionary Kiev. According to some participants, the Russian military presence during the referendum provided peaceful conditions rather than affected the turnout and the results of voting.

Some participants took the 'reunification' of Crimea with Russia very enthusiastically; however, others noticed negative sides of this episode, such as the dramatic loss for Ukraine and break within the country. Some participants also underlined the negative repercussions of this decision, including new financial obligations for Russia, the deterioration of international relations, and the following decline in the economic situation in the peninsula. It was also noticed that in some cases the participants' acquaintances could relativize 'nightmares' of the transition period in Crimea, which included a switch of infrastructure to Russian followed by a significant rise of cost of living and a general major decline in the standard of living; yet the interviewees coming from Crimea suggested that the general situation since annexation had been very difficult. The relativizing tactic could be chosen to prove that the decision made during the referendum was right and/or the only possible option then. Most participants acknowledged that they didn't believe Crimea would ever become a part of Ukraine again.

The escalation of the situation in the east of Ukraine in part was viewed by some participants as the direct aftermath of the Crimean precedent, which gave some people not supporting the revolution in eastern and southern regions the hope for change, hope that they could also implement a preferred scenario by demonstrating discontent and voting.

Among the main reasons for the conflict in the Donbass region, participants named identity differences between various groups of Ukrainians, which were to some extent determined by history, culture, and language traditions. Participants who explained the conflict in this way suggested that the pro-Russian population of eastern Ukraine felt the need to defend their identity from what they perceived as the nationalistic Ukrainian west that had elected the new revolutionary government.

On the other hand, for others the conflict was explained as a fight over the Donbass region's resources (gas, coal, fertile land, and heavy industries) and over circles of influence. In this case, participants suggested that the current confrontation was part of a major scenario developed by greater power holders. It was assumed that the conflict served interests of some American or European authorities and Russian elites. Media influence was suggested as an explanation for the intensity and strength of identity polarization in framing the conflict. For some participants, these three groups of reasoning went hand in hand, together representing their general understanding of the contemporary situation. The analysis of their reasoning for the conflict suggests that the increased polarization of the identities of people within Ukraine was more a result of the conflict than a major cause, since until 2013, as noted by interviewees and some earlier-mentioned scholars, different identity groups had lived relatively peacefully for some time within one country.

The analysis of participants' experiences in some southern and eastern regions where there were post-revolutionary anti-Ukrainian protests suggested that people there experienced an echo of war and military presence, yet there was no war. These regions were physically separated from inflamed Donbass region and remained under military control up to the time of the fieldwork and during the time of this writing. In the Donetsk

and Lugansk regions, as noted by Wison (2016), due to the absence of militant pro-Ukrainian moods, pro-Russian protests gained mass support in the region, and the situation escalated into a full-scale military conflict between pro-Russian militias and the Ukrainian army. Some participants who witnessed the conflict in the Donbass region suggested that originally the protests didn't have a separatist nature. According to interviewees' understandings, people of the Donbass region were defending themselves from nationalistic visits and demonstrating their discontent with the decision to join Europe, demanding to remain where they were and to keep connections with Russia. Referendums on the independence and establishment of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics were viewed as a logical development of the escalating situation, even though their illegitimate nature was acknowledged.

Thereafter, the conflict escalation turned Donetsk and Lugansk regions into a war zone. The participants expressed general negativity about the conflict and about the contemporary draft system and its methods. Moreover, seven interviewees stated that they lost friends or relatives in this war, which intensified their negative attitude towards the contemporary situation in Ukraine. Some participants recalled noticing different side effects of war, such as destruction of infrastructure and a significant decrease in the standard of living, noticed both in war-affected areas and in broader Ukraine. Any kind of military presence in regions (militias and the Ukrainian army) was recalled as a negative experience, since it often was accompanied by overuse of power by military people, rapes, alcohol related incidents, kidnapping, and physical abuse. All the participants suggested they could not foresee any improvement of the situation in Ukraine as a whole or the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics.

Some participants spoke about this being an international conflict, seeing Ukraine as a ‘battlefield’ in a fight between Russia and the West or the USA in particular. Most participants noticed that in the aftermath of this global post-Cold War confrontation, attitudes between Russians and Ukrainians have significantly changed. They suggested that this happened mainly due to massive propaganda, pitting pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian people against each other and serving hidden interests of some invisible power holders. Participants recalled breaks in relationships between people on different sides of ‘barricades’; in many cases these happened silently, without reasoning, and leaving no room for discussion.

Even within this group of people living in St. Petersburg, and therefore having chosen to live in Russia, there were differences in perspectives. Still, we might wonder if the small picture presented by this research may mirror the broader problems between Russian and Ukrainian citizens or between pro-Russian (which includes some people in Ukraine) and pro-Ukrainian people. Participants blamed propaganda and the media for fostering opposing sides against each other; however, the analysis of their sources of information and their vision of the conflict suggests that propaganda played its role in the intensification of the conflict (and in some cases could strongly affect attitudes, fomenting personal conflicts out of nothing), but the general relations between Russians and Ukrainians are more complicated and were formed under many different personal and general circumstances. Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that the polarization of these identity groups was further exaggerated by the ongoing information war and other conflict-related circumstances. Most interviewees acknowledged that to restore broken Russian-Ukrainian relations (which, they said, would take many years) one would need to either develop a way to resist the often

chaotic information flow, or somehow withdraw from using bilateral negative propaganda. The participants suggested that unless this happens millions of Russians and Ukrainians who don't play any role in the physical conflict will remain negative towards each other and will view the other party as the enemy.

4.6.2 – Conclusion

This chapter has presented information gathered through semi-structured interviews with seventeen study participants. In so doing, the heterogeneous/collaged picture of the Ukrainian conflict was developed out of narratives, understandings and experiences of the participants, who acknowledged four main stages of the crisis, namely, Euromaidan, Crimea, Donbass, and the international conflict. The participants suggested their reasoning and explained their pictures of development of each of these stages, as well as the aftermath of each particular confrontation, supposing that in general it was a chain of cause and effect conflicts, which altogether brought Ukraine as well as Russia to the contemporary major conflict situation. Interviews with young Ukrainian participants coming from Kiev, Donetsk and the Donetsk region, Lugansk and the Lugansk region, the Dnepropetrovsk region, the Kherson region, Odessa, and Crimea, and with Petersburgers, each of whom had different motivations to participate in the research, make it clear that the contemporary conflict developed over three years into broad, deep-rooted strife, which has affected millions of lives, including the participants, who lost their close ones, experienced breaks in relationships, were forced to move, or just felt that the events in Ukraine turned the course of common history. It is also clear that this crisis, which originally was viewed as a short-term protest, must be resolved and to achieve that some significant steps need to be

taken on all levels including top, middle-range and grass-roots levels as suggested by the work of John Paul Lederach (1997) and others discussed in earlier chapters.

Chapter V – From the Reality to the Ideal Future

5.1 – Introduction

At the time of the fieldwork not much had changed since the Minsk II Agreements, which were reached in early 2015. The shaky ceasefire in the Donbass region was being violated every so often by both parties; international relations remained tense, and many people on opposite sides of the ‘barricades’ still perceived each other as enemies. No significant improvements were achieved later, and almost four years after the revolution, as *The New York Times* reporter Bonenberger (2017) notes, slow, but still vicious fights persisted in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, turning the life of thousands of people into hell. Yet, like probably most people for whom this conflict matters, the research participants wanted to hope that one day Ukraine will see the peaceful sky again and people will be able to return to their lives. However, after the analysis of the then-contemporary situation, it was hard for them to imagine this ‘miracle’.

This chapter first looks at realistic paths of conflict development suggested by the participants. Then it addresses their vision of personal and conflict-related futures. And finally, it discusses the participants’ suggestions for what can be done to turn the ideal future into reality.

5.2 – What is to come?

The Ukrainian ceasefire regime, according to Northrup’s (1989) model of transformation of intractability can be addressed as level one change, which, as was explained earlier, includes transformations peripheral to identities and has almost no impact on future relationships between parties. In Ukraine this stage lasted more than two and a half years

without any deeper and broader changes as noted at the time of writing. For a number of participants, the situation in the Donbass region now became nothing more than a ‘frozen’ conflict, and the longer it lasted, the harder it was to imagine any improvements. Thus, talking about the eventual future ten participants were positive that the conflict in the Donbass region and international tensions would persist for the next five, ten, twenty, or even more years without any major changes, unless some big steps are made to transform it. For example, Cyril (RC) stated that the conflict would last “until hell freezes over; it can last for twenty years, for forty years if nothing changes.”

Maltseva (2016) described in detail the humanitarian tragedy happening to the civil population of the Donbass region; nevertheless, according to Sergey (U/RC), globally in the contemporary situation nobody is interested in resolving the conflict, which dooms the destiny of people affected by this war:

I think nobody is interested in it, so nobody plans to do it. I think nobody will put any effort to improve anything. I think it’s a frozen conflict, which will smolder, smolder, smolder...

Semyon (RC), Dmitry (RC), and Maxim (UC) noted that history knows many similar examples. Dmitry (RC) compared the situation in Ukraine to a number of protracted conflicts in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS):

It may sound a bit cynical, but the Ukrainian conflict itself ...there are quite a few conflicts of this type in the world. They die out, and then fire up again. There are many conflicts of this type – frozen conflicts – in CIS: Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Trans-Dniester... I don’t see anything unique about the Ukrainian conflict.

Six participants suggested that the real future of the Donbass region is the scenario of Trans-Dniester – unrecognized by the global community, supported by and dependent on Russia as a buffer zone, which aims to keep the NATO expansion away from the Russian border. Arseny (UC) explained his vision of the future in the following manner:

To be objective, frankly, I see Novorossiia as something like Trans-Dniester. It's going to be an independent small, unrecognized state like South Ossetia or Trans-Dniester. This conflict will last for a long time. There will be no normal life there for a long time. Maybe the war there will be over soon, maybe not. I don't know, but I really hope it will be over. But the situation there won't stabilize for years, even decades.

The possibility of another 'frozen-zone' development for the Donbass region or even for the entirety of Ukraine is recognized in international rhetoric (Alstshuller, 2017).

Unfortunately, as Denis (UC) acknowledged, this scenario will not bring anything good to people living in the war-affected area:

I tell everybody on Skype it's an Abkhazia, Trans-Dniester scenario. It's a scenario. [...] They say their city still lies in ruins. Nobody fixed anything and they won't. The same happened in Trans-Dniester, in Ossetia. It will be the same in Donetsk. Donetsk is not going to be the same. It was a very cool city. And now everybody is leaving it.

Maxim (UC) expressed his hope for future improvement of the situation, which would occur if politicians managed to develop peace between confronting groups in Ukraine. Still, he believed it would not happen within the following years:

So if they bring in this brotherhood politics again, they'll probably be able to get people back in five or ten years. Maybe that will even help with Lugansk and Donetsk. But for now they will be a buffer zone for sure. Like Trans-Dniester – nobody needs it, and it tries to make a living by itself.

The Donbass region was known for its calls for autonomy throughout history (Malsteva, 2016; Osipian & Osipian, 2005); however, while recognizing its need for greater independence, most participants were skeptical about its potential to be a completely independent state. For this reason, Maria (U/RC), Ksenya (UC), Grigory (UC), Yelena (UC), Maxim (UC), and Dmitry (RC) assumed that in the long run, the Donbass region will either remain within the Ukrainian borders, probably with more autonomy, or will become a part of Russia as another autonomous federal region.

Most participants expressed their hope that some day the conflict will be over; yet they noted that it will be very difficult for people in Ukraine to restore peace. Ksenya (UC) explained her worries in the following manner:

The worst part: one day the conflict will be over officially, but this unpleasant residue will last for a long time. That's what really worries me. Tomorrow the conflict will be over, but it doesn't mean that the day after tomorrow while traveling across the border I will be confident that that same customs officer won't verbally attack me again, for example.

Further, Ksenya (UC) suggested that it might take at least one generation to reshape narratives developed during the time of the conflict - narratives which writers such as Kurilla (2016) note are often mutually exclusive or incompatible. Even when the conflict is over these narratives survive either officially as historical interpretations presented in textbooks, underground, or among emigrants (Kurilla, 2016, p. 198), still affecting people's relations. Helga (RC) also noted that when the military conflict is finally over, opposing narratives will remain in place, and Maxim (UC) underlined that past and present violence will affect future relationships between people:

Keeping in mind all they've done... How will others treat people who live there... Nobody knows, because they've passed that point of no return. There is no way back, so they have to try to make it work it again.

Nicolay (RC) stated that no matter how much time goes by, for people divided by this war there will be no way for reconciliation:

Ukraine already can't be one country physically. Too much blood was spilled there, too much hatred. I never had that much hatred even in Chechnya; I participated in two campaigns there. Here this hatred is so strong, it's a mixture of fury, hatred, and anger.

Yelena (UC) in a way echoed Nicolay's (RC) idea, suggesting that people in Ukraine will probably never be able to come back to a truly peaceful life, because narratives formed under the impact of propaganda fall far from the truth (which nobody actually knows) and

contain a lot of negativity towards each other. Kurilla (2016) argues that propaganda and brainwashing explanations of the Ukrainian crisis, “besides being too simplistic to be accepted by a scholar, [...] make it impossible to get out of the conflict by any means other than complete victory over the ‘foe’” (p. 196).

While most participants were doubtful about the possibility of complete reconciliation within Ukraine, Yevgenya (UC) expressed her hope that time would heal people and identity groups perceiving each other as opposing would come back to peace. Nine participants suggested that the conflict transformation process would begin only if there is a new government in Ukraine (eight participants) and in Russia (one participant). For example, Yevgenya (UC) stated:

I think, unless we have presidential elections [in Ukraine] nothing will change. If there is another president, who will take it all differently and make it work differently, then yes. And with this [contemporary] president nothing will happen.

However, Oleg (UC) noticed that it might take a few governments to turn the situation over:

There is a joke in an online environment: we need to gather our authorities and execute them; then we need to gather a new government and execute them again, and; then we need to gather a new government again and maybe then... something will work out.

Ksenya (UC) and Grigory (UC) mentioned that changes of authorities in Ukraine are needed on different structural levels, and Janna (RC) suggested that the upcoming changes in the Russian government would also affect the situation:

I think, first, we need time for everything to settle down and fade from memory. And second, we need a shake, a shift in power. Everywhere. Here too. As soon as Putin is gone, this strong centralization will be over.

Further Janna (RC) noticed that the elections in the United States, which were forthcoming then, could also change the situation. However, so far the Trump government has brought only further escalation of tensions between Russia and the USA.

Maria (U/RC) and Maxim (UC) proposed that the change of the political system in Ukraine would most likely happen through another revolution. In Maria's (U/RC) opinion, a revolution will be inevitable if the contemporary government is not able provide major reforms soon to improve the economic and social situation in Ukraine. And Maxim (UC) explained that the domination of the oligarchs and people of the "old generation" in the contemporary political system, as well as persisting corruption in the government, in his opinion, make the natural power transition allowing "youth to rule this country" highly unlikely. However, Cyril (RC) noted that a new revolution would be possible, but that it would be the worst-case scenario, one that would wreak havoc in the country:

The worst scenario: people would take to the streets again, the state will be destabilized and the entire east will be engulfed in flames of separatism and war. People now are in a kind of a dead end situation. On the one hand, to speed up reforms they – people who voted for the contemporary Ukrainian government – need to take to the streets. On the other hand, by hitting the streets they risk losing even more over there, in the east.

There was some sense that there is not a great global push to end this conflict. Arseny (UC), Yelena (UC), and Sergey (U/RC) mentioned that, politically, today nobody needs Ukraine in general as a strong state and a real partner. Keeping in mind its size and all its problems, there is nobody to help the country overcome the crisis and resolve the ongoing conflict, which from a geopolitical point of view might be benefiting some global players. For example, Dmitry (RC), as noted before, suggested that in the case of Russia, the slowly smoldering tragic Ukrainian conflict serves as an example of the aftermath of a fight for freedom and independence, which keeps people within Russia from rising up. However,

Katya (UC) and Ksenya (UC) suggested that the contemporary slow-moving conflict still has the potential to escalate, involving other regions and causing a further break in the country.

In this way, trying to be realistic and analyzing the situation from where it was in the summer-spring 2016, most participants suggested that there would be no major changes to come soon. The ceasefire, as a level one change (Northrup, 1989), entailed the settlement, but did not constitute transformation, and as Kelman (2006) notes, to move towards conflict resolution parties need to go beyond an interest-based settlement and develop a dialogue not dependent upon power balance. Yet, according to participants of this research, apart from the people themselves struggling because of the conflict, nobody seemed interested in this process. Resonating with participants' views, Black (2016 b) at the end of *The Return of the Cold War. Ukraine, the West and Russia*, recalls the opinion of American political scientist, Robert Levgold, who recognized many differences between the contemporary situation and the Cold War but acknowledged a number of valuable similarities, which may mean that the Ukrainian conflict, as part of the global confrontation, may persist in this 'cold' or 'frozen' state for a long time.

5.3 – What we Hope for

For most participants it was easy to describe the criteria of their personal ideal future.

Grigoiy (UC), Arseny (UC), Yelena (UC), Maxim (UC), Helga (RC), Dmitry (RC), Katya (UC), and Yevgenya's (UC) ideal future included family, professional and economic stability, and a happy life in St. Petersburg. For Denis (UC) and Oleg (UC) it was additionally important to receive Russian passports to feel free and safe to go back to Ukraine to visit. For Nicolay (RC), Maria (U/RC), and Ksenya (UC), their ideal future was

a happy and peaceful life in Ukraine. Janna (RC), Semyon (RC), and Sergey's (U/RC) vision of an ideal life, to a large extent was defined by freedom to travel and the ability to afford it. Cyril (RC) noted that in general he was happy with his life, and just wanted his employer to extend his contract.

Yet when it came to the ideal future development of the conflict in Ukraine, the complexity of which was discussed earlier in the thesis, most participants for some time were lost in thought and could not answer the question right away. When I asked Helga (RC) about the ideal scenario for Donbass and Ukraine her answer was as follows:

I can't, I don't know... [long pause]... No...[long pause] I wish we could go back in time.

The hope for an again-united Ukraine was dominant among the participants of the research conducted by Flaherty (2016 a) in the western-Ukrainian city of Lvov in 2016; however, in this study, participants' perspectives of an ideal future for the region were not that homogenous. For example, Grigory (UC) and Arseny (UC) suggested that a possible agreement between the Donbass region and Russia would be an ideal option for the DPR and LPR. Arseny (UC) explained his position in the following manner:

I lived in Ukraine for 20 years, and I lived in Russia for a year, and I don't wish anybody to live in Ukraine. No matter what part of Ukraine – Kiev, Donetsk, Lvov, Crimea - because there, with the same effort you cannot achieve as much as you can here. [...]In the future, I don't really see Ukraine as a serious state to have a political or economic relation with. There were no high quality goods; there were no good working environments; there was no freedom of speech. Nothing works right there. Absolutely. The only thing there is people's unrestrained enthusiasm. [...] I really wish all people in Novorossiya and maybe most people in Ukraine to join Russia. It would be a perfect future, because I don't see any future in Ukraine. [...] I definitely want Novorossiya to join Russia. Not to be an independent piece, not an autonomous republic, not Trans-Dniester, but a part of Russia. That's it.

Coming from another perspective,, Maria (U/RC), Janna (RC), and Cyril (RC) suggested that the Donbass region should remain within Ukrainian borders while receiving more

autonomous rights (as outlined in the Minsk II Agreements). Maria (U/RC) explained her position:

In an ideal world Donbass should have its own rights, autonomy, laws, currency within Ukraine. They should have a free trade zone with the rest of the country. The connection should stay in place, but the government should be separate. Donbass should have its elected government, not the government appointed from Kiev.

Janna (RC) explained her vision of Donbass autonomy through the example of post-WWII Germany:

Maybe it could be a subject within... Maybe like in Germany – two separated states (but without a wall), each one having its own government. Let people decide whom they want more.

Cyril (RC) too underlined that the right of self-identification should be in the hands of people on the ground:

[...] maybe the governments of the two countries can come to some agreements, approved by other countries. These agreements would include a deep autonomy of questionable regions, but they should distinguish belonging not massively, but on a personal level. I mean, when citizens living in the same territory would be free to choose under which jurisdiction they want to be. But at the same time people would follow the same laws, which would be passed by democratic voting and would satisfy each and all.

Cyril (RC) mentioned the path of a Ukraine-wide confederation as a possible positive way of development for Ukraine. Maltseva (2016) notes that idea of federalization was widespread among the population of the Donbass region from the very beginning of the regional resistance. Similarly, for Katya (UC) the ideal future of the Donbass region and Ukraine included federalization:

About the conflict... If it would be possible, I wish everybody would leave each other alone. I mean, the Western part of Ukraine separately, the DPR and LPR separately, Crimea separately, and the Center can keep our amoebas – Kherson, Nikolayev, Odessa. I actually don't know what's going on in Odessa; it's a very controversial city. [...] Federalization is better. So each region would decide for itself, but in general they would be under Kiev rule. [...] I saw something similar here, when we travelled in Russia. I realized that federalization is the right thing;

that's how it's supposed to be. If peoples living in one big country are so different, there is no need to mix them up; it doesn't make sense. You probably can't do it any other way.

In contrast, Katya (UC) mentioned that, in her opinion, the western regions of Ukraine drastically differed from the rest of the country, and for that reason she believed the west of Ukraine should become an independent state, which would allow the rest of the Ukrainian people to live peacefully in the united country.

In yet a different vision, Ksenya (UC) stated that she hoped to see a united Ukraine as it used to be before the conflict:

I want to see the united Ukraine – with Crimea, with the East, with a peaceful sky over our heads and with happy people.

Some named no particular geopolitical make-up for their homeland. Denis (UC), Oleg (UC), Yevgenya (UC), and Dmitry (RC) stated that the main component of an ideal future for them was peace, independent of geopolitics. Denis (UC) described his vision as follows:

I just don't want things to be bad in my country, I don't want people to die there, I don't want to have unemployment and poverty.

Oleg (UC) defined the ideal future as “calm,” and Dmitry (RC) stated that he just wishes “to see fewer victims,” underlining that “they are culturally close people on both sides, they easily socialize in both Russian and Ukrainian environments [...] and the conflict harms both sides, so it's absurd.” Yevgenya (UC) emphasized that a peaceful life, which she wishes for all people struggling everywhere in Ukraine, strongly depends on the new government's qualities:

Ideally, I want to see an adequate [good] government there, which would work for people, for the land. The land there is favored, it's milk and honey, everything grows there, but the president's son-in-law, the mayor of Odessa's son-in-law... there is no normal, adequate [good] deputy. [...] Ideally, change everybody and it will be fine after.

These results of this research resonates with numbers suggested by Maltseva (2016), which show that in 2015 over a half the respondents of the Donbass opinion poll supported the idea of a united Ukraine, either with greater autonomy for the region (36 percent) or keeping it as it was (15 percent). Still, more than 40 percent of respondents in that research supported some kind of independence for the eastern regions, with 26 percent supporting the idea of joining Russia and 16 percent seeing the Donbass region as an independent state (p.154).

In his research Wilson (2016) describes a similar picture of public opinion on the future of the region, with about 30 percent of respondents in Donetsk in 2014 supporting some kind of secession, and over 50 percent favoring the idea of a united Ukraine (with possible decentralization or special status for the region) (p. 642).

Speaking about international confrontation, some participants spoke about global peaceful coexistence, which, according to Maxim (UC) and Grigory (UC), would only be possible with the ‘right’ people in Ukrainian and other governments. Dmitry (RC) noted that a peaceful future also depends on people’s attitudes:

I wish people would come to peace both within Ukraine, and ... I wish there would be fewer people who support the conflict in Russia (I don’t mean they should die, I just wish they change their point of view).

Oleg (UC) underlined the people’s responsibility in conflict resolution and suggested some qualities for the countries, which in his opinion, would eventually bring Russia and Ukraine to peace:

What I would want for these countries... Patience for Russia and brains for us. Because it will last for at least two or three years for sure. We gave a runaround; we made it up. It’s Russia, it’s Putin, you are all bad here. And people hoovered it. It’s easier to blame somebody else for your problems than to look at yourself. Nothing will change unless people realize that it was their fault and they did it themselves.

However, possibilities for political affiliation varied from one participant to another. Thus, looking from her perspective of childhood during the Soviet time, Yelena (UC) suggested that the new Union of the core Soviet countries could bring peace:

If not politicians' ambitions, I'd say the unification of Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine. They could be like one country under the same Putin. Something like a mini Soviet Union only for Slavic republics, though I don't mind other republics joining it. There would be a visa-free regime between countries. Countries would have some powers and authorities, but would be unified by common leaders, common principles, by economy and politics. They would all participate in the ruling, but would have one leader. This kind of union could work. If Ukraine would have a leader like the Belorussian – more loyal, less ambitious, and wouldn't want to be the only 'king' – then this scenario could come true. Maybe Ukraine wouldn't make a Union, but they probably would come to an agreement with Russia. I believe these two countries are very interconnected.

Maxim (UC), on the other hand, stated that he would like to see Ukraine either join the EU, or have a visa-free regime with the European countries (the latter happened in May, 2017):

Ideally, it would be cool if Ukraine would actually join the EU, starting to develop within the EU [...] Of course I'd like to see a visa-free regime with the EU for Ukraine, because Ukraine fits the EU better. It's mainly a European country, especially the West. [...] the country won't be a part of the EU, it will just have a visa-free regime, like other countries, for youth for example.

Although these two ideas look incompatible, Plekhanov (2016) argues that, in reality, these ways of integration to some extent coexisted within the same framework. He notes that almost to the end of 2013 the Yanukovich government hoped that Ukraine could both obtain association with Europe and keep its existing economic ties with Russia (Plekhanov, 2016).⁴⁷ Yet European politics required Ukraine to choose between Russia and the EU (Plekhanov, 2016), so at the time of the research Yelena's (UC) and Maxim's (UC)

⁴⁷ According to Plekhanov (2016), it would be possible if Ukraine became a part of the 'Greater Europe' project, which "accommodates Europe's existing polycentrism of power and seeks to build integrative ties with Russia as a close partner whose interests are respected on a par of those with other European countries" and is compatible with Russia's own integrative projects (p.11).

suggestions could exist only as ‘either, or’ options.

The hope for peace was in general popular among participants, yet Nicolay (RC), who also mentioned a peaceful sky and a happy family in his description of his ideal future, suggested that in reality he doesn’t see Ukraine as an independent country, which with high probability would mean a new world war, in which he, as a warrior, hoped to participate:

There are two options. Either there will be some significant steps made and Ukraine will become a part of Russia, or we’ll try to fix relationships with pe***sts, which will end up sad first for Russia, second, for Ukraine, third, for America. [...] I realize that according to American and European politics, this dream [about the peaceful life with a loved woman] isn’t going to come true. I think we will have a war in the near future, and we’ll beat the crap out of anybody who’ll get to us. [...] And I’d love to participate in it. Not because I’m so bloodthirsty, but because I’m sick of watching America pulling the Russian bear’s mustache.

Nicolay (RC) stated that in the then-contemporary situation war and peace depended on the Russian president, yet if he would be replaced peace wouldn’t be an option anymore. He explained his vision of future possibilities through a colorful example:

As I said, everything depends on Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin]. If someone wants to rip his head off, it’s sad. A chicken with no head, let free runs and splashes everything around with blood. Not too long, but there is a lot of blood. One can cut Russia’s head off and watch where it runs. Believe me, it will splash everybody with blood. First, Europe. I’m not sure if we’ll make it to America, but I have a very aggressive attitude.

Talking about the global ideal future Helga (RC) wasn’t radical, yet she suggested that global peace wouldn’t exist in a unipolar world:

My friends hope that Russia will win this struggle. We hope the world won’t be unipolar anymore and the USA won’t dictate to others what to do, or when to adopt democracy. That’s the victory we want. [...] I think the world will understand that it’s wrong to tell other countries what to do and decide for them how to live.

Thus, as we can see from this sub-section, the participants’ visions of the ideal and, in most cases, peaceful future for Ukraine (which either assumed Donbass reunited with Ukraine, or united with Russia) and for the global community differ from each other and from the

depressive vision of the real development of the conflict discussed earlier. I asked the participants what could be done to improve the situation to bring reality closer to their ideal pictures. Their suggestions for what it would take to transform the conflict and move closer to its resolution are discussed in the next section.

5.4 – Bringing Ideal Visions Closer to the Reality

When asked about how they personally might be able to influence the resolution of the conflict, while others had some ideas, five participants stated that there was nothing they could do to change the situation. This tendency might be explained by the underdevelopment of civil society in the majority of post-Soviet countries, as well as by people's acceptance of global corruption in the government and a pattern of having manipulated elections, which often bring the same corrupted people to power. Participants who expressed this view suggested that important steps and decisions are made “by four to five percent of the most active participants of the conflict, and also by power holders,” as Cyril (RC) worded it, leaving ordinary people with the only option – to accept this reality. Denis (UC) expressed this opinion as follows:

What can we do? Just take it as it is. Just accept it. Nothing else you and I can do. Politicians decide what's going to happen. You and I can't change the situation either in Ukraine, or in Russia. We can't. We are not even in politics.

Yevgenya (UC) assumed that most people feel that they don't have any power to change anything, and for that reason they often don't even try:

I guess people don't believe they may change something. I mean, I'll go home now. What can I do? Go complain somewhere? Nothing I can do. Do something? Nothing I can do... You can't prove anything to anybody. So people live as it is.

As a historian Sergey (U/RC) addressed revolutions in general as a poor way to achieve changes, since the aftermath often makes people struggle even more than they did before.

Analyzing the Ukrainian situation, he suggested that people should worry about their daily lives rather than about politics, since their views don't matter on a global scale. He expressed his opinion as follows:

There was a phrase that "Ukraine is seeking somebody to join, but in the contemporary situation Ukraine should wait, work out a strategy, understanding, gather itself up and then not integrate, but conclude some rational treaties." I favor and share this centrist position, but it's never going to happen. And people need to understand that politics are important but in the end nobody will ask for their opinion. Nothing will change because they hit the streets and protest for a couple months. Some will die, some will be rewarded, but in general it won't affect anything. Because in the long-term, it works a bit differently, not like everybody comes out, signs and everybody is happy. It may happen, but on the scale of Crimea. On the scale of Kosovo, when it separated from Montenegro... [Serbia]... Anyway, on the scale of Yugoslavia when it was split into pieces... People should be more adequate and take more care about what they do, which moods they create around themselves. They should worry about themselves and their routines.

Contrary to Sergey, Dmitry (RC) suggested a number of steps that regular people can take to change the situation; however, through the example of a song by a popular Russian band, he also noted that people should probably debate less about politics, and worry more about their own lives because nobody else will worry about it for them:

There is a song by "Leningrad", which was actually dedicated to this conflict, a little sketch: "You leave so much energy and time, you glorify Russia so much, you should take the garbage out instead." It's very cool. The words constantly send you towards Ukraine. "Russian troops? You prove it!" And a girl responds: "I wish you would take the garbage out instead."

Janna (RC) looked at the situation from a different perspective, suggesting that people shouldn't just follow politics, but rather should analyze information and come up with their own conclusions:

What politicians say and do... people shouldn't believe 100% of it. [...] So the only solution I see is to wait and to accept, and just to use one's own head for thinking, not the government, not propaganda.

Oleg (UC) also proposed that the transformation of the conflict between people might begin only if people start thinking and analyzing, not just accepting particular opinions.

Janna (RC) and Dmitry (RC) suggested that one of the most important tasks for people who hope for peace in the future and are willing to take an active position, is “to transfer the conflict to a stage where it will be a conflict between different interest groups, not between people, not between Ukrainians and Russians,” as Dmitry (RC) put it. Janna (RC) formulated it as advice for all people at the grass-roots level:

Maybe it can be my advice to all regular people, ordinary folks, regular citizens: now we probably shouldn't look at politics, because then the world will split completely, and we should treat each other as a human being treats a human being, not like citizen treats citizen.

Sergey (U/RC) also underlined the importance of “continuous education” and Dmitry (RC) suggested that conflict transformation could be achieved through dialogue with at least one's closest circle:

We need to try to explain it to our friends, not fight with them, swear or scream, that they are wrong. Just try to make them think, analyze some facts. Try to check things, even when they are presented to you as 100% facts. Try to understand who might be interested in factual things you just learned. [...] We need to try to explain to people that neither Russians, nor Ukrainians are bad, it's all about interests of particular groups, so lets not foment it. We used to live in peace, why can't we live like that again. We need to transfer this conflict from an inter-ethnic dimension into an inter-political dimension.

Ksenya (UC) expressed an idea similar to Dmitry (RC) and Janna (RC), proposing that to affect the contemporary conflict between identity groups, people need to invest more time in understanding the situation:

I also wish people would quit believing everything they hear and start filtering the information. It's hard [...] And take things objectively: not all Russians hate Ukrainians; not all Ukrainians hate Russians...

According to Northrup (1989), grass-roots dialogue provides possibilities for a safer derigidification of relationships between the opponents; it impacts the identities among the group members, and in the long run the success of the dialogue within a group has the capacity to affect other members of the same and of opposing identity groups who weren't involved in the original interaction.

Grigory (UC), Helga (RC), and Oleg (UC) suggested that uncovering the “truth” would eventually bring people to peace. Helga (RC) described how she sees the “truth” in the following manner:

I always liked the phrase: “power lies in the truth.”⁴⁸ I hope one day everybody will understand that this war is wrong. Now we [Russia] know the truth is on our side. And one day we'll teach people that – Ukraine, Europe, and the States. I have an idealistic picture: if people know that it is wrong, then the number of military conflicts in the world will go down. One can't impose his beliefs onto others using force.

Grigory (UC) suggested that uncovering sources of negative or false information would help people to see the real picture:

I don't know where that entire negativity comes from. I mean my cousin's negativity and other people's. If I knew where it came from, I would try to uncover the source of it so that people would sober up.

Oleg (UC) underlined that what matters is how the facts are served, suggesting that only “real history” may provide people with the opportunity to judge who was wrong and who was right:

[...] history can't be forgotten, but what matters is how one serves it. It would all be good if there was an adequate [not prejudiced or biased] person publishing books, editing them, making newspapers, etc. People would look at the point of view, and they would see what has happened, but only if the facts aren't twisted. They'll be able to make a decision on what was right and what wasn't.

⁴⁸ From the movie *Brother-2*, director A. Balabanov.

Kurilla (2016) distinguished seven narratives that emerged throughout the contemporary conflict, and stated that if people following the news about the events in Ukraine were asked, “the majority [would] insist that there [was] only one true narrative, and all alternative explanations [were] merely products of an ‘information war’ or results of ‘propagandistic brain-washing’” (p. 196). Thus, Grigory (UC), Oleg (UC), and Helga’s (RC) suggestions about uncovering the truth, according to Kurilla’s (2016) observations, probably wouldn’t give the desired result due to the incompatible nature of most of the conflict-emerged narratives, in which the ‘truth’ significantly differs. Dmitry (RC) noticed that to come to peace people would need to leave blame behind:

We only can try to tell people: “Let’s not blame anybody. Let’s not scream that we are good and they are bad, or the other way around, etc.” In any conflict two are to blame, so both of them need to... If one says, “Ok, it’s my fault,” and another responds, “Yes, it’s your fault,” it’s not going to work out.

In a similar manner Kurilla (2016) suggests that to find a real way out of the conflict, we need to include all narratives developed by participating groups while at the same time focusing on the peace dialogue.

In addition, Dmitry (RC) proposed that to qualitatively affect contemporary relationships between Russia and Ukraine, Russian people must adopt a new attitude towards the neighbor country. His explanation of the idea was lengthy, yet I found it valuable, and for that reason, include it in full:

The Russians probably need to let Ukraine go finally. They need to realize that Ukraine is an independent state with its own constitution, its own borders. It doesn’t owe Russia anything. The Russians need to accept that it’s not one of the regions within the Russian Federation that we can dictate our will to. They are independent, and if we work with them, we have to work on equal terms like with a partner. That’s what they expect. Their insult is partially caused by it... It’s like a younger brother when you are 17 and he is 14. You still feel responsible for him: you are older. But 20 years later you are 37 and he is 34, so he tells you

“I’m a grown up now...” “You do it as I said!” You tell him. “It’s absurd. I’m a grown up, I have a family and kids...” “No, I said.”

Maybe it’s not proper to switch it to people, but I feel that Russians take Ukrainians as foolish, irrational ones; they never had real sovereignty, their borders moved how many times... Very patronizing and instructive attitude. And we had it before Maidan. People wanted to show Ukrainians how to live properly. We shouldn’t do that. People don’t like when somebody else imposes his will. We should treat Ukrainians and their sovereignty more cautiously and probably just a bit patronizingly, because they are in a nation building process. States aren’t built in a year or two or three. It took the USA a long time to become a state; they had a war for independence, civil war... they had tons of problems. It’s weird to expect a young state to overcome corruption just like that. Isn’t there corruption in Russia?

Nicolay (RC) took an active position from the beginning of the conflict by participating in military operation in Donbass. At the time of the interview, after being wounded and going through the recovery process, from the position of his experience, he suggested that decisions are made by elites only, and noticed that in Russia there was no connection between the top and the bottom. Similarly, for Helga (RC), Grigory (UC), Maria (U/RC), Semyon (RC), Dmitry (RC), Katya (UC), Yevgenya (UC), and Sergey (U/RC) the major conflict transformation steps were in the hands of power-holders. For example, Helga (RC) assumed that the balance of power matters only until leaders of opposing sides decide to sit down at the negotiating table:

Right now the conflict is still going and it’s very hard to assume when it will be over. Maybe when leaders agree. It doesn’t matter who has more soldiers or who owns tanks or pistols. All these are not important. All that matters is how the heads of the participating domains negotiate, when they make a compromise that settles the matter.

In a same way Grigory (UC) suggested that this conflict couldn’t be resolved with weapons:

Mainly, I think, they need to come to a peaceful agreement. Conflicts and use of power won’t change anything. They need to find a peaceful way and come to a conclusion.

Similarly, Maltseva (2016) concludes her article on the conflict in Ukraine, stating that, “no military solution is possible in Donetsk” and, thus, in Ukraine in general (p.154).

Nevertheless, Maria (U/RC) noticed that so far all negotiations haven’t brought results since parties are speaking different languages and are not willing to come to a real agreement:

[...] now negotiations between Russia, Ukraine and Donbass are like talking to a brick wall. Russia states it’s not a real participant in this conflict, since it doesn’t have its army over there. Russia is just trying to support Donbass and defend people. Ukraine states that it’s in a state of war with Russia. This is like talking to a brick wall, and there will be no consensus, unless one of them will admit that there is a civil war in the country. Ukraine has to admit it to begin the dialogue.

On the other hand, Semyon (RC) noticed that the agreement has to be achieved by a broader board of elites directly or indirectly participating in the conflict:

So the war will be over when guys will “split the fur” and sign some paper stating that they don’t place their missiles here, and we don’t place ours here. It isn’t clear on whose condition it will happen. It’s hard to say. It’s more difficult for America to influence things that are happening so far away from them, so maybe Russia will bargain some better conditions for itself. Maybe not.

According to Semyon (RC), to proceed with inter-national grass-roots conflict transformation, first, leaders will need to develop a common narrative, agreeing on a guilty figure who wouldn’t be directly involved with the conflict anymore:

It’s easy to make peace, they just have to confess why it all happened or make up some nice picture for the public. To find hangdogs, guilty ones. There will be a different president instead of Obama now, and if Russia, America, and other participants come to an agreement on making Obama a hangdog, then... The crowd always needs a guilty one. It probably won’t be enough to just confess faults. [...] If the media world will form an opinion that everything was different and actually these particular people are guilty for this, and now we will lock them up, then ... They once made Yanukovich a whipping boy...

And Dmitry (RC) suggested that in reality it is not political leaders, but the business elites who need to come up with a solution that will meet their interests. He explained his vision as follows:

I think it's temporary, and interests of businesses, which can lobby for themselves at some markets, should overcome the politicians' will to gain importance by means of this opposition.

Sergey (U/RC) suggested, "Ukrainian authorities need to realize that they are here not just for five years; they will be building the country for a long time," and proposed that to overcome the conflict fully, all narratives need to be brought to the table and all involved parties need to come to agreement:

[...] unless all parties involved in conflict – not one, it will last forever then, but all – will come to an agreement and will decide to change Ukraine [...] Until then, this conflict won't be resolved.

This echoes Marples' (2007) perspective of the general situation in Ukraine, according to which the only solution for the state with diverse and national identity groups in regular opposition, political streams and historical memory is "some form of compromise" in which there were no second-class Ukrainians, and which incorporate multiple perceptions of the past that exist in the country (p. 313).

Besides agreement between participating leaders, Helga (RC), Maria (U/RC), and Ksenya (UC) noted that it is very important to end all conflict-related third-party support for rebels of the Donbass region, as well as to the Ukrainian government. Helga (RC) suggested that when people are left alone, they will come to negotiations sooner:

It's crucial to end all support from both sides. Then I believe it will be possible to come to the negotiating table. People are tired of war. They will accept any agreement if it will allow them to live a normal life without bombardments and gunfire. People don't know whom they support anymore, and they just want it all to be over.

Ksenya (UC), on the other side, suggested that first of all Russia has to leave the battlefield:

Well... Russia should apparently back up. Because I don't believe there is nobody there, no matter how much they scream about it. I believe, there are. Our people can't play shoot 'em up by themselves. So... Back out of there. Any other way? Just leave us alone. I guess it's never going to happen...

Maria (U/RC) stated that if "Russia would quit supporting people in the Donbass, it would be the end." Maltseva (2016), however, suggests, that although Russia played an important role in prolonging the conflict, there were other additional factors which significantly contributed to the insurgency in the Donbass region, and which need to be addressed to preserve the unity of Ukraine and to resolve the problem with rebel-held region status.

Janna (RC), Nicolay (RC), and Dmitry (RC) also suggested that regular peace procedures might help the region to settle down and proceed with negotiations. This seems to be an ongoing internal and external conversation evidenced by the fact that during his interview Nicolay (RC) stated that a major war was the only option; yet after the interview was over and he came outside for a cigarette, he commented that actually if parties would try to stick to the Minsk II Agreements and would allow a peacekeeping mission in the region, the conflict might be resolved in a more peaceful way. Janna (RC) also assumed that the presence of international observers might help to stop violence:

Ideally, I would invite some international observers and would let people vote. I would ask them what they want, the entire Ukraine. The West should vote, and the East of the country should vote. And if the East would vote for separation, they could create a republic.

Dmitry (RC) also suggested that a peacekeeping mission might improve the situation in the region. He noticed that in many cases international intervention didn't work out, yet assumed that the Ukrainian crisis was different from other protracted conflicts, since, as he said, the Ukrainian conflict is not based on ancient hatreds:

Probably the regular procedure could regulate the conflict. Bring peacekeeping forces to Donbass, create a demilitarized zone, maybe... There were similar situations. For example, in Yugoslavia, in Kosovo. It didn't work out very well, I don't know why. There was a limited contingent of troops in Iraq, in Afghanistan. But for some reason it doesn't work. Conflicts die out for some time, but then continue again. The only difference is that these areas were always conflicting zones, when Ukraine and eastern regions... Last time they had war was in 1943 or 1944. That was the Second World War. People there are not used to war unlike people in, let's say, Afghanistan.

Finally, Helga (RC), Cyril (RC), and Ksenya (UC) suggested that the imposition of a common threat might bring people within Ukraine and people in Ukraine and in Russia back together. Helga (RC) explained it as follows:

There is a thing that would actually reunite Russia and Ukraine very quickly and erase the conflict. If we'll face some shared threat, we'll probably come back together in one day. But it has to be a very real and very bad threat. That's a bit apocalyptic. Today I think that's the only thing that would bring us back together. Everything else will take a lot of time and energy. I hope it won't happen though.

Northrup (1989) states that the introduction of a common threat can result in a redefinition of the self/other construct and help to achieve level two changes in conflict transformation. Yet, to attain that the threat has to endanger all parties, has to be equal or greater than the threat opponents pose on each other, has to require common action to defeat it, and has to last long enough to allow the development of a sense of common identity (Northrup, 1989).

Cyril (RC) and Ksenya (UC) noticed that the parties have already tried to use the Syrian conflict to call attention away from Ukraine. Still, this wasn't a common threat and the escalation didn't last long enough, so the attempt failed. Cyril (RC) suggested other options:

A chain of accidental, irreversible, unexpected events may cause it. One would need to create new obstacles that would call off enough attention and resources from this conflict. The Russian government tried to do it in Syria [...], but it didn't really work out, because where Syria is and where Ukraine is... A meteorite may fall... Or somebody will die...

Summarizing the conversation about possibilities for conflict resolution, Maxim (UC) proposed that instead of focusing on differences and insults, parties should start working on the gradual development of a common narrative:

All wars come to the end eventually; the enmity comes to an end too. Countries' leaders should do it, they gradually should move towards it, change the situation, and develop the national brotherhood again.

In this way, although some participants stated that there was nothing they could do to affect the conflict, others came up with a number of strategies, which included grass-roots dialogue and education, deeper thinking and analysis of the information people receive, and uncovering the 'truth'. Besides that, most participants agreed that major steps must be taken by politicians and business leaders of all participating groups who will need to sit at the negotiating table and develop a common strategy that would address the interests and narrative of all parties involved. The presence of international observers was discussed as a possibility to create conditions to start a deeper dialogue. The imposition of a common threat was also named as one of the possible and shorter ways to reconciliation. It was suggested that deep conflict transformation should include a redefinition of opposing identities and the development of a new common narrative or a "national brotherhood," as Maxim (UC) put it.

5.5 – Key Findings

Looking at the conflict from the then-contemporary situation, the participants of the research described a generally depressive perspective of the future for the conflict. The 'frozen-zone' scenario for the Donbass region and even for the entirety of Ukraine was one of the most common visions of the future. According to a number of interviewees, any transformation would begin only with a new government in Ukraine or/and in Russia,

which could mean another revolution. In this regard, the participants acknowledged that the Ukrainian crisis had turned into a protracted, deep-rooted conflict, and its resolution would be a question of many years.

Nevertheless, when looking further to their ideal outcomes, most participants hoped to see a peaceful and prosperous future for themselves and their countries. Future visions varied for different interviewees. Some wanted to see the Donbass region reunited with Ukraine, and others suggested that a better option for it would be cooperation with Russia. Federalization and stronger autonomy for varied regions of Ukraine were acknowledged by participants as one of the practical and favorable ways of possible development in this particular case. Speaking about international tensions, participants expressed hope for an early de-escalation, which, according to some of them, would come hand-in-hand with new, talented and qualified people in governments. Some participants suggested that to proceed with economic development Ukraine should eventually decide on its ally. For Maxim (UC) union with the EU was an ideal option, while Yelena (UC) suggested a new union of core Soviet states as a preferable path. Others ideally viewed Ukraine as a prosperous and independent state, and only Nicolay (RC) suggested that it had to become part of Russia. Finally, Helga (RC) acknowledged that the world could live in peace only if the world eventually becomes multipolar.

To bring the ideal future closer to the reality some participants came up with a number of suggestions and strategies for both regular people and elites. Thus, a number of interviewees proposed the development of dialogue at the grass-roots level, which would have the capacity to affect views and later identities among and between different identity groups. Interviewees suggested balanced and consistent education as an important

component of the gradual peace process. A few participants underlined the importance of a continual and deep analysis of conflict-related information, which would allow ordinary people to come up with their own, likely less polarized, opinions. Promotion of ‘truth’ was suggested by some participants as another possible way out of the conflict; however, it was acknowledged that since there is no such a thing as ‘historic truth’ and the reality is sooner a palette of multiple, often incompatible or opposing narratives, in reality this strategy may lead to conflict escalation instead of resolution. Besides that, some interviewees suggested that to eventually bring all parties of the conflict to a sustainable peace, leaders of all involved groups would need to sit at the negotiating table and develop a conflict resolution strategy that would address all their needs and emerged narratives. According to some participants, to allow effective negotiations, countries outside Ukraine participating in the conflict would need to end support for opposing groups in Ukraine. Furthermore, some interviewees suggested that the presence of international observers or a peacekeeping mission would help to de-escalate the conflict and would provide room for dialogue, aiming at the deeper transformation of the crisis. Moreover, the introduction of a new, shared threat was proposed by some participants as a tragic but possible strategy to stitch today’s enemies back together.

A realistic perspective of the Ukrainian conflict was described and multiple suggestions on possibilities of conflict transformation were made by the participants of the research – regular, randomly found people – yet, probably due to the complexity of the Ukrainian crisis and the multi-dimensional nature of the entire conflict, within a year after the fieldwork no major changes have occurred, suggesting that the participants’ present day reality is not much closer to their described ideal future.

5.6 – Conclusion

Despite the general dissonance between the ideal developed by research participants and realistic visions of the future of the contemporary Ukrainian conflict, this chapter suggested a number of important strategies and acknowledged possible points of entrance for conflict resolution. If taken into account and incorporated with the research analysis of the conflict, these suggestions may contribute to transformation of the conflict, at least on the interpersonal level. The discussion of real and ideal visions of the future of the conflict also suggests that some important steps should be made to end the conflict, and these steps can begin at any level.

Chapter VI – Conclusion

This thesis, the purpose of which was to develop a collaged image of the Ukrainian conflict, created at the grass-roots level by Ukrainians and Russians who at the time of the research lived in St. Petersburg, has now reached its final stage. I am summarizing and concluding the project, which started over a year and a half ago, seeking an understanding of the conflict. Today, many interviews, conversations, books, months, and written pages later I suggest that what I have explored wasn't one conflict, but more a chain or a sequence of different social, political, and economic clashes with long-standing roots, tangled in history, geopolitics, and international relations. My participants took me with them on a time train, travelling through often-sad pages of contemporary history and their experiences of it in St. Petersburg and in Ukraine.

St. Petersburg became our dispatching point, creating a frame for images of different stages of the Ukrainian conflict developed through the dialogue. While the participants were a relatively small number of Russian speakers who chose to live in Russia because they were born there, or who chose to relocate there from Ukraine, the discussion that can be imagined through the interviews with these people seems to reflect many discussions and interactions in two countries. As the participants noticed, from the very beginning, life in St. Petersburg wasn't easy for conflict-emerged Ukrainian migrants who had to deal with paper and job related problems as well as 'big city nightmares', which gave people a feeling of insecurity. Despite what some of them described as the positive atmosphere in the community in 2014, there were still some signs of personal and institutional oppression against newcomers from Ukraine; and the unwillingness of some participants to be recognized as Ukrainians due to security reasons may be a sign of internalized oppression

against Ukrainians existing in St. Petersburg. Later, as a number of participants noticed, many Petersburgers developed a more negative attitude towards Ukrainians, which seemed to reflect the general tendency in Russian-Ukrainian relationships as time went on.

Our first stop – the first conflict stage we explored – was the second Ukrainian revolution named Euromaidan. By 2013, in over three years of his presidency Viktor Yanukovich had demonstrated his incapability to overcome economic struggles and corruption in Ukraine (Deliagin, 2015; Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016). The inability of the system to meet people’s ontological needs contributed to the growing desire for change among the population (Burton, 1990 a, b; Jeong, 2000; Maslow, 1943). Thus, participants as well as researchers noted the generally difficult economic situation which resulted in unemployment, inflation, and the shrinking of social budget, in such a way impoverished many families. Additionally the absence of some freedoms allowed the growth of general discontent in the country; however, these factors weren’t enough to fire the conflict (Plekhanov, 2016; Wilson, 2016).

The Yanukovich government’s decision not to proceed with Euro integration, which for many Ukrainians seemed to be a way to improve the economy, cure corruption, and improve job opportunities, and, thus, to satisfy their unmet needs, became an immediate cause for open demonstration of discontent (Flaherty, 2016 a; Maltseva, 2016; Plekhanov, 2016). According to relative deprivation theorists, if people tend to believe that their government is due to fulfill expectations, to which they feel they are entitled to, but then at the last minute fails to do so, they are more likely to start a rebellion (Gurr, 1970), which happened in Ukraine at the end of 2013. Furthermore, as some participants noted, the brutal attempt to end protests with the help of police forces demonstrated that the government

wasn't capable of providing safety for its citizens and rather posed a threat to discontented people, thus, failing to meet the population's need for security (Burton, 1990 a, b; Marker, 2003; Maslow, 1943). According to some participants and experts, the precedent of the successful non-violent Orange Revolution made people believe that they could achieve change through the usual civic process; yet this time the situation developed differently and resulted in a full scale violent revolution, which later caused broader conflict in other areas of Ukraine (Dyer, 2014; Plekhanov, 2016).

There were a variety of theories expressed about the true tipping point for the conflict in Ukraine. Recognizing the generally difficult situation in Ukraine and the value of Euro integration for millions of Ukrainians, some participants still suggested that Euromaidan was a part of an operation planned by some invisible power-holders, often assumed to be Americans, serving their own agenda. According to some scholars, this kind of conspiracy explanation is widespread among the Russian population and has some truth in it; however, in general, it more aptly takes attention away from the real issues (Goble, 2014; Korybko & Haddad, 2016). Nevertheless, this assumption was popular amongst participants who believed that this influence turned what seemed to be a local conflict into an international issue.

Besides these points, what has often been perceived as a historically-supported narrative about identity split in the country that remained through more than 20 years of independence highlighted sometimes conveniently polarized differences in the country at the time of the Orange Revolution (Osipian & Osipian, 2006). Still, most participants admitted that in early 2014 they couldn't foresee the real scale of the conflict. Wanner (2014) and Kulyk (2016) noted that through the years of independence some of the defining

identity differences such as, for example, linguistic preferences have faded, thus slowly diminishing the importance of the historical narrative about the identity divide. For that reason, most participants, as probably many Ukrainians, didn't foresee the split of the country that happened during and after the revolution, since the previous animosities had lessened to some degree. In reality, the revolution in Kiev appeared to be the beginning of the major conflict in Ukraine. Yet, Duleba (2014) argues that there were some points of entrance, when further development of the major crisis could have been prevented, but the needed steps were never taken. Why wasn't the conflict de-escalated at that point? Like Duleba (2014), some participants noted the unwillingness of the new government to include eastern and southern regions into the decision-making process. Others suggested that the declined initiative on the Russian language policies was a trigger for the broader conflict. Others noted the importance of international and especially Russian involvement with the situation as a big influence. Some assumed that the polarization of the pro-Ukrainian group happened during the revolution, and this group made people of other identity groups feel threatened and polarized as well, spreading the conflict over to eastern Ukraine.

Crimea became the second major page of the research. The decision for Crimea to separate from Ukraine and reunite with Russia, which wouldn't have been possible without serious Russian involvement, poured oil on the flames. The introduction of a serious threat brought people together and pushed them towards immediate action (Seppala, 2012). In the case of Crimea and other southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, which never provided major support for the revolution and rather supported the constitutional way of government change through next scheduled elections (Maltseva, 2016), the threat was represented in the face of what was seen to be a new nationalist revolutionary government that was supported

by those perceived as this government's radical activists and participants of the "Right Sector". Crimea was known for its long-lasting willingness to return to Moscow's jurisdiction (Plekhanov, 2016), and, as some participants noted, after years of being deprived of what they viewed as a more prosperous and successful life within Russian borders, according to polls results, the majority of people in Crimea, in the face of danger used the opportunity to fulfill their needs in a way they felt was either preferable or the only one possible.

According to a number of scholars and research participants, throughout its history of independence Ukraine did not develop a common inclusive national identity, yet through the years of independence some identity differences were partially washed out (Kulyk, 2016; Wanner, 2014), and often identity groups differing in some characteristics were able to coexist within the country without seeking their own independence or having violent clashes (Flaherty, 2012, 2016 a; Fournier, 2002; Korostelina, 2013; Maltseva, 2016; Marples, 2007; Plekhanov, 2016; Reid, 2003; Wilson, 2016). Participants and some scholars noted that this was true until the revolutionary government change, which first, didn't have Ukraine-wide support and wasn't recognized as legitimate by many Ukrainians, and second, failed to include the needs and interests of southern and eastern regions in the new politics, which especially in the beginning was characterized by a strong nationalistic nature (Duleba, 2014; Plekhanov, 2016). By analyzing the interviews, we see that according to some participants' visions, from the end of 2013 the polarization and mobilization of people of the pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian identity groups began on opposite sides of the country – in the Donbass region and in Crimea, and around the city of Lvov – and clashed in Kiev, where pro-Ukrainian, or pro-

Western activists overthrew the pro-Russian Yanukovich government. This polarization was a result of the growing conflict.

According to Northrup (1989) and Marker (2003), identities become more pronounced and important when there is a threat posed on them, as well as when people of a particular identity feel devalued or not recognized by other identity groups. Thus, as a number of participants acknowledged, after the success of the revolution people in southern and eastern regions felt they were left behind, deprived of participation in decision making and threatened by the other identity group that was gaining power (Duleba, 2014; Plekhanov, 2016). In this way, the success of the revolution and the Crimean precedent influenced the situation in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine and especially in Donbass, which are stop three and four in our metaphor of time travelling (in the research both of these phases due to their interconnected nature were discussed within the “Donbass” section for the sake of simplicity). Participants from southern and southeastern regions experienced war where there was no real war, when those regions were separated from Donbass by means of military presence; and interviewees from Donetsk and Lugansk regions, where there was no military opposition to the pro-Russian identity (Wilson, 2016), witnessed a full-scale armed conflict. However, Wilson (2016) as well as a number of participants noted that since different identity groups coexist relatively peacefully in Ukraine before, the identity issues were a baseline in the contemporary crisis, and Russian involvement together with elites’ resources and influence were needed to escalate the pre-defined confrontation into a rigorous conflict.

Russian-Ukrainian or Russian-Western conflicts became another page in the history of the contemporary crisis. Although there was no major official military confrontation between Ukraine and Russia, the undoubted Russian involvement with the conflict in Ukraine resulted

in the deterioration of relationships between these countries, thus causing the break in relationships between citizens, and strongly affected international relations. Participants suggested that propaganda mechanisms engaged by all parties drove a wedge between populations of what they felt were once fraternal countries, thus expanding the political struggle into inter-personal conflicts. While recognizing the elites' ever-present desire for control in the contemporary world McNair (2006) suggests that today's mass communication often has a chaotic nature, and for that reason, becomes hard to predict and manipulate. Participants acknowledged the general chaos surrounding the development of the situation in Ukraine; yet, a number of them insisted that propaganda played a major role in the deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian relationships and in the escalation of the conflict. Black (2016 a) also noted that propaganda strategies that were engaged fueled the dramatic crisis between peoples and states.

By 2015 the Ukrainian government and leaders of the rebellious regions agreed on a ceasefire, which was often violated since the first days by both parties. Northrup (1989) described this type of conflict transformation as level-one changes, which by themselves don't bring deep and qualitative improvements in relationships between conflicting identity groups. Analyzing the situation in 2016, some participants suggested that they couldn't foresee any major changes developing soon and described the conflict as 'frozen'. Altshuller (2017) acknowledged a similar valuation of the situation, suggesting that some major steps were needed to proceed with further transformation. According to Kelman (2006), transformation of a conflict happens in three stages: conflict settlement, conflict resolution, and reconciliation; and to proceed with the process parties need involvement in gradual negotiations aiming: first, to accommodate their needs and interests; second, to

accommodate their relationships, and; third, to accommodate their identities. In such a manner, according to Kelman's (2006) model, so far participants of the Ukrainian conflict have to some extent settled the conflict; however, following the Minsk II Agreements, in more than two years no further transformation has happened.

Research participants tried to consider strategies that would help to resolve the conflict within Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia. The suggested strategies included grass-roots dialogue, consistent education, and recommendations for a deeper analysis of the incoming conflict-related information, as well as further and deeper negotiations between political and business elites, development of a common narrative that would address all conflict-born interpretations, and introduction of a common threat (as a worst-case scenario). All these strategies have the potential to reach the level-two phase of conflict transformation, where, according to Northrup (1989), some major identity-related changes begin. Yet the strong dissonance between the participants' ideal and realistic visions of the contemporary situation in Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia suggests that even if some major steps are taken, it will take many years for people separated by war to build a common peace.

In such a way, along with the participants, I travelled through five phases of the contemporary Ukrainian crisis, namely, Euromaidan, Crimean independence, rebellion in the Donbass region, the experience of war in potential war regions, and the Russian-Ukrainian/Russian-Western stage. This research has demonstrated that the conflict we've witnessed in Ukraine during the last four years is a multi-dimensional, deep-rooted, protracted, and complicated sequence of different interconnected conflicts. To resolve this present crisis parties must come up with no-less complex multi-step decisions, methods,

and tactics. Yet, to begin the real transformation, participating sides first must agree that they are willing to end the violence happening to people in Donbass, Ukraine, Russia, and other countries, where, as was mentioned before, people also experience breaks in relationships and other consequences of the conflict, affecting the lives of their close ones.

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, displacing more people and raising the scale of humanitarian crisis in the war-affected regions, research on its original causes, development and aftermath is becoming all the more important. This thesis underlines some perceptions of the conflict developed by Ukrainian and Russian citizens living in St. Petersburg and highlights some of the main problems related to the confrontation existing both in Ukraine and in Russia. As well, it encourages people affected by the conflict to develop their ideas on possibilities for conflict resolution, and promotes their suggestions.

The thesis should be considered a part of the global research on the Russian-Ukrainian relationship. Studying the different grass-roots level understandings the ongoing Ukrainian crisis and international confrontations, and exploring the conflict-related personal experiences and perceptions, broadens the general field of conflict research, which in most cases focuses on politics, international relations, and economy. This study also contributes to the existing inquiries on Ukrainian identities and the role of national identities, theories about the motivational power of basic human needs in conflict escalation, and the research on the role of the media in violent conflicts and the Ukrainian conflict in particular. The participants' stories highlight the complexity of experiences and perspectives amongst seventeen individuals – Ukrainian and Russian - who chose to be in St. Petersburg at the time of this research.

This thesis also underlines some challenges that conflict-affected Ukrainian migrants face while residing in Russia in general, and St. Petersburg in particular, and provides some understanding of the existing intercommunity atmosphere in St. Petersburg. The knowledge gained from this study may be useful for social agencies focusing on inter-community relations in St. Petersburg and in other areas facing similar challenges, in identifying the existing problems. It is my hope that this research will help to develop a vision for some possible options and ways of further development of peaceful relationships between people from different social groups and countries.

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, the young Ukrainian citizens who participated in the research were all coming from eastern and southeastern regions of Ukraine, with one participant coming from Kiev in central Ukraine. Some of those participants weren't coming from a war zone, but rather were affected by the conflict indirectly (living in potential combat regions and experiencing military presence and/or inner resistance). Thus, this research doesn't include voices and perspectives popular in other regions where people may have been differently affected by the conflict (for example, through the economic aftermath and/or because of the military draft for the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the east of Ukraine). It did not include people whose main working language was Ukrainian and/or those who moved from the same areas as the Ukrainian participants further into Ukraine rather than towards Russia. I didn't intentionally design the research this way; rather it happened due to external reasons: southern and southeastern regions are located at the border or closer to the border and have more historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic connections to Russia. Additionally, there are more mixed Russian-Ukrainian families there, leaving people with extended families living across the border

from each other (Fournier, 2002; Maltseva, 2016; Osipian & Osipian, 2005; Plekhanov, 2016). In this way, when the crisis emerged, many Ukrainians living in those regions viewed migration to Russia as a possible, if not the only option. Ukrainian citizens from other regions are also represented in the St. Petersburg community, yet in much smaller numbers, and during the fieldwork no migrants from western, northern or other areas responded to research advertisements. Including their voices would have provided a fuller and more informed thesis.

Second, the research design suggested the use of Russian as the main language of communication with study participants. In this way, all interviews were conducted in Russian, since for all participants Russian was either a day-to-day language, and/or they could speak both Russian and Ukrainian fluently; yet, if offered, some of them may have preferred to use Ukrainian during the interview, which might have helped them to open up more or feel more comfortable. In addition, the absence of the Ukrainian language option could leave some potential participants behind. And inclusion of the experience of Ukrainians residing in Russia whose main language was Ukrainian would enrich the thesis, potentially bringing in very different perspectives.

Third, while proceeding with participant recruitment I came across gatekeepers – moderators or administrators of websites and social network communities. To place advertisements about the research I had to receive their permission, which wasn't always granted. In such cases, potential participants who might have been found through those communities were never informed about the research opportunity and that also could have narrowed participant representation.

Fourth, only seventeen interviews all together were conducted, with people of completely different origins, identities, interests, professions, and views. Both men and women's voices were included in the research, yet the group wasn't broad enough to track any possible gender patterns.

The group was formed randomly with very few requirements from people (namely age, interest in conflict and/or some kind of connection to it, St. Petersburg residence, and Russian or Ukrainian citizenship, with no limitations to origin). People who decided to become participants of this research were not professing to be experts on the subject. For these reasons, this research is not a representative sample, but rather a qualitative study of a variety of experiences, opinions, and perspectives of people who were present and related to the Ukrainian conflict.

Keeping in mind the above-described limitations and the fact that as of September 2017 the conflict in Ukraine hasn't approached an end, I suggest that further research of this topic, as well as promotion of existing related inquiries are needed. Future research on the contemporary Ukrainian crisis should consider studying the NGOs and programs existing and operating in Ukraine and in Russia that aim at conflict resolution. It is my suggestion that to proceed with the transformation of the conflict, research similar to this some training in conflict resolution should be provided with leaders of such grass-roots organizations in both countries.

Besides that, more research needs to be carried out on the main problems Ukrainian conflict-emerged migrants face not only in various regions of Russia, but also in Ukraine and in European countries. Understanding and addressing these issues may help to identify possible gaps in operating systems and improve living conditions of these people, thus,

advancing the intercommunity situations, which, in their turn, may contribute to the resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, future research should consider exploring perspectives of western Ukrainians living in Russia, since their experiences may strongly differ from understandings discussed in the thesis, and thus may contribute to the development of the broader and deeper common conflict-related narrative.

Moreover, to understand the contemporary reality in Crimea, whose status is still very controversial, more research needs to be conducted with the population of the peninsula. It will help to better understand the position of Tatars and the Ukrainian population of Crimea. Besides that it would help to better understand the role of different groups of population, including local Cossacks, in decision-making process of 2014.

Furthermore, analogous research with a broader group of participants may help to distinguish some new ideas and patterns. For example, the analysis of experiences and thoughts of a larger group of participants may uncover some conflict-related gender determined insights. Besides, such qualitative inquiry may be supported with the research on the media field or particular media sources, which would help to connect participants' ideas with the information flow.

And finally, more work needs to be done in developing a dialogue both among and between identity groups that perceive themselves to be in opposition in Ukraine and in Russia. This research just opened up a discussion about an unaddressed gap, which is often present in relationships between people of different identity groups in St. Petersburg, and which without attention, may get deeper. Further research of perspectives of each other would contribute to addressing the existing inter-group problems.

This research developed through a group of participants' pictures of causes and the development of the contemporary Ukrainian crisis and the related international situation, as well as their suggestions for some strategies for conflict resolution. This research, incorporated with existing and future research on the topic, may significantly contribute to conflict transformation and resolution. If taken into account, this and additional research studies will help to understand the situation itself and add to the development of a much-needed complex and common narrative, making movement forward in peace a possibility.

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Appendix A

Interview Guideline

These questions were translated into Russian and were used as a guide during interviews.

Question #1

What is your connection to the conflict? How did the events in Ukraine affect you personally?

Question #2

Where were you when the conflict in Ukraine emerged? How did you feel about it? What was important that time?

Question #3

How did you get to know about what was happening in Ukraine? What influenced your understanding of the conflict? How did you receive your information throughout the conflict?

Question #4

How did you feel about Euromaidan? What do you think was the turning point of the revolution?

Question #5

What, in your opinion, were the reasons for the conflict? What has happened there?

Question #6

How were events unveiling for you? Describe your experience with the conflict.

Question #7

How do you see the future of the conflict?

Question #8

Describe your happy future. What are your hopes for yourself, your family, and your community, your country, Russia and Ukraine?

Question #9

What do you think the Russian and Ukrainian governments can do in the contemporary situation? What can Russian and Ukrainian people do/change? What, if anything, can you do or are already trying to do?

Appendix B

Political Map of Ukraine



Map developed by the United Nations (2014).