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**STATE-OWNED MEDIA INFLUENCE ON THE POLICY IN
RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

Final thesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper is featured by a multiple case study on the influence of Ukrainian and Russian state-media on domestic and foreign policy of the two countries, which after the beginning of 2014 also reside in the situation of the ongoing conflict. Besides the case study, an observational analysis on Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media outlets, modern cyberwarfare and their soft power influence has been conducted. The state-media in Ukraine and Russia, amidst the ongoing military and informational conflict, can be described as the Fourth Estate by their ability to shape public opinion both locally and internationally. In a significant addition, its ability to influence those personalities and bodies who are responsible for proposing legislation, attract international attention and persecute opposition figures is seen as a demonstration of the soft power.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, cyber conflict, state-owned media impact, post-Euromaidan conflict, fourth power

INTRODUCTION

This paper is visualized to be a contribution to a broad academic debate on the impact that both Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media (further – state-media) are setting about to the policy making process in the two conflicting states amidst the ongoing military conflict. In the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, the growing tension in the Ukraine-Russian relations intensified substantially with Ukraine's former Yanukovich regime being overthrown during the *Euromaidan* protests and the Russian annexation of Crimea in early 2014, which also sparked the pro-Russian unrest movements in the Eastern part of Ukraine (Zelinska 2017, 1). Given the fact that this paper is not, however, dedicated to re-evaluation of well-researched events surrounding the ongoing conflict, it is focusing on a multiple case study on how the state-media actors facilitate number of crucial changes in domestic and foreign policy to influence the post-*Euromaidan* conflict.

According to Babinský (2016) – who underscores a common perceptual *cliché*, modern history of Ukraine is strongly characterized by its position as a country, which is geographically located between the East and the West and whose geostrategic situation thus dictates its political course. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Ukraine's geostrategic preferences have been unstable, and, to some extent, confusing, with the country seeking alternately support in Russia and, on the contrary, in the political West, especially the EU and the USA (Babinský 2016, 435). Beginning from 1991, Russia has maintained its policy of influence in Ukraine, which included various aspects, including issues of nuclear disarmament (Mearsheimer 1993, 50), energy security and gas deals (Crandall 2014, 40), and generous support of pro-Kremlin officials in *Verkhovna Rada* (Kropatcheva 2014, 9). Over the decades after Ukraine acquired its independence, the relations between two countries were switching from stable to tense, which often depended on the high ranked officials in charge, as well as the policies pursued by different factions in the Ukrainian politics. Since the beginning of 2000, the Putin era in Russia, then new administration of Ukraine's biggest Eastern neighbor started executing the policy, which was concentrated towards decreasing human rights and civil opposition (Sakwa 2014, 3), increase of presidential power and decrease of power of federal ministries, despite, as documented in the scholarly studies, the lack of legal

grounds in the Russian Constitution for such reforms (Ortung 2001, 345-347). Besides, a high level of state centralization became evident (Petrov 2010, 1). In comparison, the Ukrainian politics, since the country became independent after the Soviet Union's collapse, can be characterized by seemingly chaotic political relations between the pro-Russian and the pro-Western factions, with the country ongoing various political, cultural and economic reforms based on the manifestations of political decisions influenced by specific players in the government and the parliament (Wilson 2006, 21).

Ukraine's political instability as opposed to autocratic centralization in Russia has played a major role in facilitating geopolitical shifts towards either the political West or Russia, either of which were often followed by nationwide political segregation and protests. Of the prominent examples, the 2004 'Orange Revolution' demonstrated the noncompliance of the pro-Western opposition to the electoral results of 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, initially in favour of the supposedly pro-Russian candidate – Viktor Yanukovich. Political events in the immediate aftermath have influenced the decision by Ukraine's Supreme Court to order the revote of the presidential election, where instead a new winner was announced in the upcoming months, now a candidate of the pro-Western party, Viktor Yushchenko (Karatnycky 2005, 1; Sushko 2008, 22-23). Despite Yanukovich being re-elected as Yushchenko's successor in 2010, the relations between Ukraine and Russia were seldom stabilized since the events of the Orange Revolution – it became a symbol of pro-Western protests – which are openly opposed or frowned upon by the population of the Russian Federation and the favouring Russia's segment of population in Ukraine (Wilson 2006, 30-31).

The role of the media as the so-called Fourth Estate is widely recognized (Amodu 2014, 1-2; Gentzkow 2006, 188). While the media is often perceived as the 'watchdog' of democracy, freedom of speech and protection of human rights, the countries with more government-owned or otherwise confined media practice are also believed to have less media freedom and lower levels of political and economic freedoms for citizens, as well as increased corruption (Whitten-Woodring 2012, 114-115). Both Ukraine (The Human ... 2017) and Russia (World Report 2017, 494-503; European Court ... 2017) have high levels of human rights violations. There is also a shortage of private owned media in Russian, with most media actors being state-controlled (Ognyanova 2014, 6). Both Russian-language and Russia-originated media also continue enjoying big influence in Ukraine, especially in the country's southern and eastern parts, despite the drop in trust in the pro-Russian media after the *Euromaidan* events (Dougherty 2014, 4). In Ukraine, however, the situation with media is more varied, albeit not necessarily different, as it can be hard

to differentiate between the state- and communally-owned media outlets. There is an evidence of Ukrainian television mediums (main media sources in the country) being controlled by Ukrainian oligarchy, where media is being mostly used as a private resource for specific political goals (Facing reality ... 2016, 5). After the events that triggered the latest Russia-Ukraine multi-dimensional conflict, - there is an ongoing informational war between the Ukrainian and Russian media. Within the multiple case study for the given final thesis, there was studied several prominent examples of political domestic and international events actively broadcasted in and to the extent influenced by Ukrainian and Russian state-media' between the period of 2014 and 2017.

Topicality of the paper within the discipline International Relations relates to the fact that there are little IR studies dedicated to the overview of the Russia-Ukraine latest 2014 and ongoing conflict from the standpoint of state-media influence. The lack of stability in foreign relations between Ukraine and Russia in the post-Soviet and especially post-*Euromaidan* periods is well documented in the academic (Babinský 2016, 435), political (Dougherty 2014, 1-2; van Metre 2015, 1; Sazonov 2016, 4-5), and Western media' (Yuhas 2014; Kirby 2015; Shearlaw 2016; Coman 2017) fields. What remains relevant as well as significantly under-researched in the context of this enquiry is the actual role of Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media in influencing the latest Russia-Ukraine conflict, especially in terms of facilitating changes in domestic and foreign policy of respective states. From theoretical standpoint, the influence of the Fourth Estate, the role of soft power and cyberwarfare are important constituents of this research work.

This paper underlines the **research problem** of insufficiency of post-*Euromaidan* 2014 studies dedicated to the problem of Ukrainian and Russian state-media impact on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Unlike the abundance of portrayals of Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Western media (Yuhas 2014; Kirby 2015; Shearlaw 2016; Coman 2017), little to none academic attention is paid to the role of Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media in influencing domestic and foreign policy in Russia and Ukraine during the latest conflict.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESIS AND RAISING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The **aim** of the final thesis is to conduct a multiple case study-based observation of the Ukrainian and Russian state-media' impact on the Russia-Ukraine domestic and foreign policy amidst the ongoing conflict. Theoretical background also reveals the raised research questions. The following **research questions** are raised:

1. What is the influence of Ukraine's state-owned media in the Russia-Ukraine conflict from the standpoint of Ukraine's domestic and international policy?
2. What is the influence of Russia's state-owned media in the Russia-Ukraine conflict from the standpoint of Russia's domestic and international policy?
3. Can the conducted multiple case study of state-owned media influence be characterized as the influence of the Fourth State and modern cyberwarfare?
4. What is the impact of Ukrainian and Russian media from the standpoint of soft power and the role of media-based conflict in lowering or facilitating the 'hard' tensions in Eastern Ukraine?

The **hypothesis** of the given final thesis is formulated as following: The state-owned media in Russia and Ukraine evidently play a role of the Fourth Estate in influencing the Russia-Ukraine conflict and facilitating changes in the domestic and foreign policy of conflicting states from both the hard and soft power positions.

The **research object** of the paper is the impact of Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media's on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The cases of Ukrainian and Russian state-media' influence in facilitating changes in both domestic and international policy of conflicting states during the 2014 and present Russia-Ukraine conflict were studied. This paper concentrated only on Russian and Ukrainian state-owned media' examples as the primary object of the multiple case study. The state- owned media analyzed within the current study is limited to the online media outlets that are

subject to government or oligarchy ownership in Russia and Ukraine. Social media and its impact on the Russia-Ukraine conflict or the policies of either side is not studied within the paper.

The research methods employed within the given thesis are the literature review and a multiple case study. The literature review is used to collect and analyze the textual information, which in case of a current study is the media data and scholarly studies. Literature review may be defined as “a systematic search of published work to find out what is already known about the intended research topic” (Robinson 1998, 58). The case study can be defined as a research method, used to explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships (Zainal 2007, 1-2). A multiple case study is a qualitative research method, which, according to Campbell & Ahrens (1998), enables the researcher to explore the differences between and within selected cases. Unlike the single case study method, a multiple case study allows to replicate findings across cases. While the advantages of a given research method is obvious in that it allows comparison between several cases to see different results, it is, as the scholars imply, crucial to choose case studies carefully so that the final results are possible to analyze on the basis of a single research problem (Campbell 1998, Baxter 2008, 548). Although some critics argue that case study methodology is often related to “*freeform research, where everything goes*”, such argumentation is only applicable to some political case studies with insufficient methodological rigor, whereas case studies remain valuable methodology for IR research, which help to improve understanding of worlds politics and other phenomenon’ (Bennett 2007, 172). The current study focuses on the cases of Ukrainian and Russian state-owned or otherwise state-sponsored media’ overviews of events between 2014 and 2017, related to the ongoing conflict, in order to determine the media’ influence on domestic and foreign policy in Ukraine and Russia and the media’ influence as the Fourth Estate on the on-going post-*Euromaidan* conflict in general.

The influence of the state-media in Ukraine and Russia on the domestic and foreign policy is measured by reviewing the news articles in Russian and Ukrainian biggest online-media outlets and their, which appeared and became popular between the years of 2014 and present. The most notorious, apparent from the impact standpoint, or otherwise interesting cases are selected and further reviewed for the case study. Popularity of news articles is measured in two primary steps. First, by sending *Google Search* queries, which allows to analyze how, did the popularity of particular news link change over the months/years, how many re-posting copies are present and see the duplicate content in the search query. Secondly, the case of particular news product was analyzed to see if it has a wide impact on the public in Ukraine and Russia.

At first, the news article and copies in other online news outlets to further study of a particular case have been reviewed. Then the case is described in the final thesis and the role of media as the so-called Fourth Estate in a particular case is outlined or correlation between development, progression or outcome of the case and the role of media in facilitating either domestic or international phenomenon is described.

Further, the theories of the Fourth Estate, modern cyberwarfare, and soft power are framing up the given multiple case study of the media influence within the conflict in subject. The following are the definitions and the theoretical overview behind each chosen phenomenon. The media is widely acknowledged as the Fourth Estate (Amodu 2014, 1-2; Gentzkow 2006, 188). Simultaneously, the notion of the media as watchdog, guardian of the public interest, democracy and freedom of speech, while remaining ingrained, is not limited to it. The role of media as a separate type of power, the Fourth Estate, today is not limited to the 'check and balance' of effective part of democratic government control, but the media is also prone to sleaze, sensationalism and superficiality (Coronel 2003, 4). According to Debatin (2016), the Fourth Estate is defined as a phenomenon of the democratic press to provide counterbalance to the three branches of power, typically the legislative, executive, and juridical, which it monitors from the outside and represents the public interest of society as a whole within the division of state and society. Although the Fourth Estate is not officially recognized as a part of the state powers and has no authority to change the decision-making within any of the three branches, the media nonetheless may indirectly influence the political process through critical coverage of the events of the day. In historical context, the idea of the Fourth Estate was developed in the XVII and XVIII 18th centuries, by philosophical and political authors Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire, Kant and others. During the World War II, however, it became evident that in the light of the major propaganda of the Nazis and other powers, the media' influence is no longer limited to public relations and as a measure to monitor branches of power, but is now an influential instrument of war propaganda and 'yellow' journalism (Debatin 2016, 1-5). To counter unreliability of the press, reliability and objectivity became primary values of professional norms of journalists. The famous report titled '*A Free and Responsible Press*' was published by the Commission on Freedom of the Press, which reaffirmed the influence and indispensable role of media as the Fourth Estate (Hutchins 1947).

Seven decades after the Second World War, the role of media became stronger and universal. The rise of globalization with its inevitable institutions and tools, which complemented not just individual lifestyles of industrial states but changed the overall practice of foreign relations,

including the increasingly globalized cooperation under the international organizations and the global media, including the media in the Internet, demonstrate an increase in the influence of the Fourth Estate. Today each person is in one way or the other, be it consumption or production, connected to the media, where the influence of the media on the public is no longer limited to observation and overview of information, but the media plays a role in formation of public opinion and interests in a form of public relations, advertisement, and propaganda. The latter is especially evident during the conflicting periods, where informational warfare is both an evident yet hardly distinguishable form of cyber-attacks. Libicki (1995) defines several forms of informational warfare, among which informational terrorism is a separate form, which includes file revelation (such as the leak of sensitive data), attacks on informational systems (hacker warfare), intelligence-based warfare and psychological warfare. The latter may be an especially popular form of cyberwarfare, as it is directed towards encompassment of the use of information against the human mind. This, in turn, implies that the scope of psychological impact of cyberwarfare is far beyond the typical informational aggression and propaganda, but its primary aim is to alter public opinion and, in some cases, form certain politically relevant ideas in target population (Libicki 1995, 35). Specifically, aside of its natural connection to cyberwarfare, term ‘information warfare’, according to Hutchinson (2006), developed in many Western liberal democracies in 1980’s. This expression, besides other conflicts and especially besides the Cold War narrative, became specific, as the author of the work puts it, “*living concept*” in the Gulf War in 1991 (Hutchinson 2006, 213). Thus, the informational warfare is both an established concept given its connection with the modern Fourth Estate of the Second World War and further world, and a relatively new concept given the establishment of new cyber and informational tactics in the media. The analysis of the influence of Fourth Estate on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict from the psychological position of cyberwarfare will be conducted in respective part of the final thesis.

The concept of soft power in modern international relations is a contested concept, because an actual effectiveness of soft power is not universally accepted among the IR and communication scholars. While some point at its effectiveness from the standpoint of political resources of the state and the ability of the state to effectively employ these possibilities to non-violently influence decision-making process of fellow governments, others, however, disagree that soft power can be sufficient without efficient military and economic balance shifts (George 2016, 1). Regardless of who of the experts is more ‘correct’ on the matter, the topic of the given thesis is not to study the problem of effectiveness of soft power, but among the research questions is raised a problem of the state-media influencing the conflict in subject from the standpoint of soft power. From

theoretical perspective, the role of media in soft power, and particularly state sovereignty and conflict resolution, is fundamental in that it is a key influence on state sovereignty from the standpoint of power of communication. Central to this account are the technologies of mass media, which allow political elites to distribute political messages to the target population, by means of political messages, which consist of images, narratives, and other symbols designed to characterize state authority as beneficial and just, thus inducing voluntary compliance with state dictates (Camber 2014, 1-2). Such power of communication is crucial in both interstate and civil conflicts and will be analyzed within the subject of latest Russia-Ukraine conflict.

From perspective of strategic narratives in international relations (i.e. how state actors interact both with internal public and external players), media power can be explained from positions of formation, projection and reception. Formation of strategic narratives, among which communicative goals like agenda setting, legitimation, diverting attention, securing acquiescence, enhancing popularity, and mobilization are formed, involves short-term or long-term communicative goals. The media thus plays a role as a tool to construct different political ideas based on strategic communicative narrative. It is noteworthy to add that certain communication strategies can often be used in specific environment, such as disruption or crises. Among the most popular forms of communication employed by political actors are persuasion and coercion. These, in turn, are often seen in rhetorical communication, such as rhetorical coercion. However, regardless of the media strategy employed, without proper projection of media environment, the results of media campaign can be random at best. In the new media environment, where the audience can be an actor itself, by commenting, liking, sharing and remixing information, projection of media environment becomes a crucial part of strategic narratives. Finally, reception within the new media ecologies implies that state and media actors have to critically evaluate the audience and the effects communication has upon the audience. Since the new media ecology is now complex to the point that no longer is the media a source of actual societal changes, which can be measured objectively using qualitative measurement, but the audience may actually bypass the state when dealing with the media. This is due to the fact that new media establishes connectivity between a community and an individual, which enables public communication without a state directly involved. Thus it is important for the state and media actors to identify the impact of communication on various groups within the bigger audience (Miskimmon 2013, 8-12).

2. THE CASE OF UKRAINE'S STATE-OWNED MEDIA INFLUENCING RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

According to Sushko (2008), majority of Russian media in the country had, for the most part of the post-Soviet period, little competition from the Western media, as Ukrainian versions of Russian newspaper enjoyed the major share of the market, despite some attempts at limitation from the Ukrainian government. However, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the trust in the Russia-controlled press became lower as the preference in Russian TV channels dropped, while the printed press still remained dominated by the Russian media (Sushko 2008, 9). According to the 2016 report by *Reporters Without Borders*, only a fifth of the population regularly used Ukrainian and Russian information sources, whereby a high level of distrust of Russian media prevails. At the same time, while the available reports outline a lack of state censorship in Ukrainian media, the private TV channels, which amount for the most popular information medium in Ukraine, are controlled by the oligarchy, which use them to gain advantages in their own political and business operations (Facing reality ... 2016, 4-5; Zhdanova 2017, 7).

After the events surrounding the *Euromaidan* and the Russian annexation of Crimea, the media sphere of the two conflicting countries started informational warfare by exchanging state-centered propaganda in regards to various events around the conflict. Besides the armed conflicts in the Eastern Ukraine (Bebler 2015, 196-197; Zelinska 2017, 1), the media broadcasts played perhaps the most major part in the conflict by not only influencing the population's response as the primary aim of propaganda (Jowett 1999, 6), but also facilitating domestic and foreign political decisions in respective countries. Further, the author studies some of the popular media materials in the Ukrainian media regarding the events around the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which facilitated changes in the state's domestic and international policy. Due to the abundant amount of propaganda produced in Ukraine and Russia in the period between years 2014 and 2017, the author does not perceive it as a realistic option to review most cases and their influence in the conflict. However, some of the most popular cases in Russian and Ukraine state-media and their possible influence on the country's domestic and foreign policy is reviewed in the case study.

The Ukraine's state-media impact in facilitating changes in the state's domestic policy to influence the Russia-Ukraine conflict

One of the most controversial change in the domestic policy facilitated by the political events circulating in the Ukrainian media was the so-called '*Savchenko Law*'. The law was adopted on November 26 2015 and became effective on December 24 2015, reports *Unian Information Agency* (Poroshenko enacts ... 2017), a part of the bigger media group *I+I Media Group*, whose owner is Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi (Konończuk 2017, 6-7). The Savchenko case was one of the most popular events circulating in the Ukrainian media since her capture by the pro-Russian forces and further detention in Russia in the beginning of War in Donbass (On the ... 2016). Since then, Nadiya Savchenko was portrayed as Ukraine's national hero and a symbol of Russian oppression by the Ukrainian media (Nadezhda Savchenko ... 2016), to the point that she was elected to the Verkhovna Rada in the 2014 Ukrainian parliamentary election while still remaining in detention (Savchenko poluchila ... 2014).

Under the '*Savchenko Law*', as reported by the Ukrainian media portal 112 UA, the court shall release the convict from punishment if the term of pre-trial detention in prison equals or exceeds the main sentence, in force since the effective date of the law. Several thousands of people were released under the law since its adoption (What is ... 2016). The project of the law was registered on November 5 2015, when Savchenko was still detained in Russia (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2015). Savchenko herself, who was already by then a member of the *Rada*, was one of the initiators of the project, stating that the law can be a first step of bigger changes in the penal practice of Ukraine, needed to improve the current post-Soviet system (Nadiya Savchenko ... 2016). The '*Savchenko Law*', while receiving mixed public reaction, was certainly influenced by the growing then national symbolism of Savchenko's detention in Russia as a part of pro-state national campaign in the midst of the informational warfare.

Today, however, the term '*cult of Savchenko*' in Ukraine is evidently no longer valid. Today, as of mid-April 2018, Savchenko is being accused of planning a terroristic act and a "military coup" in *Verkhovna Rada* (Terakt – eto ... 2018). Once national hero now continues to enjoy a huge amount of support in population, although its image in the political circles within the Ukrainian elite is no longer obvious. While some politicians continue to support her, others label her "an FSB protégé" (Who stands ... 2018).

Another prominent example of domestic changes influenced by the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the set of laws to start the so-called ‘decommunization’ process, approved in April 2015, a part of which was focused on outlawing the symbols of Soviet period in Ukraine. While the country underwent several attempts at passing the ‘decommunization’ laws in previous years, they were not particularly successful compared to the 2015 legislations (Ukrainian PM ... 2015). The success of acceptance of legislations can be explained by the crisis in Russia-Ukraine relations, as well as the influence of the growing post-*Euromaidan* anti-Soviet media campaigns led by the pro-state-media and the activists since the beginning of the conflict in early 2014. Shevel (2016) studied, that the reasons of a growing priority of the post-*Euromaidan* decommunization process in Ukraine are besides other factors the result of Russian aggression and the heated discussion in the local press (Shevel 2016, 2-3). At the same time, one of the major symbols of early *Euromaidan* in December 2013 was, at some point, anti-Soviet, as the monuments to Lenin were started being removed in Kiev (Rudenko 2014).

The Ukraine’s state-media impact in facilitating changes in the state’s international policy to influence the Russia-Ukraine conflict

It is complex to find the obvious connection between the influence of the state-owned press and the changes in the international policy of Ukraine to influence or as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, due to the rich chronology of events around the conflict (Baezner 2017, 6) and the chaotic informational warfare between two conflicting states. There is nonetheless clarity in regards to the fact that the post-*Euromaidan* crisis between Ukraine and Russia highly altered the very core nature of Ukrainian practice of post-Soviet international relations, which after the Crimean annexation became highly anti-Russia both rhetoric-wise and reflected in the policy changes. Since the start of pro-Russian unrest in the Eastern Ukraine (Zelinska 2017, 1), Ukraine has been executing the policy of reintegration of Donbass as its primary strategy against the pro-Russian military actions in the region, the movements typically defined as the ‘separatists’ or the ‘terrorists’ in the Ukrainian media (Shutov 2014). The war between the Ukrainian military forces and the pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbass region would normally be regarded as the civil war, meaning its analysis cannot be classified as a part of the international warfare. However, according to the Ukrainian media, the military conflict in the Eastern part of the country is in fact the all-out war between Russia and Ukraine (Over 35,000 ... 2017). Due to this, the current case study

analyzes the reintegration of Donbass as the event influenced by the Ukrainian media, in response to the Russian military aggression in the region.

According to the *Euromaidan Press*, the first bill of the ‘re-integration law’, passed on October 6 2017 titled “*On the specifics of the state policy to ensure the state sovereignty of Ukraine over temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts*”, is a legalized attempt to restore sovereignty over the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Among the key points of the bill are fixing Russia’s status as an aggressor state; defining territories controlled by the Russian-hybrid forces as temporarily occupied; safeguarding the right of Ukrainian citizens to their properties in the occupied territory, and other points (Donbass laws 2017).

According to both the Ukrainian media and the legislative bill, Russia is regarded as an aggressor state with its troops on the Ukrainian soil. As of January 2018, the Donetsk and Luhansk regions remain occupied by the pro-Russian forces (A report ... 2017).

While Ukraine could have banned many things connected to Russia over the period of the conflict, including the introduction of trade sanctions and the ban on rail and air links, according to media reports (Timofeychev 2017), one major international move on Ukraine side was the ban of Russian media, namely Russian TV channels back in 2014 (Ukraine bans ... 2014). Besides, top social networks in the post-Soviet region, including VK.com network, was banned by the Ukrainian authorities on in the first half of 2017 (Ukraine bans ... 2017; Luhn 2017). According to data company Alexa, *Vk.com*, *Yandex*, *Mail.ru* and several other Russian social networks were among the most popular used websites used in Ukraine, prior to their governmental ban.

3. THE CASE OF RUSSIA'S STATE-OWNED MEDIA INFLUENCING RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the leadership of Russian media in Ukraine was evident. With little Western competition, many Russian media-actors have entered the Ukrainian market to publish Ukrainian versions of Russian newspapers. While the authorities tried to limit the presence of Russian media in the country, the effort was proved to be ineffective for the best part of post-Soviet period in Ukraine (Sushko 2008, 9). The situation, changed, however, over the years as the tensions between two countries grew, so did the distrust of Ukrainian population towards the Russian media, especially after the *Euromaidan* events (Dougherty 2014, 4). In comparison to the Ukrainian media practice, the major share of which is controlled by the oligarchy while technically being privatized (Facing reality ... 2016, 4-5; Zhdanova 2017, 7), Russian media is totally government-owned (Ognyanova 2014, 6). Since the beginning of the conflict, Russian media resources, including social media and state-owned TV channels, as well as DDoS attacks towards Ukrainian media outlets, all possible modern propaganda forces were used in the cyber and informational warfare against Ukraine (Baezner 2017, 4-5).

The Russia's state-media impact in facilitating changes in the state's domestic policy to influence the Russia-Ukraine conflict

Since the beginning of the conflict, portrayal of certain Ukrainian symbolism, including images and media content, was banned in Russia over censorship means against the 'rival symbolism and propaganda', officially titled as 'publications inciting hatred'. Cases of political criticism towards and dissent against Russian authorities in regards to the events related to the the Russia-Ukraine conflict have also been subjected to censorship and persecution, as well as viewed as 'rival ideology' in Russian propaganda. For instance, a Crimean journalist Mykola Semena currently (as of January 2018) awaits European Court of Human Rights's decision regarding his failed case appeal at Supreme Court of Crimea over his criticism of Russia's annexation of Crimea from

Ukraine in 2014 (Trial Postponed ... 2017; Zashita Semenq ... 2017). Semena's position over annexation of Crimea and overall his individuality was initially and continues being propagated in pro-Russian media as related to 'Ukrainian propaganda' due to his affiliation with Ukrainian-centered media (Ukrainskij propagandist ... 2016).

The Russia's state-media impact in facilitating changes in the state's international policy to influence the Russia-Ukraine conflict

Since the acquittal of independence after the collapse, regaining control over Ukraine has been long on the Russia's wish list, as the control over the country would allow Russia to regain the opportunity to become an imperial state, the fact acknowledged in the geopolitical field since the very end of the Cold War (Golanski 2016, 68). Therefore, not so much was changed in the Russian imperial-nostalgic policy in regards to Ukraine, as it is clear that Russia's geopolitical interest involve acquiring control over the state, which would in turn give Russia access to more geopolitical options in the West. Interestingly to note, however, not so many sanctions were introduced by Russia against Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict, except for the retaliatory ban on the use of its airspace by Ukrainian aircraft (Russia hits ... 2014). The practices of exchanging captives was also practiced by Russian special services long before *Euromaidan* events. As such, in 2010 Russia exchanged alleged American double agents with several people recruited by Russia to allegedly provide intelligence information (Spy swap ... 2010). Nadiya Savchenko, who was handed over to Russia in 2014 for her alleged role in murder of Russian journalists was releases back to Ukraine in exchange for Russian intelligence operatives who were detained in Ukraine, in 2016 (Ukrainian pilot ... 2016). A similar case happened in Estonia, when one of Estonian intelligence service agent's was sentenced to 15 years in jail in Russia and later exchanged for a Russian spy imprisoned in Estonia (Russia and ... 2015). Therefore, not so much has seemingly changed in Russian foreign policy' practice in accordance with the influence from the state-controlled press. Russia continues to execute its imperial moves towards Ukraine by using all means possible, including cyber and informational attacks in order to slow down Ukraine's integration with the West (Baezner 2017, 4-5).

4. THE FOURTH ESTATE, CYBERWARFARE AND SOFT POWER: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN MEDIA' IMPACT

The following analysis is based on Ukrainian and Russian state-media' impact in the ongoing conflict as based on the studied cases in previous chapters. State-owned media' impact on patriotic symbolism, war rhetoric's, as well as specific influence of the media on internal and foreign policies established due to and directly connected to the 2014 and ongoing conflict of the two conflicting states is undeniable. Among the notable examples within the scope of studied material, the '*Savchenko Law*' of Ukraine was a direct influence of political rhetoric's and media coverage. Russia, in turn, uses its state propaganda resources to justify trials against manifestations of social media free speech by condemning and criticizing particular individuals after their persecution as happens in the Semena's case. Thus, by labeling someone as related to 'Ukrainian propaganda' Russia's authorities may persecute someone without the risk of sparking public protests over politically induced criminal charges. These and other cases certainly portray the state-media in Russia and Ukraine as related to the Fourth Estate. Its power is evident from being able to both influence, form and cease if needed public interest over hot topics such as warfare and foreign aggression, and is used locally to spread politically oriented messages among the population to acquire needed public reaction and internationally as a tool of soft power.

The media as the Fourth Estate: analysis of degree of its impact in the Russia-Ukrainian conflict and cyberwarfare

While the Fourth Estate is not politically recognized as a 'actual power, in terms of having authority other decision making, the state-media is paradoxically one of the most powerful tools to influence decision making or social reaction towards decision making. In terms of studied cases, Ukrainian biggest media such as Ihor Kolomoyskyi's *1+1 Media Group* is, as noted in respective

studies, controlled by Ukrainian oligarchy that may use it as a resource for personal or otherwise politically motivated gains. In Russia, situation with state-owned or state influenced media is simpler and does not need speculation over its ownership, as most of the media content is directly subject to the state and its special services, with shortage of privately owned informational channels (Ognyanova 2014, 6). During the ‘hard’ warfare, information war makes the power of the Fourth Estate even more evident. As is noted by Felman (1992), “amidst the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam, a new fundamental principle of war was born in conjunction with the proliferation of television and the growth of television news. powerful visual medium altered the entire interplay between the news media and government policy making. In particular, it would no longer be possible to wield the military instrument of national power without first considering how it would play in the news media.” (Felman 1992, 1).

It is impossible and void of research practicality to include all of the aspects of informational influence and cyberwarfare in the case of Russia-Ukraine conflict. As such, cases of hacker warfare between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian hacker groups, as was already studied in Baezner (2017, 10-12), for instance, and countless of other related cases did not appear on the pages of the given case thesis. What current analysis focuses on is as following: (1) an aspect psychological warfare in the case of Russia-Ukraine informational war; (2) the Fourth Estate from the position of three aspects of strategic narratives.

As described by Libicki (1995), an informational warfare is a multilateral concept, which besides other covered aspects includes psychosocial warfare, which by its definition encompasses the use of information against the human mind. This is primary tool to influence public opinion and altering specific politically induced ideas among the population (Libicki 1995, 35). During the conflict of two states psychological warfare becomes a primary instrument in respective antagonizing of the conflicting sides, as a part of the ‘new strategy’ as Seppälä (2002). At the same time, the new types of psychological warfare highly depend on the public support, which requires efficient propaganda efforts (Seppälä 2002, 3-4). As such, if one browses Russian and Ukraine state-media at any time around the recent years and currently, one will certainly notice a high psychological pressure, which not only is related to an actual ongoing conflict between the two players, but may as well target various local incidents that occur in any country. For instance, in the second half of 2014 and further the terms and abbreviations like ‘*cyborgs and separs*’, ‘*PTN PNH*’, ‘*Ukr*’ and ‘*Colorad*’, ‘*Vatnik*’ and other descriptions were in an abundant use in Ukrainian and Russian online and social media’, some of which could have appeared due to lasting cultural and political conflict between two rival parties or as a result of political events (Ukrainian wartime

... 2015). The limit of the given paper, however, does not include elaboration of those glossaries, but an example of such psychological strategy during the informational warfare is evident. From the standpoint of previously studied cases, the psychological warfare against Russia symbolism is evident in the course of the ‘decommunization’ campaign in Ukrainian media, which perceived Ukrainian-Russian relations from the standpoint of both current Russian aggression against Ukraine and historical Soviet repressions (Rudenko 2014, Shevel 2016, 2-3).

While the given thesis does not focus explicitly on the issue of strategic narratives in the state-media, its brief overview in the case study of Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Fourth State can be beneficial for the study. The aim of strategic narratives is to explain how state actors interact both with internal public and external players (Miskimmon 2013). Formation of strategic narratives is occupied with the communicative goals of agenda setting, legitimation, diverting attention, securing acquiescence, enhancing popularity, and mobilization. An example of agenda setting and legitimation in Russian media is overall evident in the state-media propaganda. Two notable examples can be distinctly seen in the case of annexation of Crimea and persecution of Crimean journalist Mykola Semena. Because of wide legitimation and agenda setting strategies, Russia’s media narrative of the self-determination of the “Crimean people”, and antagonizing *Euromaidan* by labeling it *coup d’etat* in Russian media, most of the pro-Russian public both in Russia and in other countries are in full support of Crimean annexation (Žalimas 2017, 8-10). Mykole Semena is under persecution and trial in Russia after criticizing a new regime for Crimean annexation. The pro-Russian public, however, perceives him as an agent of ‘Ukrainian propaganda’ thus he has little support among the pro-Russian internal population in Crimea (Ukrainskij propagandist ... 2016). The ‘*Savchenko Law*’ in Ukraine is a Ukrainian state-media example of agenda setting, legitimation. The previous Savchenko solidarity campaign, when Savchenko was still held under Russian jurisdiction, played a role of rhetorical persuasion of the public into acceptance of the controversial law (What is ... 2016).

From the standpoint of projection and reception i.e. analyzing the population and learning its attitude within the contemporary media ecology, Ukrainian and Russian state-owned media is seen as a wide and the powerful Fourth Estate mechanism, which has capacity and experience in how to project specific media campaigns and how to influence its public. It is without a doubt a huge industry with the Fourth Estate, a more broad analysis of which is, while not a part of the given paper may nonetheless spark interest in further communication studies.

Soft power and media in Russia-Ukraine conflict and the role of media in influencing hard tensions in Eastern Ukraine

Beginning with the *Euromaidan* unrest, the Eastern Ukraine has been subject to separatist involvement since early 2014 with its Lugansk and Donetsk regions being under pro-Russian military and administrative influence (Zelinska 2017, 1). The ongoing war between Ukrainian state forces and pro-Russian militants as well as its consequences are well known. However, from the perspective of the media in a role of a mechanism for the soft power of conflicting states, there is an evidence of the state-media influencing ‘hard’ tensions in the region. Szostek (2014) made a comparative study of several biggest Russian news exports and their influence on forming public opinion in Ukraine. Among the outlets nightly news include *Podrobnosti* on *Inter*, *Sobytiya* on *TRK Ukraina*, *Vremya* on Russia’s *Pervyy Kanal*. Daily broadsheets include *Den*, *Kommersant-Ukraina*, *Izvestiya v Ukraine*. Weekly newspapers include *Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine*, broadsheets *Zerkalo Nedeli* and *2000*, Berliner-format *Stolichnyye Novosti* and *Kommentarii*. During her study, these broadcast were available in Ukraine. While by today Ukraine has employed banning measures against Russian TV propaganda channels, as investigated in previous chapters (Ukraine bans ... 2014), evident soft power influence through Russia-linked media channels in Ukraine were still strong back in 2014, to the point that one could see an obvious lack of balance between Russian media operating in Ukraine and, on the contrary, Ukraine’s media on the audience living in Russia. Before the ongoing conflict, Russia’s media was one of the biggest News exporter in Ukraine (Sushko 2008, 9). Today situation is radically different, with Ukraine’s news shares mostly limited to Ukrainian state-owned media, social media and pro-Western news outlets. However, due to apparent separation of news exporters in both countries, it is now complex to distinguish between internal and external propaganda and the influence of soft power, since the latter applies primarily to the tool of influence in international relations. Nonetheless, the cases studied earlier indicate an apparent Ukrainian soft power influence on attracting tremendous international attention towards the conflict, something Kremlin’s authority would like to keep down since the annexation of the Crimea and the spark of tensions in Eastern Ukraine. Besides, the ‘re-integration law’ case indicates the use of soft power to pass certain foreign policy alterations so as to both, approve the use of hard power against the labeled aggressor and gain unlimited local public support for such operation (Donbass laws 2017).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Ukraine's state-media' impact on the latest conflict with Russia has been found to influence several domestic practices. Ukraine's media influenced country's symbol of national independence by adhering to the propagation of Savchenko's martyrdom during her imprisonment in Russia. Savchenko became a symbol of national sovereignty in Ukraine during her time in Russia and for several months after her release. During her imprisonment, besides being elected in the *Rada*, she was also one of the initiators of the controversial '*Savchenko Law*' (repealed Q5 2017). Another notable impact on the domestic policy influenced by the 'war-time' media' coverage is its role in the country's 'decommunization' process, which became especially successful after the *Euromaidan* events and the Crimean annexation. Namely, the laws successfully enacted in April 2015 focused on outlawing the symbols of Soviet period in Ukraine. State's foreign policy, while becoming obviously more directed towards the West since early 2014 and further was also heavily influenced by the state-media in its policy against Russia. The notable example includes the policy of re-integration of Donbass, which is regarded by Ukrainian media as the territory occupied by Russian military forces, and not as a civil conflict between Ukrainian military and Russian military/Russia-backed separatists movements. Finally, banning all kind of transportation and trade deals with Russia, while major Russian social networks and TV channels were also banned in Ukraine as a move against Russian governmental propaganda.

In comparison with the first part of the study, the research of obvious links between Russian government-owned media' influence on the changes in its domestic and international policy during the Russia-Ukraine conflict was less successful. It is widely acknowledged that Russia's media is extensively controlled by the state and is remains subject to heavy censure. However, little in Russia's domestic and foreign practice was found being influenced by the media's coverage, which would be related to the latest conflict with Ukraine. Most of the propaganda and intelligence related 'traditions', which became known since the beginning of the conflict, were already practiced by Russian government before, including capturing alleged spies in order to exchange them on people related to Russia and held in the foreign country. Therefore, it was complex to find

a certain link between Russian state propaganda and changes in the foreign policy. At the same time, obvious propaganda related influence was found in the case of Crimean journalist Mykola Semena, who was labeled as Ukrainian ‘propagandist’ in the Russian and pro-Russian press and charged with separatism because of his criticism towards Russia’s aggression against Ukraine sovereignty.

The power of the Fourth Estate during the informational or cyberwarfare between the two conflicting states has been shown to be evident. While not all types of cyberwarfare were analyzed due to the limit of the study, psychological warfare, which results in specific glossary towards the rival party and major propaganda, as well as formulation of specific politically induced mindset or attitude in the population is a major informational tool in Russia-Ukrainian conflict. Such is evident during Ukraine’s coverage of the ‘decommunization’ process and in Russia is especially evident in the media’s process of ‘whitewashing’ persecutions of Ukrainian opposition against annexation of Crimea, as is evident in the Semena’s case.

The influence of Russian state-media as the actor of soft power was more evident before the conflict than after, since Ukraine started banning Russian TV and social media exporters. This makes differentiation between the propaganda and the use of soft power by the state-media in Russia and Ukraine complex, since both are now mostly oriented towards local population. Simultaneously, few cases in Ukrainian media portray apparent ‘soft’ influence in the conflict, namely ability of Ukrainian media attract Western attention and lobbying international bills, such as the ‘Donbass re-integration law’, where Russia is labeled not merely as a part in Eastern Ukrainian conflict, but an actual international aggressor.

The earlier proposed **hypothesis** of the given final thesis can be considered as confirmed. It is evident from the fact that the informational war between Ukraine and Russia in the midst of the post-*Euromaidan* conflict has certainly influenced domestic and foreign policy of two sides. Ukrainian media, on the one hand, has been spreading hateful propaganda against Russia and, at the same time, positively influencing the state’s policy of national symbolism and re-integration of territories currently under control of pro-Russian rebels. On the other hand, besides using military aggression against Ukraine, Russia has been using various informational and cyber warfare means against Ukrainian stability and its propaganda was, beside other aims, focusing on persecuting ‘dissidents’ who opposed foreign moves undertaken by Russia against Ukraine after 2014.

Further research of the topic may include a narrowed field of study. One example is Russia's orientation towards China after the Western sanctions in 2014 and further and Russia's state-owned media's coverage of Chinese 'loyalty and friendship' towards Russia and the role of Ukraine's media in facilitating liberation from energy dependence on Russian gas. While briefly touched in the given thesis, a more in-depth analysis of strategic narrative and their execution in the state-media can be a key topic in further research.

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