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**THE IMPACT OF THE INFORMATION WAR ON RELATIONS  
BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

Bachelor's thesis

Programme International Relations

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Tallinn 2020

I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.  
The document length is 10 716 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
1. THE THEORY OF INFORMATION WARFARE .....	9
2. RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR: ATTITUDES AND ESTIMATES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS	13
2.1. Russian invasion to Ukrainian crisis and Russian propaganda .....	16
2.2. Intra-Ukrainian information war .....	21
3. THE IMPACT OF THE INFORMATION WAR ON RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKAINE .....	23
3.1. Possible scenarios of Russo-Ukratian relations.....	26
CONCLUSION .....	30
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	32
Appendix. Non-exclusive licence .....	35

## **ABSTRACT**

In the XXI century, the power of media can potentially make a crucial difference in the field of politics. More specifically, due to its multi-dimensional involvement in launching and maintaining information warfare, media can be one of the main factors that provide for the ultimate win in a conflict between countries. The mass media sources in different countries were contradicting to each other in delivering narratives on the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, which began in February 2014. The fact of violation of international treaties by a nuclear super-power not only led to the dismantlement of the global security system, but it also transformed a range of theoretical debates and practical policy-making procedures to focus more on the destructive power of information during an international conflict. This paper is dedicated to the information warfare, contextualising it with the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Employing a range of qualitative methods in detecting the main techniques used by modern media (both Russian and Ukrainian), the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014-2020 was identified as a provider for one of the most unprecedented platforms for information warfare.

Key words: Theory of information warfare, Ukraine, Russia, media, Russo-Ukrainian war.

# INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, especially over the past 20 years, information and technologies related to it have become increasingly influential. They are improving, getting out of the control of the state, and becoming the 'property' of the entire society. The Internet has made a particularly strong impact on the dissemination of information as well as development of information technologies. It should be noted that soon after the advent of the Internet, states realized that no country could have a monopoly on it, because, objectively, none has absolute control over it<sup>1</sup>. Closer to the context, therefore, it could be suggested that this century is the actual beginning of a qualitatively new approach to be used in the process of exchanging information, including all types of confrontational exchange or information wars (the concept of information war has been a very popular topic in as different academic fields as Political science, International relations, Social anthropology, Strategic communication, Security studies, Informational technology and many others)<sup>2</sup>.

The study of information wars is relevant, because in order to understand the processes in modern international relations, it is necessary to trace how changes in technology have affected the conduct of wars in the information space and how they, in turn, affect the bilateral relations not only of those who wage such wars, but also of third countries. In this regard, it is necessary to consider the information war, which affects Russian-Ukrainian relations, considering the conflict in Ukraine<sup>3</sup> as a moderator for this discussion, because it is featuring not only information and psychological, but also elements of cyber wars<sup>4</sup>. Arguably, Russia-Ukraine interactions, which go back into centuries, not only represent a highly complicated as well as multi-faceted interlinkage between the two largest nations of the Slavic world, but also, historically, make a crucial difference for the entire international system. Both World Wars were extensively fought over the territories of the present-day Russia and Ukraine; the 1917 Bolshevik revolt was predominantly focused on keeping Russia and Ukraine under the same geo-strategic 'roof'; the Ukrainian question was being answered during the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 1938 Munich

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, Jonathan B. "Preserving a Political Bargain: The Political Economy of the Non-Interventionist Challenge to Monopolization Enforcement." *Antitrust LJ* 76 (2009): 605.

<sup>2</sup> Libicki, Martin C. *What is information warfare?* NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV WASHINGTON DC INST FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper it is understood to be the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, sometimes also called the Russo-Ukrainian War, which is still current and has been featured by a number of military actions from February 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Snegovaya, Maria. "Putin's information warfare in Ukraine." *Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, Russia Report 1 (2015): 133-135.

Betrayal, the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop times, and via signing the 1975 Helsinki Accords. These days, the Russo-Ukrainian is the European continent's biggest conflict of the contemporary, and it is, possibly, making a tectonic impact on the global multi-polar redesign.

However, on this occasion, the research hypothesis of the paper is of a different nature – during the conflict in Ukraine, information warfare plays a major role and represents, due to countrywide coverage in each case, the main battleground for the two sides. The purpose of the study is to identify the nature as well as consequences of the information war for relations between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, in order to achieve this aim, it was necessary to solve the following research tasks: 1) to determine the theoretical basis of information warfare, terminology, and instrumentarium used by participants; and 2) to detect the effectiveness of the information confrontation between Russia and Ukraine (concentrating on the 2014-2016 period when open military actions were also taking place), while identify the impact of the information confrontation on Russian-Ukrainian relations.

The analysis of information war is framed by the theory of realism (the works of Thucydides<sup>5</sup>, M. Weber<sup>6</sup>, R. Aron<sup>7</sup>, H. Kissinger<sup>8</sup>, K. Waltz<sup>9</sup> who studied the problems of war and peace, taking into account the importance of force and the balance of forces in international relations). The methodological basis of the research was made up of general scientific methods: induction-deduction, comparative analysis of information policies (in both Russia and Ukraine), content and event analysis, method of cognitive mapping (analysis of speeches, and interviews of political elites in a) Russia, since it is a country which considers any the Ukraine-related development an existential threat to national security; b) Ukraine, because it is the main subject as well as the object of the crisis; c) the USA, since it is a country that is historically interested in strengthening its influence in the post-Soviet area; states), and d) the EU, because the opportunity to conclude an Association Agreement with which was one of the main slogans of the Euromaidan in Kyiv, in 2013-14).

On concrete notes, content analysis is a formalized method of studying text and graphic information, which consists in translating the studied information into quantitative indicators and

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<sup>5</sup> Thucydides. Translation and notes by G. A. Stratanovsky. History of the Peloponnesian war. The fifth book. url: [http://librebook.py/history\\_of\\_the\\_peloponnesian\\_war/r.1/5](http://librebook.py/history_of_the_peloponnesian_war/r.1/5) (09.012020)

<sup>6</sup> Weber M. Politics as a vocation and profession // Weber M. Selected works: 1990. Pp. 644-650.50.

<sup>7</sup> Paix et guerre entre les nations: la théorie des relations internationales selon Raymond Aron. URL: [http://www.persee.fr/doc/rasp\\_0035-2950\\_1962\\_num\\_12\\_4\\_403400](http://www.persee.fr/doc/rasp_0035-2950_1962_num_12_4_403400) (02.02.2020)

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger H. the restored world: Metternich, Castlereagh and the problems of the world, 1812-1822. Boston. 1973. P. 146.

<sup>9</sup> Waltz, Kenneth N. Theory of international politics. Waveland Press, 2010.

its statistical processing. It is characterized by great rigor and systemic nature. The essence of the content analysis method is to fix certain units of content that is being studied, as well as to quantify the data obtained. The object of content analysis can be the content of various publications, radio and television programs, movies, advertising messages, documents, public speeches, and questionnaire materials<sup>10</sup>. The source database includes state and international documents that relate to the regulation of information policy (technical aspect and content). State documents include laws of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the United States, official concepts and strategies governing the implementation of information policy. These types of sources make it possible to determine the institutional environment for regulating state policies in relation to information technologies and dissemination of information. Were also used other sources such as speeches and presentations, press conferences of heads of state and government of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, USA, the EU Member States, thanks to which it became possible to identify examples of the use of information weapons. Other important sources for the study were statistical data, such as the official results of Ukrainian and Russian electoral campaigns and referenda, which assisted in the process of identification the extent of the impact of the information war on the citizens of Ukraine and Russia. In addition, surveys conducted by the Levada Center and the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) were significant for this study.

In addition, a method of forecasting was also employed in order to build a prospective scenario based on the analysis of existing problems in Russian-Ukrainian relations in the context of information warfare. For this, an analysis of world politics as a system was used, taking into account the following six levels proposed by J. Rosenau in 1971 (“individuals, their positions, the structure of government, society, the system of relations between the national state and other participants in international relations, the world system”<sup>11</sup>).

The scientific novelty of this study is in the analysis of Russian, Ukrainian, and Western information campaigns, as well as their impact on relations between Russia and Ukraine, which is academically under-researched but severely politicized field. Usually, Russian, Ukrainian and Western experts focus their work more on the very fact of the information war, its individual characteristics, rather than studying its impact on bilateral Russian-Ukrainian relations using a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the causes and mechanisms of information war in the

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<sup>10</sup> Neuendorf, Kimberly A. The content analysis guidebook. sage, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Bordachev T. V. in collaboration with Zinovieva E. S., Likhacheva A. B. Theory of international relations in the XXI century. Textbook. Moscow: International relations. 2015. P. 98.

post-Soviet space. There is also a nouvelle approach offered in assessing the effect of the information war on the Kremlin's policy towards its post-Soviet neighbourhood.



# 1. THE THEORY OF INFORMATION WARFARE

At the turn of the XX-XXI centuries, the world entered a period of regional armed conflicts and political instability. The number of large-scale military actions of a global, regional, and national nature has increased dramatically. The assessment of the military-strategic situation shows that the transformation of forms and methods of warfare that began more than twenty years ago under the influence of the concept of network-centric war<sup>12</sup> has become more and more relevant in recent years. At the same time, hidden or 'latent' confrontation is increasingly used to achieve geopolitical or economic goals, as well as the use of non-military forms of struggle is being intensified. The power to control information is becoming increasingly important, there are many variants of the concept of information war. Almost every scientific article or monograph treats it differently. As argued, the information war is, in many respects, a journalistic notion, which appeared on one side on the basis of futurological discourse generated by the concepts of post-industrial (information) society via Daniel Bell, Alvin Toffler, Manuel Katella, and, on the other hand, by the reflection in journalism objective phenomena: filling in the information sphere, the emergence of new types of media, growth of speed of information dissemination and increase the impact of information on other areas of society. At the same time, the notion of 'information war' reflects at least two important trends: first, it is the projection of the confrontation from the military (power) sphere into the information sphere, and second, the realization of the advantage gained in the information sphere in the power dimension of the conflict<sup>13</sup>.

The modern understanding of information warfare arose in part due to the development of the work of John Boyd<sup>14</sup>. These works substantiate that any war includes three elements: moral war — the destruction of the enemy's will to achieve victory by separating it from its allies (or potential allies) and internal fragmentation, undermining common faith and common views; mental war — the distortion and distortion of the enemy's perception of reality based on misinformation and creating misconceptions about the situation; physical war — destruction of the enemy's physical resources (in the case of information war, this is the destruction (suppression) of the infrastructure of state and military administration, information and telecommunications systems.)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Cebrowski, Arthur K., and John J. Garstka. "Network-centric warfare: Its origin and future." In US Naval Institute Proceedings, vol. 124, no. 1, pp. 28-35. 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Valiullin, Ildar Ildarovich. "The evolution of the concept of" information war" in political science." International relations (2014): 68-74.

<sup>14</sup> Osinga, Frans PB. Science, strategy and war: The strategic theory of John Boyd. Routledge, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Osinga, Frans PB, 2007.

Information warfare consists of a set of information operations carried out in the information space in the interests of achieving information superiority. At the same time, it is necessary to distinguish information war from cyber-attack. Any cyber-attack is a violation of a particular law. It can be random, or it can be specially planned; it can be isolated, it can be part of an extensive plan of attack. However, the conduct of war is never random or isolated (and may not even be a violation of the law) but involves a concerted effort to use information as a weapon of war.

A 2011 Convention draft on ensuring information security of the United Nations (UN) defines information warfare as an inter-state confrontation in the information space with the purpose of causing damage to information systems, processes and resources, critically important structures; to undermine political, economic and social systems; massive psychological processing of the population to destabilize society and the state, as well as forcing the state to make decisions in the interests of the opposing party<sup>16</sup>.

According to Roger Molander, there are three main political objectives of information warfare, namely: changing the structure of economic, political, information and psychological systems of any state in accordance with the interests of the one who carries out the information attack; achieving military and political superiority in the international arena; achieving the goals of information and psychological expansion<sup>17</sup>. It is also necessary to note the role of the media in conducting informational and psychological campaigns that have a propaganda impact on the intellectual and emotional aspects of society. Mass media are the main means of information wars. They use asymmetric information (disinformation) as one of the ways to influence the population. This concept is derived from research on the relationship between information and economics by M. Bashlar and C. Turner. Bashlar, for example, argues that the concept of disinformation is a concept developed in the field of economics and information relations<sup>18</sup>. Characteristically, in many areas of life, information is asymmetric. When one party owns it more than the other, asymmetric information is exchanged between them.

The media often increase the information asymmetry in society, which can be observed mainly in the field of news. Misinformation is purposeful and deliberate, related to the desire to confuse

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<sup>16</sup> UN Convention on ensuring international information security (concept). 2011.—URL:

[http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/191666](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/191666)

<sup>17</sup> Molander, Roger C., Andrew Riddile, and Peter A. Wilson, *Strategic Information Warfare: A New Face of War*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1996. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR661.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR661.html). Also available in print form

<sup>18</sup> Başlar M.A. *The Influence of Media on the Reconstruction of Social Reality Through Asymmetric Information*. URL:[http://cicr.blanquerna.url.edu/congres\\_vi/actas/dades/ambit2/2.%20Gulsah.pdf](http://cicr.blanquerna.url.edu/congres_vi/actas/dades/ambit2/2.%20Gulsah.pdf)

people and mislead them. The dissemination of false information in society includes the intention to make citizens of any state believe in false information and make incorrect decisions. Disinformation is a method that politically influential groups use to influence public opinion through the media. Thus, the mass media, possessing an asymmetric information advantage, can at any time mislead the public, misinforming it, if necessary. Therefore, the power can generate reality by presenting information in a favourable light for it. Full control over the media makes it possible to shape public opinion in their own interests. Thus, political, and economic institutions can manipulate society in every possible way through the media. Misinformed, ignorant in certain areas and issues, people have the risk of unfavourable selection<sup>19</sup>.

In this way, the media can change and transform social reality. Instead of revealing the reality of the mass media in most cases hide it. In addition to the government, the media is strongly influenced by the owners of capital, who Finance information wars and campaigns in the media space. Consequently, under their influence, the media can inform people in a way that will mislead society in accordance with the political or economic interests of individual companies or individuals. Initially, the main moral responsibility of the media was to raise awareness in society. Turner argues that journalists still need to be guided by a moral obligation to raise awareness in society. The problem of moral hazard is applied to the media to show that, in the relationship between the agent (the media) and the principal (the public), there is a moral risk. Turner continues that the moral hazard that arises in the relationship between the media and the public can be reduced<sup>20</sup>. She claims that journalists are morally responsible for the accuracy of the information they provide<sup>21</sup>. The media do not have the power and are not able to correct any shortcomings in society, but they have the right to inform people of the truth, on the basis of which they will make decisions.

The use of information weapons is, in fact, the use of military force, since propaganda is an instrument of war (military force is replaced by information weapons, in particular, information technology). Therefore, the consideration of the impact of information wars on relations between states should be carried out taking into account the established definitions and theses about the essence of war in the theory of realism, in which the main subjects of international relations are

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<sup>19</sup> Campbell, K. K. *The interplay of influence: News, advertising, politics, and the mass media*. Wadsworth: Belmont, CA, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Turner K. *Public Service Reporting in the Era of Commercialized Media*. URL: [http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1208&context=honr\\_theses](http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1208&context=honr_theses)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

states whose interests are intertwined, which leads to conflicts and wars as an extreme manifestation of conflict<sup>22</sup>.

Based on the theory of realism, it could be suggested that, even in the information age, the main subject of international relations is the state. Force (in the information space, military force replaces the use of information and information technologies in their own interests) is the main tool in inter-state relations and represents the ability of one state to control the thoughts and actions of another with the help of information weapons and the threat of their use, both in the information space and in cyberspace.

The current state of international relations in the information age also accurately describes the thesis of Raymond Aron that “international relations develop in the shadow of war”<sup>23</sup>, in particular, in the XXI century in the shadow of the information war, which has not stopped since the end of the cold war. It is also worth paying attention to the fact that within the framework of the theory of realism, force and the balance of forces are the main regulator of international relations. For example, according to Henry Kissinger, “the balance of opportunities—the balance of power is important for international stability”<sup>24</sup>. Regarding the information war, this thesis can be exemplified by the example of the information campaign, which unfolded during the Russian-Ukrainian War, in particular, because of the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The EU and USA saw in Russia’s policy a desire to change the balance of power in the post-Soviet space. They supported Ukraine in protecting its territorial integrity and trying to prevent Russia from changing the balance of power by pursuing its policy. Against the background of this event, the information war was launched with a new force. In the context of the ongoing struggle between countries to strengthen their influence in the information space (the information war is going on in peacetime as well), the optimal state is the balance of forces through the improvement of information technologies and the legislative framework that regulates the information component, both domestic and foreign policy.

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<sup>22</sup> Libicki, Martin C. *Conquest in cyberspace: national security and information warfare*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Paix et guerre entre les nations: la théorie des relations international essel on Raymond Aron. URL:[http://www.persee.fr/doc/rfsp\\_0035-2950\\_1962\\_num\\_12\\_4\\_403400](http://www.persee.fr/doc/rfsp_0035-2950_1962_num_12_4_403400) (30.03.2020)

<sup>24</sup> Kissinger H. *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822*. Boston. 1973. P. 146.

## **2. RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR: ATTITUDES AND ESTIMATES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS**

The conflict in Ukraine is currently the most acute from a military and political point of view in the entire post-Soviet space. Russia has supported the authoritarian president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich during the Euromaidan of 2013-2014, held an illegal referendum in Crimea in March 2014, after which a sizeable part of the Ukrainian territory – Crimea – became *de facto* controlled by the Russian Federation. This was followed by a range of successful provocations to arrange and maintain unrest in some of the regions of the eastern Ukraine (in the Donbas area) via supporting the collaborators with finance, personnel, and weapons from Russia. In the summer of 2014, regular units of the Russian army were presented, which not only saved the pro-Russian forces from defeat, but strengthened them, and created a front line with the capture of new territories. It was a tragic event for Ukraine, which sent many on the road of refuge, brought incalculable suffering and losses of more than 10,000 Ukrainian citizens being killed, more than 21,000 injured, 1.8 million losing their homes, while 44,000 km<sup>2</sup> of territory being occupied, and 20% of the country's industrial potential being destroyed<sup>25</sup>. During the initial three years of war, Ukrainian citizens received an unprecedented traumatic experience, because of which the positions and assessments of Ukrainians of relations with Russia, its state institutions, the Kremlin's policy in the Ukrainian direction, and the prospects for contacts between Kyiv and Moscow have changed dramatically.

The relevance of the research topic is determined by the fact that during all these 29 years after the collapse of the USSR, numerous events took place related to diplomatic relations between the participating countries. Many positive and negative aspects happened during the period of the existence of the former Soviet republics, independent of each other. After Ukraine became independent, it began to pursue an ambiguous foreign policy with a confused focus. Ukraine was looking for an opportunity not only to maintain the relatively stable relations with Russia, but also build relations with the EU in a non-aligned manner. Despite this, since 2014, a monumental political crisis began in relations between Ukraine and Russia, which influenced not only bilateral relations, but also the entire international system.

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<sup>25</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine. June 13, 2017. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21730>

With the beginning of the hostilities, the information war between Russia and Ukraine started being exemplified by such events as the Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, military actions in Lugansk and Donetsk oblasts, and, certainly, MH17. More specifically, one of the reasons for the mass protest, which took place in the centre of Kyiv and contributed to the emergence of the Euromaidan in 2013, was the decision made by Viktor Yanukovich to suspend the process of signing the Association Agreement with the EU. Other reasons that led to the mass action are social injustice, a large gap in the doses and standard of living of Ukrainian citizens, widespread corruption – these are problems that always existed<sup>26</sup>.

The following sociological studies on the problems of Ukrainian-Russian relations were conducted by the Razumkov Centre, perhaps the most reputable Ukrainian non-governmental public policy think tank, in November and December 2016<sup>27</sup>. In one of the surveys, citizens characterized the state of relations between Ukraine-Russia, determining the causes and consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, evaluating the policy of Russia in the Ukrainian direction, and predicting further development of bilateral relations. On details, most often, citizens describe relations between Ukraine and Russia as antagonistic. The percentage of respondents who share this view in November 2016 was 46% (the maximum was 57%, such assessments were observed during the distinct escalation of hostilities in October 2014). More than a third (37%) of respondents consider them bad, and only 12% chose the neutral characteristic as unstable, and only 2% of respondents consider them good. Given the absence of any prospects for solving the problem of the annexed Crimea and the uncertainty of a peaceful settlement of the situation in the Donbas – there is no reason to predict that this picture of the assessment of the state of bilateral relations will change for a more positive mode in the nearest future.

It is worth noting that then closer approach to the conflict zone, the share of those who consider Ukrainian-Russian relations antagonistic decreases – from 55% in the Western region to 41% in the Donbas (due to an increase in the number of respondents who consider them bad or unstable). This can be explained by the fact that among the residents of the Eastern regions, where the level of sympathy for Russia has traditionally been higher, the most noticeable pro-Russian sentiment-hence the tendency to give more moderate characteristics of Ukrainian-Russian relations.

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<sup>26</sup> Motyl, Alexander J. "The surrealism of realism: Misreading the war in Ukraine." *World Affairs* (2015): 75-84.

<sup>27</sup> Razumkov Center December 16-20, 2016 with cooperation of Foundation for Democratic initiatives. 2,018 respondents aged over 18 years were interviewed in all regions of Ukraine, except for the Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. <http://razumkov.org.ua/>

By Razumkov survey the main reasons for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are Ukraine's attempt to get away from the Russian Federation's direct influence, Moscow's rejection of the European integration course of Kyiv as well the concept of Ukrainian statehood that can, in principle, have an independent foreign policy. The Russian leadership considered and still considers Ukraine as a zone of its privileged interests in the post-Soviet space, and its independence as an artificial and temporary phenomenon, a historical incident. The European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine is perceived by Moscow as a desire for Kyiv to get out from under Russian influence. To prevent this, the Kremlin launched a hybrid war, using a full range of means – from military expansion in the Donbas to economic pressure, energy blackmail, information sabotage, instigating separatist sentiment in the regions and supporting terrorist organizations in the Donbas<sup>28</sup>.

Separately, it should be noted that only 5% of respondents believe that violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine are the cause of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict<sup>29</sup>. As this claim was declared by the Kremlin leadership and the media controlled by it as the main reasons for the conflict in the Donbas.

The most negative consequence of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is the destruction of economic ties between the countries. The majority (60%) of respondents agree with this. In the second position – the deterioration of inter-state political and diplomatic relations (44%), in the third – the growth of negative attitude of Ukrainians to Russians and Russians to Ukrainians (38%). It should be noted that, in contrast to the previous study (November 2015), the number of respondents who mention the energy aspect has decreased slightly, and the number of those who focus on negative consequences of a humanitarian nature has increased<sup>30</sup>.

Relations between the people of Ukraine and Russia have deteriorated over the past year. This is stated by the majority (61%) of respondents. At the same time, the share of such assessments decreased against the background of the maximum indicator recorded in October 2014, when respondents compared these relations with the end of 2013 (with the situation before the commencement of the conflict in the Donbas). At the same time, the negative can be attributed to

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<sup>28</sup> Razumkov Center December 16-20, 2016 with cooperation of Foundation for Democratic initiatives.

<sup>29</sup> Sayapin, Sergey. "An alleged "genocide of Russian-speaking persons" in Eastern Ukraine: some observations on the "hybrid" application of international criminal law by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation." In *Use of Force against Ukraine and International Law*, pp. 313-326. TMC Asser Press, The Hague, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Razumkov Center, 2016.

the fact that almost a third (29%) of respondents say that these relations (which are now bad) have not changed.

The attitude to the Russian leadership and state institutions of the Russian Federation was negative in 2014-2016. In November 2016, the share of those who have a negative attitude to the President of the Russian Federation was 74% and is similar to the indicator of April 2014. A similar trend is observed in relation to other state institutions of the Russian Federation – the Government and the State Duma.

The attitude towards the citizens of Russia is more restrained. However, compared to April 2014, the number of Ukrainians who have a positive attitude to Russians has significantly decreased – from 45% to 29%, while the level of negative attitude has increased, although not significantly – from 17% to 21%, and the share of those who are neutral – from 33% to 39%. In other words, most often Ukrainian citizens express a neutral attitude towards Russians. But in general, such a picture of assessments, where a neutral and negative attitude clearly prevails, can be considered as evidence of distancing, distrust, and alienation of Ukrainians from Russians.

## **2.1. Russian invasion to Ukrainian crisis and Russian propaganda**

Active information policy is an integral part of the overall strategy of the Russian Federation in the field of international relations. This is confirmed by all the main events of the historical period that began after the end of the USSR, and most clearly seen during crises and conflicts: the Russian Federation conducts comprehensive information activities aimed at achieving its goals in the process of pushing for and then justifying various actions in relation to other countries. Relations with Ukraine, which for various rational and irrational reasons are particularly important for the Russian Federation and its leadership, are accompanied by the most active work in the information sphere. At the present stage of relations, the strengthening of the information component of the Russian Federation's policy are the events of 2013, concerning the conclusion of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, and the subsequent ongoing Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, including a few open ones in 2014-2016. It is quite natural that during conflicts with other states in the public sphere, the Russian Federation has always paid special attention to arguing the legality of its own actions with considering of norms and principles of international law. Certain approaches to the main issues of international legal regulation of interstate relations were



consistently developed. However, the conflict with Ukraine has become special in this regard. First, the information dimension of the conflict has become more important, which is greatly facilitated by the technical development of the means of communication and mass media.

Actions of an active party to an international armed conflict (aggressor) always require serious information support, which is associated with significant objective difficulties in arguing their legality, legitimacy, and justice, for both domestic and foreign audiences. These difficulties are more typical, of course, for relations with other subjects of international law, foreign actors, and the international community, than for the interaction of the state with its own population. In the case of the Russian Federation, citizens usually show support for the actions of the country's Government, but this does not detract from the importance of information activities, the purpose of which is, of course, to unite society around the government, to subordinate anti-government sentiment and opposition political forces, which is especially relevant in times of international conflicts and, consequently, instability. The actions of the Russian Federation in Crimea and Donbas radically changed the position of Russia on the international arena. This is primarily due to the perception of its behaviour by most foreign states as being illegal, significantly violating international peace and security and creating fundamental threats to the international legal order. International law, as the main regulator of international relations, provides for several serious measures of responsibility for States that violate its provisions grossly and systematically. It is also extremely dangerous for a state if other actors refuse to comply with international legal norms and principles in relation to it.

The Euromaidan in 2013-2014 was and is generally viewed very negatively in the Russian Federation by both the authorities and the doctrine. The relevant events are considered in the information space as organized and sponsored by the West, anti-Russian in political and social nature, carried out by nationalist and fascist forces as part of the struggle against Russia, the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. In the legal aspect, these ideas are reflected in several main theses, which, in turn, include several components: "Ukrainians had no right to revolt against the regime of Viktor Yanukovich", "in Ukraine, in February 2014, there was a military coup"<sup>31</sup>; "Yanukovich's displacement from power was flagrant violation of the Constitution of Ukraine"; "the new Ukrainian government is not legitimate and consists of fascists"; "as a result of the coup, the collapse of Ukrainian statehood occurred, a new state was formed"; "the Russian Federation has no international obligations to this state", "the West has

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas, Timothy. "Russia's military strategy and Ukraine: Indirect, asymmetric—and Putin-led." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 3 (2015): 445-461.

grossly interfered in the internal Affairs of Ukraine, violating the international people's legal principle of non-interference, led Euromaidan, and put pressure on the Ukrainian authorities”<sup>32</sup>.

It could be suggested that the Russian position that there was no legal grounds for an uprising against the Yanukovich regime was and is based on the desire to destabilize the internal political situation in Ukraine after the change of power in February 2014, and to narrow the possibilities for responding to the actions of the Russian Federation in Crimea, which were carried out at the same time. On the other hand, we are talking about the need to discredit protest movements in other states to avoid same situation in the Russian Federation itself. The corresponding campaign, which is carried out by both the Russian media and the doctrine, has been going on since the events of the so-called ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia, in 2003<sup>33</sup> and ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, in 2004<sup>34</sup>. No less important for the Russian Federation was to present arguments of its actions during the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February – March 2014, one of the directions of which was to promote views that “there was an illegal removal of Yanukovich from power”, “a fascist regime was established in Kiev”, “violence is being carried out against the residents of Crimea”<sup>35</sup>. Russian President Vladimir Putin applied one of the most important methods of information activity for the Russian Federation, which in 2014-2016, was repeatedly used by representatives of the Government and the media. It consists of attempts to demonstrate the superiority of the Russian Federation, first of all, to its own citizens.

Despite the actual and perceived socio-cultural closeness of Ukraine and the Russian Federation (and, most definitely, the other way around), Russia was not able to effectively use information power, which was evident during the conflict in Ukraine. The escalation of the political conflict in Ukraine also demonstrated the inability of the Russian Federation to influence Ukrainians. But the information campaign inside the country had great impact on citizen’s mind. The reaction of the Russian Federation to the Ukrainian crisis was quite predictable, rational, and calculated. The Ukrainian crisis forced Russia to use countermeasures in the information war with Ukraine and Western countries. Russian media used as evidence of the correctness of the Russian position, such tools of information warfare as propaganda (mainly video format, which is particularly effective for forming the necessary perception of events), continuous broadcasting of events from Ukraine. According to a Levada Centre poll conducted in the autumn of 2014, it can be detected that most

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Presidential election campaign in Ukraine and Russia. Radio Svoboda. 27.10.2004.

<sup>34</sup> Karatnycky, Adrian. "Ukraine's orange revolution." *Foreign Aff.* 84 (2005): 35.

<sup>35</sup> Trofimov, Eugene Alexandrovich. "The Crimean issue and the future of the Russian state." *Izvestiya Irkutsk state University. Series: Political Science. Religious studies* 8 (2014).

Russian citizens trusted the way state television covered events in Ukraine – they did not want to believe that the TV programs had a propaganda-driven agenda. In their opinion, Western countries, the United States and Ukraine in itself started an information war against Russia, and not *vice versa*. Only 11% of Russians agreed that the Russian state media was waging an information war against Ukraine, and that this represented a danger to bilateral relations<sup>36</sup>. More than 80% of Russians considered the Russian Federation a victim of the information war launched by Ukraine, the United States, and the EU<sup>37</sup>, given that the state-owned Russian media have an almost undivided monopoly on presenting events on the territory of Russia. It is also necessary to emphasise the fact that a small number of Russian citizens were familiar with alternative sources of information and were able to carry out an objective analysis of events in Ukraine<sup>38</sup>.

According to the survey, approximately 37% of Russians did not want to read, watch, or listen to alternative media that presented an alternative view of events in Ukraine (Maidan, Donbass). An interesting fact is that 26% of Russian citizens believe that alternative sources deliberately distort information in an anti-Russian direction and constitute propaganda<sup>39</sup>. A Levada Centre poll conducted in the autumn of 2014 also showed that 52% of Russian citizens believe that Ukraine's policy is determined by the US and the EU. In addition, 70% of Russian citizens are convinced that the Ukrainian conflict was imposed on Russia by the USA and the EU. Thus, we can conclude that Russian citizens do not believe that Ukrainian oligarchs have a special influence on Ukrainian politics, as they did 10 years ago (but their role is also taken into account in the conflict), and even local nationalists are taken less seriously by Russians in relation to their influence on Ukrainian politics and the course of the conflict. In general, Russian citizens are convinced that the US and the EU are trying to manipulate Russia and, to an extent, detect what kind of leverage the Russian side possesses to be able to influence other actors in the field of international relations (especially, in the context of the conflict in Ukraine).

When the Verkhovna Rada on 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2014, by 232 votes in favour repealed the law 'On principles of state language policy'<sup>40</sup>, according to which the Russian language received the

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<sup>36</sup> The Levada Center. Russians only believe the news of Federal media about events in the Ukraine. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/2014/11/12/rossiyaneveryat-tolko-novostyam-federalnyh-smi-o-sobytyah-na-ukraine/>(19.03.2020)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> The Levada Center. Russians only believe the news of Federal media about events in the Ukraine. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/2014/11/12/rossiyaneveryat-tolko-novostyam-federalnyh-smi-o-sobytyah-na-ukraine/>(19.03.2020)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> "Sight". The Parliament has canceled the law on the regional status of the Russian language/ URL: <http://www.vz.ru/news/2014/2/23/673985.html> (19.03.2020)

regional status where it is native at least for 10% of the population, it naturally increased the degree of negativity in Russia towards Ukrainians. In addition, when American and European diplomats started demonstrating support of the post-Euromaidan new Ukrainian authorities, it significantly strengthened the belief of Russians that the political West has a significant influence on Ukraine, and that the Ukrainian side is simply a ‘blind’ follower of Western politics. In 2014, due to the intense information campaign, it was detected that 83-88% of Russians believed that Ukraine, the United States and the EU were waging an information war against Russia during the conflict in Ukraine, while 64% of Russian citizens are convinced that the Russian Federation is not waging an information war against Ukraine<sup>41</sup>. *Table 1*, quoting some of the most popular media sources, shows a comprehensive set of perceived reasons for the conflict.

Table 1. Names of Russian media sources and its reasons for Ukrainian crisis

Name of the media source	Reasons for the conflict
“Argumenty I Fakty”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge corruption</li> <li>• Decision of the Ukrainian government to suspend the process of signing the Association Agreement with the EU</li> <li>• Selectivity of the Judicial system</li> <li>• Weak protection of property</li> <li>• Criminal and political raiding</li> <li>• Offshorization</li> <li>• Greed and selfishness</li> <li>• The division of society</li> </ul>
"Moskovskij Komsomolets"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure of the US on Ukrainian government and its overthrow</li> </ul>
“Kommersant”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shale gas deposits located in the area where the armed confrontation is most violent between Luhansk, Slavyansk and Kramatorsk</li> </ul>
“RIA News”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unprofessional actions of the West</li> <li>• Genocide of Russians in Ukraine</li> </ul>
“Lenta.ru”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coup supported by American and European partners</li> </ul>

Source: Author’s summary based on content analysis of Russian newspapers covering the news about Ukraine situation in Russian news media.

<sup>41</sup> The Levada Center. Military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/2014/11/27/voennyj-konflikt-na-vostoke-ukrainy/> (20.03.2020)

Based on this summary, it can be argued that the Russian media do not identify a specific cause of the conflict in Ukraine, but clearly indicate a high number of directions on where to search for the reasoning. Each media outlet reveals a variety of reasons for the conflict, considering the thematic focus of each resource. The most used method of conducting information warfare of Russia is ‘direct refutation’, which is applied to the information about the presence of Russian military forces on the territory of Ukraine. The Russian media publishes statements by well-known foreign persons that Russia is the aggressor and participates in the war in Ukraine by deploying its troops in the south-east of the country. Russian side completely refutes this accusation and at the end of most stories, a disclaimer is given: “international observers have never recorded the presence of Russian military personnel on the territory of Ukraine. In addition, according to information in the Russian media, Moscow has repeatedly officially denied all the accusations and highlighted that

## **2.2. Intra-Ukrainian information war**

As for Ukraine, the Ukrainian information campaign is successful within the country, as evidenced by the above-mentioned surveys. Proof of the success of information propaganda in Ukraine is the fact that most citizens are convinced that Russia is participating in the war in the eastern of the country, on the side of the collaborates. The success of Ukraine within the country is a consequence of the fact that the leadership that came to power in May 2014, primarily established its influence over the media sources, informational advantage due to the exclusive use and control of the media. An important element of the information campaign in Ukraine that ensures its success is to restrict the broadcasting of Russian television channels within the country, since they feel that Russian television is stronger, given also that it is difficult for Ukraine to fight against the truth, also banning the work of correspondents of many Russian TV channels and news agencies, complicating the work of those who are still allowed to enter and operate on the territory of Ukraine.

In addition, according to the content analysis of Ukrainian media conducted by a Russian source, the Ukrainian media managed to form a negative image of Russia in all contexts (bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine, Russia’s role in the military conflict in eastern Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, Russia’s involvement in the crash of MH17)<sup>42</sup>. Thus, the anti-Russian

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<sup>42</sup> Threats to information security in crises and conflicts of the XXI century. Edited by A.V. Zagorsky, N. p. Romashkina, Moscow: IMEMO RAS, 2015, P. 96.

sentiments were solidified in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian media, in general, emphasized the importance of imposing sanctions against the Russian Federation<sup>43</sup>.

It is also worth paying attention to the fact that one of the most dangerous components of information wars is cyber-attacks, which in most cases it is impossible to find participants, since they can be purposefully carried out on foreign territory, using proxy servers of a foreign country, which makes it much more difficult to determine the real origin of cyber-attacks. For example, after an incident that occurred in December 2015 on the territory of Ukraine, namely, the implementation of a cyber-attack on the Ukrainian power grid, which led to a power outage in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, American senior security officials said that the attack was committed by the Russian side. However, it should be noted that the Obama administration was not hastening to blame Russia for the incident<sup>44</sup>, while the security service of Ukraine publicly accused the Russian Federation of attacking the power system<sup>45</sup>.

Consequently, the points of view of the citizens of Russia and Ukraine differ significantly, since as a result of the information war, opposite images of each other are formed. For example, Russians believe that the citizens of Ukraine are a fraternal people who have stumbled and need help to find the 'right' way back. While Ukrainians are sure that Russia has carried out an act of aggression against Ukraine, they accuse the Russian Federation of imperial ambitions, of trying to prevent Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU. Over time, the constantly broadcast official position of Russia (in Russia) and Ukraine (in Ukraine) becomes the personal position of readers and viewers within the two countries.

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<sup>43</sup> Threats to information security in crises and conflicts of the XXI century. Edited by A.V. Zagorsky, N. p. Romashkina, Moscow: IMEMO RAS, 2015, P. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Perez E. U.S. Official Blames Russia for Power Grid Attack in Ukraine. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/11/politics/ukraine-power-grid-attack-russia-us/index.html> (02.03.2020)

<sup>45</sup> The SBU has warned of an attempt by Russian special services to disable Ukraine's energy facilities. URL: [http://www.sbu.gov.ua/sbu/control/uk/publish/article?art\\_id=170951&cat\\_id=39574](http://www.sbu.gov.ua/sbu/control/uk/publish/article?art_id=170951&cat_id=39574) (02.03.2020)

### **3. THE IMPACT OF THE INFORMATION WAR ON RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

The impact of the information war on Russian-Ukrainian relations should be judged by the degree of its impact on changing bilateral relations in the fields of economy, politics, and culture. The information war has a negative impact on relations between Russia and Ukraine. This is proved by the Levada Centre survey on the attitude of Russians to Ukraine, which indicates the deterioration of bilateral relations in general<sup>46</sup>. In addition, according to a joint study by the Levada Centre and the Kiev international Institute of sociology, more than 60% of Ukrainian citizens believe that the Russian Federation and Ukraine are at war, and about 25% of Russians hold the same view<sup>47</sup>.

The deterioration of relations between Russia and Ukraine due to the conflict in Ukraine and in the conditions of information warfare can be judged by the polls, 2013-2016 Levada-Centre and the KIIS. For example, 52% of Russian citizens are convinced that Russia and Ukraine need to become friendly states (without visas and customs)<sup>48</sup>. At the same time, the citizens of Ukraine believe otherwise: only 43% supported the opening of the border (in November 2013, 73% of Ukrainians wanted the borders to be open)<sup>49</sup>. 32% of Russian citizens and 43% of Ukrainian citizens were in favour of closing the border<sup>50</sup>. A possible unification of the two states is out of the question, as evidenced by the low percentages in the polls (only 11% of Russians and 4% of Ukrainians responded positively to this)<sup>51</sup>.

Considering that for the majority of the population in both Russia and Ukraine, television is the main, and sometimes the only, source of information, the results of the survey demonstrate the negative impact of the information war on relations between Russia and Ukraine, as the consciousness of citizens of both countries is greatly changed by the media. As a result, the degree of alienation between Ukrainians and Russians has increased, which has a negative impact not only on interstate relations, but also on interpersonal ones. The consequences of the information

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<sup>46</sup> The Levada Center. The attitude of the countries. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/индикаторы/отношение-к-странам/> (04.03.2020)

<sup>47</sup> The Levada Center. Russians and Ukrainians differ in their assessment of war and peace.url: <http://Russians-I-Ukrainians-differ-in-the-assessment-of-war-and-peace/> (04.03.2020)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> The Levada Center. Russians and Ukrainians differ in their assessment of war and peace. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/2016/03/10/rossiyane-i-ukraintsy-razoshlis-v-otsenke-vojny-i-mira/> (04.03.2020)

war cannot be quickly overcome for many reasons (for example, a high number of casualties, the situation with the Crimea). In both countries' media are reinforcing the diametrically different positions: Ukrainian citizens are sure that the Russian Federation is conducting military operations on their territory, while Russians do not perceive the conflict as acutely. Some Russians are not even aware of the possibility that Russian citizens fight in Ukraine since the Russian media show events as an internal struggle that resembles a civil war.

The impact of the information war on Russian-Ukrainian relations can be estimated based on economic indicators. For example, the trade turnover of Ukraine with the Russian Federation in 2015 decreased by 63% (more than 2 times), exports of Ukrainian goods to the Russian Federation decreased by 61.3%, imports of goods from Russia also decreased significantly – by 63.9%<sup>52</sup>. However, in December 2015, Russia remained Ukraine's largest trading partner (12.8% of exports to Russia and 20% of imports from Russia)<sup>53</sup>.

In addition, the Ukrainian side stopped military-technical cooperation and cooperation in the military and security sphere with Russia. For example, "Ukraine has stopped servicing missile systems that were manufactured at the *Yuzhmash* enterprise, military transit and transit of dual-use goods both through the territory and airspace of Ukraine has been stopped"<sup>54</sup>. Speculatively, Ukraine expected that the Russian defence industry would suffer because of this, that it would collapse. It considered itself the leading workshop for the Russian defence industry. Undoubtedly, problems in the Russian Federation arose in connection with these actions of Ukraine, for example, the Mykolaiv plant made turbines for military vessels of Russia, but now the Russian Federation seeks to develop its own analogues.

In addition to economic indicators showing the deterioration of bilateral relations, culture is an important indicator in relations between countries. The deterioration of cultural bilateral relations can be judged by the fact that Russian actors and musicians are forbidden to enter the territory of Ukraine. Analysing the impact of the information war on relations between Russia and Ukraine, we can conclude that as a result of information campaigns, economic, political and cultural ties between Russia and Ukraine were severed. It will be very difficult to restore them in the coming decades since several generations were affected by the information war. Objectively, the

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<sup>52</sup> UNIAN. The trade turnover between Ukraine and Russia has decreased by 2 times in nine months.: <http://economics.unian.net/finance/1185438-tovarooborot-ukrainyi-s-rossiey-za-devyat-mesyatsev-sokratilsya-v-2-raza.html> (06.03.2020)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> UNIAN. NSDC: Ukraine has imposed sanctions against 1,700 Russian citizens since the beginning of the aggression. URL: <http://www.unian.net/politics/1121118-snbo-ukraina-s-nachala-agressii-vvela-sanktsii-protiv-1700-grajdan-rossii.html> (06.03.2020)



consequences of the information war are a reduction in trade turnover, the closure of the free trade zone, the strengthening of nationalistic tendencies on both sides, enmity between Ukrainians and Russians, increased hatred, perpetual false accusations.

On the nouvelle factors, Russians are sceptical of the figure of new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The majority of Russians know almost nothing about his activities, and those who see Zelensky positively are in a clear minority. Russians do not see the head of the Ukrainian state as a transformative figure for the future of the two countries. The attitude of Russians to Ukraine is gradually becoming more and more pragmatic<sup>55</sup>. Given the current level of bilateral relations, their dynamics, and the depth of contradictions between the two countries, Russians do not see conditions for a breakthrough and do not attach high expectations to Ukraine and Russian-Ukrainian relations. In Ukraine, they do not see the enemy, but they do not see it as a friend. Most Russians believe that Russian-Ukrainian relations will be normalized sooner or later, but some kind of ‘brotherhood’ between the countries can hardly be restored quickly.

67% of respondents believe that Russian-Ukrainian relations have not changed during the term of the new Ukrainian President. Optimists who believe that the relationship between Russia and Ukraine has rather improved were 16%. 9% of Russians became pessimists who saw the deterioration of relations. At the same time, positive changes are seen primarily by men (22%) and young people (27%). At the moment, more than half (53%) of respondent’s rate Russian-Ukrainian relations as rather bad. In some ways, they are considered good in some ways bad by 30%, but rather good-only 5%. Given the drop in ratings of support for Zelensky in Ukraine, we can expect that in Russia, the attitude to the new Ukrainian President will continue to deteriorate.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Russian public opinion research center. VCIOM. Russian-Ukrainian relations: on the way to realism. <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10082>. (05.03.2020)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

### **3.1. Possible scenarios of Russo-Ukrainian relations**

Russian aggression has changed the attitude of Ukrainian citizens to Russia, the Russian leadership, and the prospects for cooperation with Russia. Given the uncertain prospects for the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there is hardly any reason to predict changes for the better in the relations of Ukrainian citizens to Russia in the near future. Most often, citizens evaluate relations between Ukraine and Russia as hostile. The reason is Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin's unfavourable policy in the Ukrainian direction. According to Ukrainian citizens<sup>57</sup>, the Russian-Ukrainian war is caused by Ukraine's attempt to get out from under the influence of the Russian Federation, Moscow's rejection of Ukraine as an independent state with an independent foreign policy and its course towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Only a small part of respondents believe that the cause of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is the violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine.

The most negative consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are the destruction of economic contacts between countries, the deterioration of inter-state political and diplomatic relations, and the growth of mutual negative relations between citizens of Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards Russian state institutions – the President, the Duma, and the Government – is consistently negative. At the same time, in 2014-2016, the attitude towards Russian citizens has also changed – the part of Ukrainians who have a positive attitude to Russians has decreased. The majority of respondents' state that relations between the two countries' peoples have deteriorated over the past year, and they feel alienated between Ukrainians and Russians.

Ukrainian citizens are very sceptical about the prospects for relations between Kyiv and Moscow in the coming years. In their opinion, in the medium term (1-3 years), cannot expect positive changes in the Russian-Ukrainian direction. In general, there is a tendency to distance people from Russia in their positions and assessments. Most respondents note the need to reduce cooperation and influence of the Russian Federation on Ukraine or even curtail cooperation with Moscow. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has caused a noticeable increase in the number of supporters of European and Euro-Atlantic integration in Ukrainian society. Ukrainians prefer integration into

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<sup>57</sup> Razumkov Center December 16-20, 2016 with cooperation of Foundation for Democratic initiatives. 2,018 respondents aged over 18 years were interviewed in all regions of Ukraine, except for the Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. <http://razumkov.org.ua/>

the EU rather than joining the Eurasian economic Union, and as the most optimal option for ensuring security, countries often choose to join NATO<sup>58</sup>.

The state of Russian-Ukrainian relations is affected by a variety of factors-domestic political, social, economic, military-strategic, and even psychological. With all the variety of these factors, it is possible to build a matrix of forecast scenarios of future Russian-Ukrainian relations. The most realistic scenario, called the 'Status quo' by experts, implies maintaining the current bilateral relations. There are no objective conditions for reconciliation between Russia and Ukraine, and the decisions taken in 2014 will continue to determine the agenda between the countries. This scenario assumes that Ukraine will not be able to make significant progress in the coming years on the path of economic reforms, strengthening government institutions, improving the efficiency of public administration, and fighting corruption. The split between the government and society, as well as the fragmentation of society itself, will deepen. This does not mean that Ukraine will collapse or turn into a 'failed state': The West will continue to support the Ukrainian authorities afloat, providing them with the minimum necessary economic and technical assistance. Questions about Ukraine's entry into the EU and NATO will be put off for an increasingly distant future, and serious Western investment in Ukraine will not come. The opposition to Russia in these circumstances remains one of the most important sources of legitimacy for any potential Ukrainian leader.

Under these conditions, there are reasons to predict the continuation of the current status quo for a long historical perspective. Russian-Ukrainian relations will remain hostile, although neither side is likely to risk escalating the conflict or completely severing trade and economic ties or diplomatic relations. Both Moscow and Kyiv will continue to be dominated by expectant moods-hopes that sooner or later the other side will be forced to make serious concessions. Russian and Ukrainian societies will continue to diverge in cultural and civilizational terms, which, however, will not automatically mean a parallel rapprochement of Ukraine with Europe.

The 'warming' scenario means a gradual but limited restoration of Russian-Ukrainian relations. This is an attempt to focus on problems that can be solved in the near future: a complete ceasefire in the Donbas and the creation of infrastructure for the payments of pensions and benefits to the territories that are currently not controlled by the Ukrainian government (this was during the election campaign, said Zelensky), the restoration of direct flights (it is repeatedly offered by Russia), the easing of sanctions and the resumption of normal trade relations, the agreement on

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<sup>58</sup> Razumkov Center December 16-20, 2016 with cooperation of Foundation for Democratic initiatives.

Russian gas transit and gas purchases by Ukraine. The problem with this scenario is that each side is not ready to be satisfied with small steps and seeks to win the conflict, experts say. The Russian authorities need at least a neutral Ukraine that recognizes Russia's interests in the region and is ready to take them into account. Ukrainian elites can and are ready to recognize the insolubility of the problem of Crimea and mostly insist on returning the situation in the Donbas to the format before 2014.

The third scenario – ‘Escalation’ – may result from maintaining the *status quo*. This does not mean a war between countries: both Moscow and Kyiv consider raising rates as the most effective tool to maintain the intensity of the confrontation. For example, for Russia, the existence of the self-proclaimed ‘republics’ is of some value, since they keep Ukraine from joining NATO and the EU, and Moscow simply does not have any other levers for this. Moreover, the threat of losing this asset may force Russia to escalate – for example, by issuing Russian passports to residents of the occupied territories of Ukraine. In its turn, Ukraine can provoke local military clashes in the Donbas or in the waters of the Black and Azov seas to change the level of involvement of the West in the confrontation with Russia – this is how Poroshenko acted<sup>59</sup>.

The most optimistic scenario is based on strengthening Ukrainian statehood and defusing tensions between Russia and the West. If these two processes run parallel to each other, it is possible not only to avoid many of the risks inherent in other scenarios, but also to gradually turn Ukraine into an economic, political, and even cultural and civilizational bridge between Russia and the West, which would meet the long-term interests of all parties to the current conflict. In order for such a scenario to become a reality, it is essential for Russia (and not only the current Russian government, but also a significant part of Russian society) to recognize and accept the subjectivity of the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian government. That is, to take for granted the fact that it is not obvious to everyone that Russians and Ukrainians are still two different, even if historically and culturally close to each other people. For Ukraine (primarily for the current Ukrainian political elite, but also for a part of Ukrainian society), it will be equally important and no less difficult to recognize the continuing regional, socio-economic, ethno-confessional, cultural and linguistic pluralism in the country. This pluralism is the result of a long, complex, and contradictory history of the part of Eastern Europe that exists today within the borders of a single Ukrainian state. The conflict with Russia may indeed have led to the formation of the Ukrainian political nation, but it

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<sup>59</sup> Kuzio, Taras. "Euromaidan revolution, Crimea and Russia–Ukraine war: why it is time for a review of Ukrainian–Russian studies." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59, no. 3-4 (2018): 529-553.

could not and did not cancel the diversity that had been developing for centuries. This means that the current political agenda will be requiring serious correction<sup>60</sup>.

For the West (mainly for the EU and the United States), the most important task would be to recognize that the scale and nature of Western support for Kyiv in the future should be determined not only by a degree of confrontation towards Russia, but also by consistency and progress in the socio-economic and political modernization of the country. In other words, as it was argued by Timothy Snyder, after reaching a breakthrough on the Donbas, Ukraine should be perceived in European capitals and in Washington as an independent direction of foreign policy, and not as a convenient springboard in the geopolitical confrontation with Moscow<sup>61</sup>.

Changes in mentality will not happen quickly, and the current logic of confrontation will long affect specific political decisions made in Moscow, Kyiv, and Western capitals. The balance of mutual movements is quite possible here. Especially if the adaptation process turns out to be gradual, divided into many parallel concrete steps, not necessarily in the form of some confusing documents such as the Minsk agreements. The main thing here — not the format, redefining the parties' long-term interests and perceptions of changes in their approaches as forced concessions, but rather as necessary steps towards realizing these long-term interests<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Shelest, Hanna. "After the Ukrainian crisis: Is there a place for Russia?" *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015): 191-201.

<sup>61</sup> Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Tim Duggan Books, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> D'anieri, Paul. *Politics and society in Ukraine*. Routledge, 2018.

## CONCLUSION

In the XXI century, information is crucial in making political, economic, and military decisions. In addition, the formation of the information society has a significant impact on the information security policy of each state. Due to the development and improvement of technical capabilities for information dissemination and the formation of a unified information space, information wars have become a common and dangerous phenomenon.

The fact that the information war is being waged during the conflict in Ukraine can be judged by detecting the methods of participating in it used by Russia, Ukraine, and the political West in the struggle for their national interests. In addition, information war begins, as a rule, before the armed conflict, but continues after it, and it can start after the end of the war (for example, reviewing the progress and results of the Second world war and of a country's contribution to the victory over Nazis). In the information war, the impact on people's minds is carried out both from outside and from inside the country. The analysis of the impact of the information war on relations between Russia and Ukraine allows us to conclude that the information impact within the country is of crucial importance. Despite the considerable amount of literature that covers the problems of information warfare, there are many unresolved issues related to the deepening of complex mechanisms of information warfare and their impact on bilateral relations between countries.

Summing up the results of the research, we can draw conclusions about the main characteristics of information wars, participants in the information confrontation during the conflict in Ukraine, the effectiveness of their information policy and the impact of information war directly on relations between Russia and Ukraine. Firstly, information warfare using modern information technologies is a phenomenon of a new era, which is comparable in its consequences and damage to a real hot war. It is a continuation of politics through the use of information (thanks to the development of new technical means of dissemination of information and the formation of a global information space) as a weapon to suppress the will of the enemy and impose their ideals and values on him. The information war between Russia and Ukraine has become particularly acute, which is typical for the border area, especially for territories where disputes have not been settled definitively (Crimea and Sevastopol). For example, during the information war between the countries, diametrically different information about the territorial belonging of Crimea were introduced by all parties.

Secondly, participants in the information war during the crisis in Ukraine are as follows: Russia, whose aggression into Ukraine is presented as a response to an existential threat to national security; Ukraine as the main subject and object of the crisis; the United States due to its geo-strategic interest in the post-Soviet territories; and the EU, since Ukraine is now in Association with the entity.

Thirdly, television is the most influential of the Russian Federation on the territory of Russia and Ukraine. That is why the Ukrainian side closed access to Russian television, because of the desire to preserve its information field, not allowing the influence of the Russian Federation on it, since Ukraine initially was on the losing side in the information war. Notably, the US information campaigns have had significant success during the conflict in Ukraine, not only in Ukraine, but also in the EU countries.

Fourthly, the information war has a devastating impact on relations between Russia and Ukraine. With each stage of the information war, they deteriorate more and more, thereby increasing the gap between the two countries. Thus, summing up, we can say that the information war has become a reality in the XXI century, which was especially pronounced during the studied period. In the XXI century, thanks to the modernization of information technologies, the creation of modern media (television, radio, mobile communications, the Internet), which have a unique ability to repeatedly affect the consciousness of both individuals and large social groups, information wars have become more dangerous and turned into 'hot wars' that can cause material damage to the warring countries.

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