# The long gone past?

## Using the power of history to justify the separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine

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**Abstract**

This master thesis explores the ways separatist leaders in Eastern Ukraine (specifically Donetsk People's Republic) employed historical narrative to justify the violence in the region. The research is based on analysis of video statements by Alexander Zakharchenko and Pavel Gubarev retrieved from YouTube.

In this paper I argue that separatists used a certain frame in their statements: "ethnic Russians in Ukraine are being oppressed and therefore have the right to separate". To explain the usage of this frame I relied on the framing as a mass communication theory.

To analyse the chosen videos I used the method of discourse analysis, as it focuses not only on explaining meanings behind a textual messages – it also takes into account visual symbols and broader cultural and historical contexts that exist within the society.

While analysing selected statements I have summarised three main ways on how separatist leaders in Ukraine use history as an apparatus to prove the righteousness of their actions. First of all, they create an image of credible leaders to make sure that their message is perceived as legitimate; secondly, by mentioning wrongdoings from the past separatist deepen already existing divide in society. But most and foremost history is used as a justification by drawing direct parallels with the present. By using already existing beliefs, prejudices and allegations, separatists brought back controversial World War II figure Stepan Bandera and a concept of Novorossiya – an idea that would unite Eastern Ukrainian regions in a new sovereign state. Hence, both Zakharchenko and Gubarev employ historical narratives to convince society that events of World War II are happening again and people in the Eastern Ukraine are facing a fascist threat just like their ancestors did 70 years ago.

Keywords: Donbas; Ukraine; conflict; separatism; historical narratives.

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**Table of contents**

## 1. Introduction

Keeping in mind the context of today (2019), conflict in Eastern Ukraine seems to be far from resolution. However, back in April 2014, when the armed uprising in Donbas had just started, the leaders of self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk promised to lead their people into the better, brighter future – and they aimed to achieve it all during the course of upcoming couple of years. Amongst other things (such as economic prosperity and elimination of corruption), they were asking to fight for the sake of Russian values – just like their ancestors did during the World War II, or as it is known in the most post-Soviet republics – the Great Patriotic war. History indeed seemed to be repeating itself – when the conflict in Donbas was unfolding, a battle broke down just next to the Saur-Mogila (Rus. *Саур-Могила*) memorial not far away from Ukrainian-Russian boarder on 23 August, 2014.[1] In this sense, history had a peculiar, symbolic twist – volunteers picked up their weapons (even though most of them have no military background) and came to the memorial to fight professional soldiers with the same goals in mind as they imagined their ancestors did. The conflict was aptly assessed by Serhii Plokhy: "on a certain level, in Ukraine the World War II had never come to its end. People continue to die there under the colours and symbols of the long gone past".[2]

Fast development of events in the Eastern Ukraine showed that he was right. Since the conflict escalated in 2014, history has been used as a rhetorical apparatus for justification of violence by separatist leaders in Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). Figures like Aleksander Zakharchenko and Pavel Gubarev were returning to the stories from World War II and using them to shape political agenda and convince citizens that the armed conflict is the right way to go about while seeking sovereignty from Ukraine. For instance, the controversial name of World War II Ukrainian figure Stepan Bandera and strong memories of his alleged collaboration with Nazi

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[1] Mikhail Zhirohov. "Битва за Саур-Могилу: исход." Fraza.ua. https://fraza.ua/analytics/266434-bitva-za-saur-mogilu-ishod-  (accessed August 1, 2019).
[2] Serhii Plokhy. "When Stalin Lost His Head: World War II and Memory Wars in Contemporary Ukraine." In *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, edited by Julie Fedor, Jussi Lassila, Markku Kangaspuro and Tatiana Zhurzhenko (Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2017): 187.

Germany were brought up in the public discourse again. While praised by various organizations (such as the "Right Sector") in Kyiv and Western cities, Bandera's name is still being used as a synonym to 'evil' in the East.

There is no doubt that the urge to fight for what each side deems to be right did not occur overnight. To this day residents of the Western and Eastern regions, amongst many things, argue on their interpretation of history. This split provided perfect opportunity to utilize historical memory as an instrument to justify armed conflict. Of course, there have been other reasons that led to formation of separatist spirits in Donbas, one of them being economic downfall that the region experienced since Ukraine declared independence in 1991. Official GDP collapsed by almost half from 1990 to 1994, and slow decline continued throughout the decade. Economic growth would not resume again until 2000. According to Pekka Suttela, Donbas has always been the industrial powerhouse of Ukraine. It was metallurgy and engineering – industries that Eastern regions were known for since Soviet times – that had major impact on strengthening state economy. Suttela writes that "crucially for Ukraine's survival, between 2001 and 2008, as metals and chemicals prices boomed on the back of fast international economic growth while the price of gas imported from Russia remained low, terms of trade improved by 50 %".[3] Therefore, as Donbas still is one of the biggest contributors to the state economy, residents of the region felt that they are getting too little in return and got tired of being providers for the rest of the country – this fact helped to build the case to convince both Ukraine and the rest of the world that Eastern cities should have more rights.

However, I will argue here that there were other reasons that made people quit their jobs, put on a uniform and join the army of the two self-proclaimed republics in Donbas. One of these was the nationalist discourse employed by the leaders of the secessionist groups that points to uniqueness of Russian values and language, also bringing back the memories of the World War II in contemporary politics, as has been shown in literature. What has been almost completely neglected is the role attributed to history in justifying these discourses. Particularly in 2014-2015

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[3] Pekka Suttela "The Underachiever: Ukraines Economy Since 1991." Carnegieendowment.org
https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/09/underachiever-ukraine-s-economy-since-1991-pub-47451 (accessed on August 1, 2019). For more on reasons behind separatist moods in Ukraine see: Serhy Yekelchyk *The Conflict in Ukraine : What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press:2015).

the events in Ukraine and accompanying rhetorical manoeuvring of political actors render it questionable whether the past is really long gone and was the historical memory of World War II employed by separatists as a tool to justify violence? How can we unpack and interpret the symbolic pertinence of the battles that are fought in Donbas just next to a World War II memorial?

The reason behind using history as a rhetorical apparatus might be the fact that a considerable number of people in Ukraine identify as Russian and regard Russian as their first language. In terms of political values, the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, alongside with Crimea, were the most pro-Russian regions in Ukraine since its independence as measured by vote for political parties and presidential candidates, foreign policy orientations, and support for Russian as the second state language in Ukraine.[4]

Separatist movements in the Eastern part of Ukraine often mention the right of self-determination on the basis of identifying themselves as Russian and have expressed significant support towards some kind of secession from Ukraine. A survey conducted in 2014 shows that 23% of the respondents in Donbas favoured autonomy as a part of federal Ukraine, compared to 8% supporting independence of their region, while 23% favoured the region joining Russia.[5] To sum up, more than half of Donbas residents supported the change of *status quo* and opted for some sort of secession. Keeping in mind that as per 2014 there were 4.3 million people living in Donetsk and 2.2 million in Luhansk,[6] there is no doubt that a significant part of population shared some sort of separatist thoughts. Moreover, according to Kevin Lees, "in Donetsk, the largest city in the region, around 48% of the municipal population is Russian and around 46% of the population is Ukrainian. That's still not as 'Russian' as Crimea, but it's still close enough to worry".[7] Therefore, it is not surprising that while explaining reasons behind the violent outbreak in Donbas separatist leaders emphasize preservation of historically Russian values and the

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[4] Ivan Katchanovski. "The Separatist War in Donbas: A Violent Break-up of Ukraine? †." *Ukraine in Crisis*, 2017, 473.

[5] Katchanovski, *The Separatist War in Donbas*, 485.

[6] Robert Kirchner, Ricardo Giucci. "The Economy of the Donbas in Figures." German Advisory Group, 2014. https://www.beratergruppe-ukraine.de/download/TN/TN_04_2014_en.pdf (accessed on August 1).

[7] Kevin Lees. "All You Wanted To Know About Ukraine's Donbas Region." http://suffragio.org/2014/04/18/all-you-wanted-to-know-about-ukraines-donbass-region/ Note: this article also provides more insights on economic situation of Donbas which are not touched on in this paper.

victory in the World War II is one of the core aspects that are being used to shape the worldview of residents of Donbas. A feeling is created that they have to stand up for their rights and values that are facing a threat from the West – just like it happened 70 years ago during the Nazi Germany occupation. In their public statements separatist leaders stress the importance of Russian people sticking together and opposing an upcoming oppression of "Kiyv junta", "fascist scum" and "Banderovites" as separatist leaders and media outlets often refer to the Ukrainian government.

There is an immeasurable amount of videos and other material on the Internet encouraging people from the East to join the fight. Leaders of separatist movements also often refer to the conflict as genocide and accuse Ukrainian government of various human rights violations against people in Donbas. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how history was adapted to fit justification of on-going war and try to find out what these historical narratives are. Because the conflict in Ukraine is still not resolved at the moment of writing this paper (March – August 2019), this research will be set around the years of 2014 – 2015. This time frame was selected because the conflict was just starting to fold and a lot of important developments happened during the period of those two years: for example, the fighting in Donbas started in April 2014 the Minsk accords were signed on September 15, 2014 and the second attempt to establish peace also happened in Minsk on February 11, 2015.

However, there are difficulties in the question itself – as an on-going crisis, the situation in Ukraine still lacks a concrete definition. The most problematic parts of my question are the words "separatists" and "conflict". Scholars and experts in the field define these two concepts differently – depending on the information that is being used and the side of the conflict that one takes.

In the literature and news articles separatists in Donbas are also often referred to as "rebels" or "terrorists". The definition of "rebels" usually occurs in Western media alongside "separatists". The notion of "terrorists" is being used by Ukrainian government as an official stance, also in the media. However, in my case I will use the term "separatists" because it defines the cause of set group of people and is quite neutral.

The definition of "conflict" in Ukraine also varies. Some media outlets and academic articles use the term "crisis"; it is also being called a "war" - sometimes a "hybrid" or "civil" war. Therefore, as the situation in Ukraine at the moment of writing this paper is still unsettled, in my work I will use the term "conflict".

### 1.1 Literature review

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that there is little broader research done on *how* history is employed to ensure justification of the conflict. Even though there is a lot of research done on the memory politics, there is little debate on bringing back the past to the political agenda as a particular way to justify violence. It is not much acknowledged in the academic discussion or in the media. Secondly, it is also the first research on the topic of Eastern Ukraine conflict that is based on analysis of video material and tries to establish a pattern of framing historical narratives.

Did historical narratives become a powerful instrument to justify the conflict, and if it is the case – how they are being used and how much influence the events that happened more than seven decades ago have on a modern state of Ukraine? As the separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine gripped the attention of the world, it also became a broad topic for academic discussions. Broader analyses on formation of insurgent armies, emergence of separatist conflicts, why they succeed (or fail) have been done by Barbara F. Walter[8], Henry E. Hale[9], Klaus Bachmann and Igor Lyubashenko[10], Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer[11], Marko Bojcun[12] and Ivan Katchanovski.[13] While this

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[8] Barbara F. Walter. *Reputation and Civil War : Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=304014&site=ehost-live
[9] Henry E. Hale. *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics : Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=234389&site=ehost-live
[10] Klaus Bachmann and Igor Lyubashenko. "The Maidan Uprising, Separatism and Foreign Intervention : Ukraine's complex transition". Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2014. Accessed August 2, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.
[11] Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer. *Lessons From Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*. [Research Report]. Santa Monica:

field will benefit from their merits immensely, by focusing on the role of history it will fill a lacuna on the subject.

One of the few authors who placed historical and identity factors under scrutiny during the establishment of the two self-proclaimed republics, besides the importance of foreign influence and support from the local elites, is Andrew Wilson.[14] However, even though he gives credit to historical narratives and their possible influence, Wilson does not explore exactly *how* history can be used to shift public discussion and influence the course of policy making. Both Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics had to build everything from scratch – the same goes for the interpretation of the past. Depending on the historical memory which appears to be alive among the Eastern Ukraine society people can show support towards particular political promises.

Another branch of studies of the Eastern Ukrainian conflict focuses on already existing regional split in the society. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, Ukrainian society was fragmented for centuries. For example, Lowell W. Barrington explores the grounds of ethnical, regional and linguistic divisions in Ukraine before the latest conflict began in 2014.[15] Stylianos A. Sotiriou examines how enduring regional political preferences, embedded in a fragmented national identity framework, have been serving as destabilizing factors in the eastern part of the country.[16]

Some scholars argue that the split occurred because regional identities were always more potent. For example, Ihor Stebelsky also focuses on the regional split that might have strengthened separatist moods in Donbas and emphasizes the growing Soviet nostalgia in the region. According Stebelsky, regional identities in the East of Ukraine surpass the national ones:

RAND Corporation, 2017.
http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1532756&site=ehost-live.
[12] Marko Bojcun. "Origins of the Ukrainian Crisis." *Critique* 43 no. 3-4, (2015): 395-419.
[13] Katchanovski, *The Separatist War in Donbas;* For more articles by Katchanovski see: "The Politics of World War II in Contemporary Ukraine." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 no. 2 (2014): 210-233.
[14] Andrew Wilson. "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War." *Europe-Asia Studies* 68 no. 4, (2016): 631-652.
[15] Lowell W. Barrington. "Examining Rival Theories of Demographic Influences on Political Support: The Power of Regional, Ethnic, and Linguistic Divisions in Ukraine." *European Journal of Political Research* 41, no. 4 (2002): 455-491.
[16] Stylianos A. Sotiriou. "The irreversibility of history: the case of the Ukrainian crisis (2013–2015)." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 no. 1 (2016): 51-70.

"prevalence of regional over nation identity rather than the use of Russian language influenced how receptive the population was to Kremlins active geopolitical discourse".[17] Stebelsky does not deny that history had major influence because of its emotive appeal: "history is a specific form of narrative that develops social identity, cohesion and purpose. It plays a major role in the formation of national, ethnic religious and regional identities".[18] However, he does not show how exactly the influence is passed on. It is quite evident from the statements of separatist leaders that by bringing back the past and creating personal ties with it (for example, talking about relatives who fought bravely against fascists during the World War II) they are trying to provoke an emotional response. Glenn Diesen and Conor Keane also focus on region-building as well as nation-building. They emphasize the importance of historical narratives in both processes: "the objectives of the former Soviet republics have ranged from developing a distinctive or opposing identity to Russia in order to cement sovereignty and independence, to various degrees of leveraging from the shared history to advance a social, economic and security agenda".[19] Even though Diesen and Keane acknowledge the importance of history in the political processes (which also include of nation and region-building in Ukraine) they do not focus on the exact ways *how* history is implemented to achieve various political goals.

As the question of identity in overall state-building process plays a big part as well, Volodymyr Kulyk analyses transformation of identity of Russian-speakers in independent Ukraine and what influenced the shift towards more Ukrainian or, on the contrary, more Russian oriented identities. Because a big part of Soviet heritage is usage of Russian language, Kulyk bases his research on surveys "of those people who use predominantly Russian in their everyday lives and the meaning they attach to their perceived belonging to the Ukrainian nation".[20] Vohla Charnysh also focuses on divisions on linguistic basis. As both Russian and Ukrainian nations share the same religion and similar languages, the latter is considered to be one of the main reasons of regional fragmentation in Ukraine. About half (47.7%) of those surveyed by the Kiev International Sociology Institute (KIIS) think Russian should be made official in the regions with large

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[17] Ihor Stebelsky. "A tale of two regions: geopolitics, identities, narratives, and conflict in Kharkiv and the Donbas." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59 no. 1 (2018): 30.
[18] Stebelsky, *A tale of two regions*, 32.
[19] Glenn Diesen and Conor Keane. "The Two-tiered Division of Ukraine: Historical Narratives in Nation-building and Region-building". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19, no.3 (2017): 313.
[20] Volodymyr Kulyk. "Identity in Transformation: Russian-speakers in Post- Soviet Ukraine", Europe-Asia Studies, (2017): 1.

Russian-speaking populations. People who support elevating the status of the Russian language live primarily in Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine and in cities.[21] Therefore, some scholars believe that language serves great purpose in justifying the war. According to Charnysh, in Ukraine language arguably evokes strong sentiments because of the emotional scars left by centuries of forced russification under the Russian tsars and the Soviet government. In the nineteenth century there was a major increase of Russian settlers in Ukraine. In 1863 Russia issued a ban on publication of religious and educational texts in Ukrainian language. During the Soviet period, Ukrainian language went through a turbulent period – the use of it was encouraged, then banned, then encouraged again.

A conclusion can be made that language is embedded into historical memory and can be used as an argument to achieve other goals on the political agenda. However, Elise Giuliano questions the linguistic approach and argues that "there is no *a priori* reason why people's linguistic identity trims other identities and interests".[22] She states that "ethnic and linguistic identities do not translate directly into political alienation from the central state when politicians initiate campaigns for secession".[23] However, she agrees that nationalist movements in Ukraine added to tensions between Ukrainians and Russians – the later are often being scapegoated for Ukraine's problems. Guliano concludes that popular support for separatism in Donbas developed further, but only amongst the minority of the population. She claims that "propaganda concerning ethnic and cultural categories has not produced separatism among a majority of the target population (ethnic Russians or Russophones)".[24] Guliano argues that even though ethnic and linguistic identities matter, analysts should focus more on political and economic developments that inevitably cause changes in society. She highlights two possible factors that created a deep sense of alienation among Ukrainian citizens in Donbas area:

1.  The material interest of industrial workers in preserving economic ties to Russia, and

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[21] Volha Charnysh. "Analysis of Current Events: Identity Mobilization in Hybrid Regimes: Language in Ukrainian Politics." *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 1 (2013): 5.
[22] Elise Giuliano. "The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine", *Ethnopolitics* 14 no. 5, (2015): 517.
[23] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine*, 520.
[24] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine*, 520.

2.  Nostalgia for the Soviet Union was strengthened by developments following the Orange Revolution and after the Maidan that emphasized an ethnically exclusivist Ukrainian national identity, and gave voice to the ultranationalist far right in national politics.[25]

Even though some scholars notice the growing Soviet nostalgia in the Eastern parts of Ukraine, feelings that are developing in other parts of the country are quite the opposite. One of the articles supporting my claim of bringing back the past to the political agenda to achieve a set of goals today was written by Nicolas Dreyer. According to Dreyer, "in the most general terms, the historical experiences by the peoples of the Soviet Union of the major twentieth-century catastrophes have been framed rhetorically by today's Russia and Ukraine in ways which discredit the other and bolster the legitimacy of one's own position".[26] The Ukrainian government openly accuses Russia and pro-Russian separatists in the East of repeating crimes of Stalinist era. At the same time, Russia's, DNR and LNR officials have enriched its discourse with a victimizing approach by framing Russian-speakers in Ukraine as victims of Ukrainian anti-Russian policies and rhetorically as victims of "genocide".[27] Dreyer notices that using the term "genocide" on a political level possibly strengthens the popular sense that Russian-speakers in Ukraine are in grave danger and in need of a protection – both by the indifferent volunteers who picked up their weapons, and Russian government. A broader overview of the 20th century history of Ukraine, memories such as Holodomor and Nazi occupation and how they are interpreted today was concluded by David R. Marples. [28]

As Sanshiro Hosaka summarized in his work, "in Ukraine, the issue of historical memories has been traditionally far more controversial than social, economic and foreign policy issues, and is often used to mobilise the electorate".[29] There is no doubt that history plays a role in setting a political agenda – but there is no certain way to tell how it works exactly. The analysis of the

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[25] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine,* 515.
[26] Nicolas Dreyer. "Genocide, Holodomor and Holocaust Discourse as Echo of Historical Injury and as Rhetorical Radicalization in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict of 2013–18." *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 4 (2018): 546.
[27] Dreyer, *Genocide, Holodomor and Holocaust Discourse*, 551.
[28] David R. Marples. *Heroes and Villains : Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*. New York: Central European University Press, 2007. Accessed August 2, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.
[29] Sanshiro Hosaka. "Hybrid Historical Memories in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71 no. 4, (2019): 553.

discourses of DNR and LNR, and their use of "history", therefore, provide us with an important case study, which is the subject of this thesis.

### 1.2 Theoretical framework

To fully explore the chosen topic and analyse how historical narratives are adapted to fit in the political agenda, I will base my research on the framing theory. The aim of the paper is to explore the use of particular frame in separatist statements: "ethnic Russians are again facing oppression and therefore want to pursue secession from Ukraine". It was used on many occasions in the media and also powerful leaders of foreign countries. For example, Russian president Vladimir Putin has repeatedly expressed his wishes to protect the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in all post-Soviet countries – this was one of the core justifications for Russia annexing Crimea peninsula in March 2014. Therefore, another aim of this research is to understand what historic context is being used to explain and prove that the image of the enemy is true and the conflict in Ukraine is justifiable.

As the armed uprising in the Eastern Ukraine can be defined as a social or/and ideological movement, I will set the key components of framing a social/ideological movement. Robert Benford and David Snow explain how frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action.[30] Frames are used to simplify "the world around" and present one perception of specific issue to a large group of people. Because historical narratives are already shared by the members of society as a collective memory, they can become a useful framing tool. As was established earlier, Ukrainian society was already divided on many levels before the conflict started: changes in the language policies, interpretation of history, further state development (as in choosing "pro-European" or "pro-Russian" path), etc.

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[30] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 614.

According to Snow and Benford, frames are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists".[31] In my case that would be Ukrainian government that is oppressing the Russian population in Donbas and is getting in a way of the peace settlement. It is clear that historical connotations used by separatist leaders have major mobilizing power and are being used to easily divide the population of Ukraine into "adherents" and "antagonists". Of course, both sides of the conflict perceive themselves as being right and other side being wrong – I argue that a major part of that confrontation comes from the lack of one, generally accepted interpretation of the past. In most cases, frames are constructed on shared understanding of the particular groups what is wrong, what need to change and who it is to blame. They urge adherents to act certain way. As this research aims to analyse use of historical narratives to justify violence, it goes without saying that information spread by various media channels can encourage people to act a certain way.

Moreover, Richard Jackson and Helen Dexter argue that "the structures that enable or precipitate organized political violence require human agents to trigger or unlock their violence-generating potential: a great many societies endure conditions that are seemingly 'ripe' for large-scale political violence, sometimes for decades at a time, without ever actually experiencing it".[32] If a part of society has suppressed anger/disappointment/traumatic past experiences, all it takes to spark a conflict is to "unleash" the potential that is already there. As Jackson and Dexter present it, "all social practices take place within a set of conditions that enable certain actions and constrain others".[33] In order to do so, parties that are interested in starting the conflict can use media framing. According to Jackson and Dexter, "violence is deeply embedded in the very idea of the state and is constantly reproduced through those practices that constitute the sovereign state. Nationalism, protection, justice, law, humanitarianism, revolution are all historically rooted, deeply embedded cultural narratives that serve to legitimate certain norms of violence".[34]

Going further from this point, an assumption can be made that society members that have certain ideas already embedded into their belief system are easily mobilized into movements. According

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[31] Benford, Snow. *Framing Processes and Social Movements,* 615.

[32] Richard Jackson and Helen Dexter. "The Social Construction of Organised Political Violence: An Analytical Framework." *Civil Wars* 16 no:1, (2014): 3.

[33] Jackson and Dexter, *The Social Construction of Organised Political Violence*, 4.

[34] Jackson and Dexter, *The Social Construction of Organised Political Violence*, 6.

to Benford and Snow, „movements function as carriers and transmitters of mobilizing beliefs and ideas, to be sure; but they are also actively engaged in the production of meaning for participants, antagonists, and observers. The productive work may involve the shaping and structuring of existing meanings".[35] Uprising in Donbas can be described as a social movement because its main goal is to achieve societal change. The support came not only from armed volunteers (even though armed forces of DNR rely heavily on the volunteer power). Separatist movement also involves political organizations, as there were 4 active political parties in DNR during 2014-2015.

Looking over separatist claims it is easy to notice that they took already existing meanings (that occurred because of the split in society on the basis of historical memory) and created an understanding that history is repeating itself and Ukrainians have to rise again against fascism as their grandfathers did. (Particular narratives and ways they were employed will be provided in the analysis section of this paper). Benford and Snow claim that social movements "frame or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and demobilize antagonists".[36] This can be seen in separatist's speeches by creating "us" and "them" divide. Ukrainian army is being downgraded by shaming them for inability to stand for the right thing, succumbing to pressure and collaborating with "fascist junta". Armed resistance in Donbas is being hailed for continuing the glorious mission of their ancestors and fighting for what is right – and the right thing in this situation is determined by leaders of the separatist movement.

### 1.3 Methodology

In order to see how much chosen rhetoric of separatist leaders effects society and what role the embedding of the historical narratives plays, I will use the method of discourse analysis. As a research methodology it includes a broad range of different approaches to analyse textual

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[35] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow. "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research,* no. 1. (1988): 198.
[36] Benford, Snow. *Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization*, 198.

sources.[37] Importantly, discourse analysis embraces a social constructivist epistemology, as it sees reality as constructed through social interactional processes.[38] Speeches and public announcements of political leaders serve as an example for the citizens they represent. Therefore, their conceptions of national identity, as well as their interests, best represent perception of the whole Donbas region's identity and interests. While speaking to the public, leaders of separatist movements in Donetsk, such as A. Zakharchenko and P. Gubarev, emphasize the inevitability of war and provide various justifications for it. As mentioned previously, they often rely on historic memory that is still important in Ukraine's political and cultural life.

Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy define discourse as a "particular way of talking about an understanding the world (or an aspect of world)".[39] According to James Paul Gee, discourses are "ways in which we humans integrate words, deeds interactions, thoughts, feelings, objects, tools, times and places to enact and recognize different socially-situated identities".[40] Michael Foucault defines discourse as "not an ideal, timeless form. […] it is, from beginning to an end, historical – a fragment of history […] posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality".[41] Moreover, according to Foucault, "truth is a discursive construction and different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false".[42] By using historical narratives that are known to a large portion of society and are perceived as a non-negotiable truth, separatists can indeed determine what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, because the truth is unattainable, it is fruitless to ask whether something is true or false. Instead, the focus should be on how effects of truth are created in discourses.

Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips claim that discourse analysis can be focused on power relations in society and possibilities for societal change. Leaders (of any kind) are the ones who are most likely to implement the changes and convince the members of society that change is needed and it is in their best interest to follow. Consequently, as this research focuses on

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[37] Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy. *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of social Construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, (2002): 18.

[38] Phillips, Hardy. *Discourse Analysis*, 2.

[39] Marianne Jørgensen, and Louise Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, (2011): 1.

[40] James Paul Gee. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method.* London: Routledge, (2014): 61.

[41] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 12.

[42] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method,* 13.

separatist leaders in Eastern Ukraine, discourse analysis proves to be a suitable way to analyse their statements and the effects their words (and actions) have on society. Because this research is heavily based on the analysis of language and how it is being used to influence social opinion and reach political goals, further part of methodological framework regarding discourse analysis will be focused on language.

James Paul Gee argues that discourse analysis "is based on the details of speech or writing that are arguably deemed relevant in the context, and that are relevant to the arguments the analysis is attempting to make".[43] He makes a point that discourse analysis is not based on all the physical features present – judgments are heavily based on the analyst.

Gee points out 7 building tasks of discourse analysis: significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. For this particular research the building tasks of relationships and politics are the most relevant. First one focuses on building and sustaining social relationships and the second – on "creating, distributing, or withholding social goods or constituting particular distributions of social goods as 'good' and 'acceptable' or not". [44]

One way to establish the norms that are universally acceptable is through exercising political power. Jørgensen and Phillips rely on Foucault's ideas that "power is responsible both for creating our social world and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about, ruling out the alternative ways of being and talking".[45] As was previously noted by Gee, power relations also establish what is "good" and "acceptable" in the society. Therefore, to construct a certain narrative, separatist leaders in DNR create power relations through their appearances in the media, answers to the press and statements at public events. Separatists use particular language in the context of an armed conflict that was, for the biggest part, started on a national basis. Using particular historic memories that resonate with the majority of DNR residents they give those memories new layers and create a narrative that "history is repeating

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[43] Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis,* 136.
[44] Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis,* 141.
[45] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method,* 3.

itself". By comparing government in Kyiv to followers of Stepan Bandera and accusing them of nationalism, separatist leaders bring out memories of the World War II which are important in the contemporary social discourse. For example, the world "genocide" is also being used in a different context – not to describe the historic events of World War II, but to accuse the Ukrainian government of oppressing its own people. Because of the strong emotional charge that these narratives bring into society, they can be adapted to the ideology that is being projected by the ones in power – in this case that would be separatist leaders.

Discourse analysis allows looking into systematic occurrences of specific variables. Therefore, the exact way to implement discourse analysis should become clear after I have selected a set of speeches, public announcements and video material to analyse. Secondary sources will be used to define the historical narratives that are likely to be used by separatist movements in Ukraine and provide more background information on the interpretation of history in the modern state. As primary sources I will use a set of examples from 2014-2015 and analyse them from the perspective of framing – how separatist leaders construct their message to justify the war. The examples will include official statements and interviews by separatist leaders in Donetsk and video content from YouTube. Separatist leaders often mention both DNR and LNR in their speeches and emphasise the need of sticking together. However, in this research I will be focusing on the leaders of DNR as they are more outspoken and more frequently cited in media outlets.

A number of public statements by the government of DNR are published on YouTube. Most of the statements in question are video messages, some of them are also provided in written form. One of the most outspoken leaders of DNR was Aleksander Zakharchenko. For example, in November 2014, he stated that after the elections in Donbas, local government will start working on a genocide case.[46] Another vocal leader of armed uprising in Donbas is Pavel Gubarev who proclaimed he will serve as "People's Governor" just after the seizure of governmental buildings in Donetsk in April 2014. Gubarev has also published a book on his ideas of Novorossiya in 2016.

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[46] Pravda.ru. "Александр Захарченко: После выборов мы откроем дело о геноциде." https://www.pravda.ru/news/world/formerussr/ukraine/02-11-2014/1233868-doneck-0/ (accessed on March 30, 2019). Note: this and further translations provided by the author.

One of the most active YouTube channels that produce content on Ukrainian crisis belongs to Russia-based news agency "News Front". The channel was established on November 25, 2014. Although it has 406 625 subscribers, "News Front" videos have 444 229 500 views in total.[47] These numbers suggest that the content from this channel reaches wide audience that might not be interested in constant news-flow from Ukraine, but searches for specific content. Videos shared on this channel usually rely on graphic images with heavy emotional charge (for example, interviews with the relatives of the fallen soldiers, montages of ruined towns with a sentimental song in the background). There is a consistent theme going through most reporting from the war zone – Russian speaking fighters in the East are being slaughtered by the Ukrainian military forces. As mentioned in the literature review, the narrative of "genocide" is often used by separatist movement leaders to target their potential audience. Moreover, majority of the content is in Russian with a possible intention to strengthen the nationalistic charge of the videos. However, the channel has branches in different languages – Bulgarian, English, German and Serbian. As their main mission, creators state "to provide a non-stop information flow and to oppose lies and slander with truth and facts". Most of the videos by News Front start (or end) with a call for financial support for the channel which leads to believe that it is subsidized by the audience. However, there is high possibility of support provided by the outside (probably foreign) agents that are interested in spreading similar content.

### 1.4 Thesis outline

I will begin the analysis of chosen topic with a broader explanation of historical context that will be provided in the chapter 2. There I will focus on the influence of such personalities as Stepan Bandera and what does their legacy mean in today's Ukraine. Also, I will explain why the memories of the Soviet victory in World War II is still important and how growing Soviet nostalgia influenced the shift of Donbas towards some sort of secession from Ukraine and developing closer relations with Russia. Moreover, in chapter 2 I will touch on the idea of Novorossiya and what was its role in separatist political agenda.

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[47] YouTube channel "News Front" statistics.
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt94dhpYV06IMOTXcGXt3eQ/about (accessed on August 6, 2019)

In the beginning of chapter 3 I will present the actors of my research, Aleksander Zakharchenko and Pavel Gubarev. After providing some more information on who those people are and why they gained the trust of people in DNR, I will continue on analysing their statements form a selected set of videos retrieved from a YouTube channel "News Front". The analysis will include direct quotes and some visual symbols that are being used to amplify the message. I will split the chapter 3 according to ways separatist leaders use history to justify violence: by deepening the already existing divide in the society, by creating an image of credible leader and mostly – by creating a sense that history is repeating itself by comparing current situation in Ukraine to the memories of World War II. Chapter 4 will provide conclusions and general reflections on my research.

## 2. One state two nations: the historical origins of the regional split in Ukraine

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, fragmentation of Ukrainian society is not a novelty. However, a deeper split emerged after the collapse of USSR. As did all the post-Soviet states, Ukraine too had to re-construct itself both on a national and international level. Nationally, it had to negotiate an ambivalent economic and cultural position between the Russian-speaking majority in the East and the Ukrainian-speaking population in the Western regions. Internationally, Ukraine had to choose between more western-leaning countries of Eastern Europe and Russia, which seemed closer because of the economic ties and linguistic/cultural similarities, but was tainted by negative memories of the past.

The newly formed Russia expected Ukraine to go "Eastern" and become a close ally. As Serhii Plokhy writes in his book "The Last Empire", in the very beginning of post-Soviet state building process many hoped that Ukraine will become an integral part of Russian Federation: "they were prepared to let the Baltics go and hoped that the Central Asian republics would stop demanding subsidies from the centre, but no one in Yeltsin's entourage had ever imagined releasing Slavic Ukraine – a nightmare scenario".[48] However, despite the wishes of dissolving Soviet Union, Ukraine declared its sovereignty in the summer of 1990 – according to Plokhy, Ukraine cleared the way for other republics that "were run by the communist or former communist nomenklatura".[49]

As the years went by, the government of Ukraine leaned more to the West and started working on the membership in the European Union and NATO. However, nation and state building processes turned out into big political disputes which resulted in violent clashes. The current conflict in Donbas emerged following the 21 November 2013 Euromaidan demonstrations condemning the decision by Ukrainian government not to sign an agreement with EU, which both preceded and affected this conflict by producing a spiral of escalating violence and

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[48] Plokhy, Serhii. *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (London: Oneworld Book, 2015), 173.
[49] Plokhy, The Last Empire, 173.

overthrowing Viktor Yanukovych and his government. In contrast, the opposition protests during the Euromaidan in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, especially in Crimea and Donbas, were limited and were often confronted by the pro-government "titushki" mercenary agents who supported the Ukrainian police force posing as street hooligans with the express purpose of performing illegal acts.

The violence against the protesters resulted in overthrow of the Yanukovych government which encouraged the separatist rebellion in Donbas. Those changes also led to a shift of power in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which until that point were strongholds of Yanukovych and his Party of Regions. Starting in March 2014, unarmed and armed separatists seized and occupied regional administrations, security service (SBU), and police headquarters in Donetsk, Luhansk, and other cities and towns in these regions. Eventually, the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR, Russian: *Донéцкая Наро́дная Респýблика*) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR, Russian: *Лугáнская Наро́дная Респýблика*) were formed in early April 2014.

Despite various depictions in the world media, the divide between eastern and western parts of Ukraine was not created on the Maidan square. Roots of the split in Ukrainian society date back centuries. However, to fulfil the purpose of this research and uncover more recent events and the rise of separatism in Donbas region, I will focus on the history of 20th century, specifically memories of World War II.

**2.1 Importance of the legacy and memory of Stepan Bandera in contemporary Ukraine**

After dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new government of Ukraine faced many challenges: not only on with rebuilding a democratic governance system and effective socio-economic structures, but also with setting a historical narrative which would be followed further on, as the new state develops relations with other members of international community. Glenn Diesen and Conor Keane write that "the objectives of the former Soviet republics have ranged from developing a distinctive or opposing identity to Russia in order to cement sovereignty and independence, to various degrees of leveraging from the shared history to advance a social,

economic and security agenda".[50] Literature has already shown that this was one of the greatest challenges for Ukraine because the society was extremely polarized on key historical issues such as perception of Stepan Bandera and his role in World War II. Legacy of Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) emerges in the centre of public discussion as well.

For a 20th century historical figure, Stepan Bandera is still very much present and can be considered as a somewhat household name. Russian and separatist media, as well as the militants themselves, often refer to the transitional government in Kyiv as "Bandera Junta" or "Benderovites". Needless to say, the following description carries a heavy historical and emotional charge. Bandera was involved with a more radical wing of OUN and is deemed as a controversial figure in Ukraine till this day. He is accused of helping to orchestrate the genocide of Poles in Volhynia in the late 1942 and collaborating with Nazi Germany throughout the World War II. As quoted by David R. Marples, Bandera's grandson stated that "even now, 44 years after his assassination, the name 'Bandera' is used to frighten people, particularly in Eastern Ukraine".[51] Surveys also show that this particular view towards his personality are indeed strong and vary on a regional basis. If Bandera is glorified by some in Kyiv and Western Ukraine, he is accused of fascism in the heavily ethnic-Russian East and South of the country. There memories are still fresh: current discussion about the past very much resembles Soviet-era campaigns that sought to discredit Bandera, and his quest for a Ukrainian homeland, by playing up his ties to Nazi Germany. In the 2010 Research & Branding Group Survey concluded that 48% of the respondents in the West, compared to 20% in the Central Ukraine, and 8% in the South and the East, agreed that Bandera deserved the "Hero of Ukraine" title. Conversely, 27% in the West, 59% in the Central Ukraine, and 82% in the South and the East believed that he did not deserve this title.[52]

Memories and opinions on UPA and OUN also differ on a regional level. Similar to the perception of Bandera's legacy, these organizations receive more praise in the West and are

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[50] Diesen and Keane, *The Two-tiered Division of Ukraine*, 313.
[51] David R. Marples. "Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero." *Europe-Asia Studies*58, no. 4 (2006): 556.
[52] Ivan Katchanovski. "Terrorists or National Heroes? Politics of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine". Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal, June 1-3, 2010

frowned upon in the East and South. UPA was paramilitary nationalist organization, created in 1942 and mostly active during World War II. The main purpose of UPA was the formation of an independent Ukrainian state. OUN was established in 1929 by radical Ukrainian activists and first operated in Eastern Galicia (interwar Poland).

According to Per Anders Rudling, in April 1940 OUN saw a split between the younger and more radical wing led by Stepan Bandera and a more "moderate" wing led by the older generation. Rudling writes that members of OUN envisioned Ukraine as "ethnically homogenous state for the Ukrainian people, free of Jews, Poles, Russians and other minorities. The future Ukraine would be a "national dictatorship," where all rival political parties would be banned". [53]

It is important to keep in mind the state-organized political violence campaigns carried out by the Soviet and German governments after territories were divided according to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in 1939. Because of the brutalities carried out by the Red Army, people of Ukraine turned against it and saw Germany as a possible ally. According to Rudling, "pro-Soviet sympathies that were particularly strong among sections of the Ukrainian population of Western Ukraine prior to the war, particularly in Volhynia, were much weakened during the occupation of 1939–41. Instead, the appeal of OUN's radical anti-Polish, anti-Russian and anti-Semitic nationalism now grew among the Western Ukrainians". [54]

However, after the Soviet Union disappeared from the map, the effect of institutionalised history in Ukraine stayed after independence. The pro-Soviet perception of the past is still strong in the East of the country – this is where the rejection and negative memories of OUN come from. Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe argues that "in the Soviet Union and its satellite states, national and radical right movements were an important part of Soviet propaganda, which exacerbated their [OUN] crimes and named and shamed them for massacres that they did not perform". [55]

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[53] Per Anders Rudling. "Historical representation of the wartime accounts of the activities of the OUN–UPA (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—Ukrainian Insurgent Army)." *East European Jewish Affairs* 36 no. 2 (2006): 166.

[54] Rudling, *Historical representation of the wartime accounts of the activities of the OUN–UPA*, 165. For more insights on OUN-UPA by Rudling see: "The Cult of Roman Shukhevych in Ukraine: Myth Making with Complications." *Fascism* 5, no. 1 (2016): 26-65. https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1163/22116257-00501003

[55] Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe. "Debating, obfuscating and disciplining the Holocaust: post-Soviet historical discourses on the OUN–UPA and other nationalist movements." *East European Jewish Affairs* 42 no. 3 (2012): 200.

However, he notices that intelligentsia from the West deemed OUN and UPA as anti-Soviet, hence – democratic and unlikely to participate in any atrocities. Andrii Portnov also agrees that current tension in Ukraine is often split into "the dichotomy between the innocent, sacred nation of traditionalists and the complicated, disturbing narrative of their opponents," that is liberal intellectuals and historians".[56] However, Portnov argues that this binary approach does not take into account supporters of Russian and post-Soviet narratives that are the main question of this research. He emphasizes the fact that there is no middle ground in the discussion about Ukraine's past and the debate is quite black and white: it is either pro-Soviet or ultra-nationalistic which is becomes evident while looking  through social media accounts of various organizations or reading articles in the news. Negative memories from the past are often brought up not only in intellectual discussions but in the media as well. Kyiv and Western part of Ukraine are depicted as exploiters of the East. For example, as written in Lenta.ru, "in Donbas everybody knows that the "westerners" not only glorify the "accomplice of Nazis" Stepan Bandera and "hate everything that's Russian". They also live at the expense of "hard working Donetsk coalminers".[57] According to the reporters who spoke with local people, to them federalization of Ukraine (or even a secession from the state) seems simple and would solve many of the economic problems and restore historical justice.

However, as the economic factors are not the main point of this research, I will go straight into history of the divide in contemporary Ukraine which, by any means, was also defined by government changes. After the Orange Revolution in 2004, President Viktor Yushchenko and Ukrainian government advocated for ethnic-based conception of a nation, emphasising unique Ukrainian culture and language. Elise Giuliano notices that during this period, some Ukrainian elites interpreted the past through Stalinist era crimes (such as The Great Famine of 1932-33, Holodomor) and depicted Ukraine as a victim of Soviet Union. More extreme versions of this

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For more information about OUN-UPA see: Narvselius, Eleonora. "The "Bandera Debate": The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine." *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 54, no. 3/4 (2012): 469-90. For more on Soviet campaigns against OUN see: Zhukov, Yuri. "Examining the Authoritarian Model of Counter-insurgency: The Soviet Campaign Against the Ukrainian Insurgent Army". *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18 no. 3 (2007): 439-466.

[56] Andrii Portnov. "The Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine." In *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, edited by Julie Fedor, Jussi Lassila, Markku Kangaspuro and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, (2017): 347.

[57] Lenta.ru. "Русский и бессмысленный." https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/03/06/donbass (accessed on August 1, 2019).

view celebrate Bandera and factions of OUN. Advocates of these ideas associate post-Soviet Russia and ethnic Russians with Soviet Union. Because Maidan protests and general pro-European approach of the new government did not receive much support in the East, DNR is consequently considered as "pro-Soviet" and "anti-Ukrainian". Consequently, citizens of DNR share resentful feelings towards the new government and accuse them of being nationalistic and following the footsteps Bandera, UON and UPA. Most of the time the reason behind the heated debate is the lack of one historical narrative that both Western and Eastern Ukraine agree on.

After the independence in 1991, the "right" interpretation of history became a defining factor of Ukrainian politics – that is why events that happened more than 70 years ago still hold the attention and bolster the public discussion. Even though many historians have now confirmed that Bandera himself was in captivity for the most events that he is being associated with, David R. Marples notes that negative connotations towards Bandera are a part of Soviet legacy. In order to shape the public understanding of the past and adapt it to fit in the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, Soviet government constructed continuous propaganda campaigns: "the Soviet authorities never desisted from using the appellation 'Banderites' or 'Banderovites', with various descriptions of members of this army as "Ukrainian – German nationalists", agents of "Anglo American imperialists", "bandits", and "traitors to the Motherland".[58] Yuliya Yurchuk adds to those statements and writes that during the Soviet era the OUN and UPA were "stigmatized as a small anomalous group of "bourgeois nationalists" and "fascist collaborators" against the broader picture of the "normal" brethren Ukrainian people who welcomed Soviet rule and "reunification" with the Russian people".[59] She emphasizes that the division of the world into fascist (bad) ant anti-fascist (good) originated during the World War II and is still pretty much alive today: "the anti-fascist banner was used as a key justification for Soviet ideology and as proof of the superiority of the Soviet system".[60] Now the same technique is being used by both separatist leaders and government in Kyiv – they call each other names that carry deep historical charge in it. From the perspective of a factory worker in Donetsk, the conflict is a fight of "brave soldiers of Donbas" against the "Banderovites". On the contrary, a resident from the Western

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[58] Marples, *Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero*, 563.
[59] Yuliya Yurchuk. "Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past: OUN–UPA Memory Politics and Nation Building in Ukraine (1991–2016)." In *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, edited by by Julie Fedor, Jussi Lassila, Markku Kangaspuro and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, (2017): 109.
[60] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 108.

city sees the conflict as resistance of Ukrainian patriotes against "vatniki" or "vata" (the term "vatnik" is used to describe somebody who expresses deep support for Russian policies and "slavishly supports the regime out of fear, hatred of others, or most often a combination of both").[61]

It goes without saying that politicians manipulating the history to win the elections did not contribute to resolution of centuries-long dispute over Ukrainian past that divided Western and Eastern regions. On the contrary, interpretations of the past often became a tool to achieve political goals and score some additional public support. Depending on the governing party, the "appropriate" historical narratives differ. For example, in 2010 president Yushchenko presented Bandera the "Hero of Ukraine" title. This decision angered the society and resulted in mass riots. The incoming president Viktor Yanukovich declared that the posthumous award was given illegally, since Bandera was not a citizen of Ukraine. This announcement was confirmed by the regional court of Donetsk in April 2010. [62] Moreover, during the same year the Ministry of Education presented a new concept for history textbooks used in schools: "OUN and UPA and their leaders, Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, were to be depicted as nationalists and organizers of mass murders and "will be forever tainted by collaborationism".[63]

Historical monuments also showcase the fragmentation of public opinion. According to Per-Anders Rudling what he described as the "OUN-UPA cult" is more active in the western parts of Ukraine, but in the east and the south the situation is the opposite: "in Luhansk and Crimea they erected monuments to the victims of the OUN and UPA."[64] The same tendencies were noticed by Andre Liebich and Oksana Myshlovska. According to their research, "as of early 2014 there are 46 full-sized statues or busts of Bandera plus 14 plaques,10 all located in L'vivs'ka, Ivano-

[61] Jim Kovpak. "Vatnost – Why the West can't Understand Russia." Readrussia.com
http://readrussia.com/2015/06/09/vatnost--–why-the-west-cant-understand-russia/ (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[62] Radio Svoboda. "Донецький суд скасував указ Ющенка про присвоєння Бандері звання Героя."
Radiosvoboda.org https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/2001219.html (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[63] Gazeta.ua. "В новом учебнике истории Бандера и Шухевич будут убийцами – Табачник." Gazeta.ua
https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/politics/_v-novom-uchebnike-istorii-bandera-i-suhevich-budut-ubijcami-ndash-tabachnik/342287 (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[64] Washington Post. "A Ghost of World War II History Haunts Ukraine's Standoff with Russia."
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-ghost-of-world-war-ii-history-haunts-ukraines-standoff-with-russia/2014/03/25/18d4b1e0-a503-4f73-aaa7-5dd5d6a1c665_story.html?utm_term=.28ad4f971c50 (accessed on August 1, 2019).

Frankivs'ka, and Ternopil's'ka Oblast's as well as most recently in Rivnens'ka and Volyns'ka Oblast's far from what is often referred to as the Banderivs'kyy kray. […] In addition to these constructions, over 100 streets have been renamed after Bandera".[65]

All of the provided examples show that glorification of Bandera as a hero of the state bolstered the narrative of nationalism in Ukrainian government and gave separatist leaders in the East one more argument to support the armed conflict as a protection from "fascist Bandera junta in Kyiv" – the same threat that haunted Eastern Ukraine more than 70 years ago. History also became a tool for Ukrainian government. According to Yurchuk, by praising OUN and UPA as heroes and martyrs, Ukrainian national democratic opposition wanted to counteract the Soviet narrative. However, since the Euromaidan demonstrations "the history of radical Ukrainian nationalism has been instrumentalised by Russian state propaganda that demonizes the OUN and UPA and equates Ukrainian nationalism with "fascism". At the same time, the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance promotes "the heroic cult of the OUN and UPA as a model for today's fight against the Russian aggression".[66]

The nationalist connotations of Bandera's past were also enhanced by Vladimir Putin on various occasions. In his speech welcoming Crimeans into Russia, he declared that he was saving Crimean people from Ukrainian leaders who are the "ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler's accomplice during World War II". [67] However, nationalists in Ukraine explain the collaboration between Ukraine Independence Movement and Nazi Germany as a means to an end – freeing the country from the Soviets. Nationalist organization "Right Sector" (Rus. *Правый сектор*), which was heavily involved in Euromaidan protests and offered military support to end crisis in Donbas, bases their ideology on ideas of Bandera.

Yurchuk also emphasizes the importance of symbols that were used during Euromaidan: "historical symbols and myths played an important role during the Maidan protests, mobilizing

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[65] Andre Liebich, and Oksana Myshlovska. "Bandera: Memorialization and Commemoration." *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (2014): 754.

[66] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 110-111.

[67] An address given by Vladimir Putin on March 18, 2014. Kremlin.ru
http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603 (accessed on August 1, 2019).

people and helping them make sense of the rapidly changing reality". [68] According to Yarchuk, the nationalist greeting "Слава Україні! Героям слава!" (Eng. *Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!*) was repeated by activists and protesters "as a symbol of courage, devotion to Ukraine and willingness to fight, now came to stand for grief, self-sacrifice, and gratitude of the living to the dead".[69] Separatist leaders often express criticism towards the greeting and will be showcased in the following chapters (description of their words as "criticism" has been chosen by the author to keep the speech of this paper up to the academic standards).

All the provided examples prove the point that history is deeply embedded into political sphere and is being used to achieve certain goals on both sides of Ukrainian conflict. OUN, UPA and Stepan Bandera are being used as symbols to prove the rightfulness of the official political agenda or, as it is evident in the east of Ukraine, to oppose it and use as a reminder of the painful historical passages.

### 2.2 70 years later: significance of the Great Patriotic War

The narrative of great victory in the Great Patriotic War makes many people in post-Soviet countries to forget the cost of winning. Serhii Plokhy notices a growing tendency of rising favour towards Joseph Stalin. In the eyes of many (especially in Russia), Stalin was a great leader who made Soviet Union into a superpower and won the biggest of the wars – and the number of people who view Stalin as a positive figure is only growing. Plokhy points out that Ukraine experienced similar processes as the post-Soviet Russia, but the return of Stalin into the contemporary public discussion was modest. However, the results of surveys (again) differ on a regional basis: "in the Western parts of the country only 7% viewed Stalin positively, but in its Eastern provinces, bordering on Russia, the number of those who viewed Stalin positively reached 44%, which was comparable with the Russian numbers".[70] According to Anna Wylegala, the profound historical significance of World War II for Ukrainians can also be seen

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[68] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 125.

[69] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 125.

[70] Plokhy, *When Stalin Lost His Head*, 173.

in data regarding commemorative practices: "in 2013, 82% of Ukrainians considered the Victory Day (9 May) a great holiday, and 75% intended to celebrate on that day".[71]

All in all, the two competing World War II narratives in Ukrainian society were summed up perfectly by Plokhy: "the Soviet-era myth of the Great Patriotic War versus that of the Ukrainian nationalist underground's heroic resistance to both communists and Nazis".[72] Diesen and Keane support his point by stating that "in Eastern Ukraine, largely supported by Russia, the dominant historical narrative conveys a lengthy struggle between ethnic nationalists and pro-fascists against 'brotherly peoples' and anti-fascists. In Western Ukraine, the main countering historical narrative, which has been endorsed by the West, depicts a struggle between a liberal democratic European community against Russian authoritarianism and imperialism".[73] The whole concept of unification with "brotherly peoples" also resonates with raising longing for the Soviet past which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 2.3 Growing Soviet nostalgia

Glorification of victory in the Great Patriotic War has also raised the levels of Soviet nostalgia in the Eastern Ukraine. Therefore it might be another reason why, as many surveys show, regional identity in Donbas overcomes the national one.  Moreover, during the Cold War Donbas region was the largest economic power of Ukraine. As a centre of coal mining industry, it is safe to say Donbas was one of the richest regions in the whole Soviet Union. However, after Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, the region's economy deteriorated severely in the ensuing years. According to Pekka Sutela, "the country experienced hyperinflation and an exceptionally huge production decline for a country not ravaged by a major war. Official GDP collapsed by almost half from 1990 to 1994, and slow decline continued throughout the decade".[74] In this case, economy ties closely with historical memory and recent resurrection of Soviet ideology in the

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[71] Anna Wylegała. "Managing the difficult past: Ukrainian collective memory and public debates on history." *Nationalities Papers* 45 no.5, (2017): 782

[72] Plokhy, *When Stalin Lost His Head*, 178.

[73] Diesen and Keane, *The Two-tiered Division of Ukraine*, 314.

[74] Pekka Suttela "The Underachiever: Ukraines Economy Since 1991." Carnegieendowment.org https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/09/underachiever-ukraine-s-economy-since-1991-pub-47451 (accessed on August 1, 2019).

public discourse. The dominant Soviet Donbas narrative glorified the miners and industrial workers as the epitome of the Soviet proletariat. Stebelsky notices that this particular historical narrative was brought back in the 21st century by the "Party of Regions" to gain voter support – they blamed the decline of economy on the government in Kyiv and used "Soviet stereotypes to "other" their political opponents, the supporters of Yushchenko, as the "Orange plague" of "Ukrainian fascists".[75] Similar tactics of "othering" by using history were implemented by separatist movements in Donbas as well.

Therefore, reasons for anti-Maidan protests in the East were also based on struggling economy. Residents of Donbas could not help but compare the current state with the lost prosperity of the Soviet era. The original issue that started the protests on the Maidan square was president Yanukovych's rejection of economic integration with the EU. However, people in Donetsk and Luhansk (72.5% and 64.3%, respectively) favoured joining the Customs Union over the EU.[76] Gulliano explains these numbers by associating them with the fact that Donetsk and Luhansk are dominated by Soviet-era industry: mining, metallurgy, and machine building. Many of these industries sell their products to Russia and are not competitive with Western firms. Therefore, joining the Customs Union and maintaining trade ties with Russia and other post-Soviet states seemed like a way better solution for the majority of population, whose best interest are stable jobs and income. According to Gulliano, "a shift in economic orientation toward Europe would bring uncertainty to the region".[77]

Consequently, as Poroshenko together with post-Maidan government stated that membership in the EU is the new priority, many workers in Donbas opposed the decision that they thought posed a direct threat on their jobs and general livelihood. Moreover, many citizens in the South and East of Ukraine long for Soviet era because "things used to be more orderly, when "everything used to be linked"', in the words of one newly minted Ukrainian citizen interviewed after the Soviet collapse in the early 1990s".[78] Therefore, as the new government expressed a clear direction towards Europe, many residents of Donbas got worried about the changes such

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[75] Stebelsky, *A tale of two regions*, 37.
[76] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine,* 518.
[77] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine,* 519.
[78] Giuliano, *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine,* 519.

policies would bring to the life that they are used to. The element of danger posed on their unique Russian-based identity and culture emerged later – it was the basic human need to ensure ones welfare that planted seeds of distrust in the society. However, as previously mentioned, historical memory in Ukraine has a lot to do with economic situation.

Another possible reason of growing nostalgia is that during Soviet period the history of Ukraine had been presented as a pursuit for unification of both Ukrainian and Russian nations. In the Soviet Union all the Slavic people lived great, prosperous live. Therefore, USSR was viewed as the only recipe for creating successful state. However, as Yurchuk notices in her work, "in the post-Soviet years, Ukrainian history was re-narrated as a centuries-long struggle for independence".[79] For example, Leonid Kuchma, the former leader of Ukrainian Soviet Republic, ran for President in 1994 with a campaign that appealed to the Russian-speaking population in the East. Promises of better relations with Russian neighbors won Kuchma the place as a leader of the newly formed state.[80]

The idea of creating better relations with Russia or even unification into one state is gaining more and more attention (again, as with many debates in Ukraine, the results of surveys depend on the region). In a poll conducted by KIIS in the first half of February 2014, 33.2% of people polled in Donetsk Oblast believed that "Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state".[81] When mass protests and violence erupted in the biggest cities across the region in March, the same poll showed that 77% condemned the takeover of administrative buildings and only 16% supported the outbreak. KIIS issued a second poll from 8–16 April 2014. 18.1% of Donetsk Oblast residents supported the recent armed seizures of administrative buildings in the region, while 72% disapproved of the current actions.[82] These numbers lead to a suggestion that in the end of the day majority of Donbas residents want unity and end of violence. It goes without

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[79] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 114.
[80] Yurchuk, *Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past*, 116.
[81] A survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) "The Views And Opinions of South-Eastern Regions Residents Of Ukraine: April 2014."http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=302&page=1&y=2014&m=4 (accessed on August 1, 2019)
[82]  KIIS "The Views And Opinions of South-Eastern Regions Residents Of Ukraine: April 2014."http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=302&page=1&y=2014&m=4 (accessed on August 1, 2019)

saying that the ultimate goal would be peace, and even though leaders of both sides publicly spoke of ending the military action, there was no significant progress – at least in the sense of maintaining the ceasefire. Both of Minsk decrees proved to be unsuccessful and both sides of the conflict, naturally, provide their own arguments behind inability to reach an agreement and why their side is the right one. One of the reasons might be that separatists had created the "ethnic Russians in Ukraine are oppressed and therefore have the right to separate". Because of the deeply embedded historical memory this frame is particularly hard to dismiss. Dreams of creating a prosperous state that would bring ethnic Russians together and liberate them from the Western influence and oppression of their own government might have resulted in revival of the idea of Novorossiya.

## 2.4 The birth and death of Novorossiya

The concept of Novorossiya is in a way long and short-lived concept at the same time. Even though the term itself dates back to 17$^{th}$ century, every time somebody tried to bring it to reality, the idea would die out quite quickly.

The idea of Novorossiya was on the rise during 2014-2015 because leaders of both DNR and LNR were looking for ways to get the self-proclaimed states recognized internationally. As for any idea on the political agenda, it needs to be supported by society – and for a while the idea of Novorossiya was met with much enthusiasm. Based on historical context, it is not surprising that leaders of the separatist movements took this concept as a base for one state – the idea of uniting territories of South-Eastern Ukraine and a couple of Southern Russian regions of the coast of the Black Sea into one entity was known since the times of Russian empire. It seemed that Novorossiya found a new purpose in 21$^{st}$ century as well.

**Figure 1 The map of Novorossiya**[83]

On 24 May, 2014 the self-proclaimed DNR and LNR established the confederative "Union of Novorossiya". However, the substantial support that the president Petro Poroshenko managed to gather on the elections 25 May, 2014 showed that the majority of the country is reluctant to support the idea of Novorossiya and lean towards the idea of Ukraine as it is today.

Nonetheless, the idea of Novorossiya got worldwide attention after Putin mentioned it in his annual address that he gave a month after the Crimean annexation (April, 2014). He appeared on the annual call-in show where anybody (or so the official statement says) can ask the president any question. This is what Putin had to say on the matter of Novorossiya:

"The essential issue is how to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in the southeast of Ukraine. I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiya (New Russia) back in the tsarist days—Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev, and Odessa—were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to

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[83] Retrieved from https://edmaps.com/html/novorossiya.html

Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows? They were won by Potemkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The centre of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiya. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained. Today, they live in Ukraine, and they should be full citizens of their country. That's what this is all about". [84]

To give more context on the mentioned "tsarist days": the idea of Novorossiya first emerged on 22 March 1764, when Catherine the Great issued a decree establishing a *guberniya* (region) called Novorossiya on the territories of Slavyanoserbiya (in today's Luhansk region), Kremenchug province, and the "Ukrainian defence line". [85] Even though after a couple of decades the term seized to exist in official documents, the word "Novorossiya" was not forgotten. Suslov gives an example of the University of Novorossiya that was established in Odessa in 1865. [86] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov emphasize that Novorossiya still has a strong presence in contemporary history: "Novorossiya has both a long and a contentious was one of a number of Russian nationalist fantasies about Ukraine in the 1990s. Its re-emergence as an alternative territorial vision of Ukraine amidst the tumult of early 2014 took many by surprise". [87]

Suslov argues that the concept of Novorossiya has a strong anti-globalisation ideology behind it. "Most of those nationalistic intellectuals view Novorossiya as a trump card in the 'big geopolitical game' in which the Russian civilisation is withstanding the pressure of the global West". [88] The reoccurring idea of the need to protect the Russian values (which are often referred to as "Russian World") revolves around resisting the influence of the West and keeping Ukraine within the Russian realm which is deemed to be the only historically appropriate option.

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[84] Amelia Gentleman. "Putin asserts right to use force in east Ukraine." Theguardian.com
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/17/vladimir-putin-denies-russian-forces-eastern-ukraine-kiev
(accessed on August 1, 2019).
[85] Mikhail Suslov. "The Production of 'Novorossiya': A Territorial Brand in Public Debates." *Europe-Asia Studies* 69 no. 2, (2017): 206.
[86] Suslov, *The Production of 'Novorossiya',* 206.
[87] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal and Vladimir Kolosov. "The rise and fall of "Novorossiya": examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33 no. 2, (2017): 126.
[88] Suslov, *The Production of 'Novorossiya',* 213.

However, the "stand against the West" in a form of uniting resisting regions in one state did not last long. On one year anniversary of the proclamation of Novorosiya separatist leaders in both DNR and LNR made a series of statements acknowledging that Novorossiya seized to exist as an active geopolitical project. On 18 May 2015 Oleg Tsarev, speaker of the parliament of 'Novorossiya', proclaimed the break-up of Novorossiya as a confederative state on the grounds that its existence had not been stipulated in the Minsk agreements.[89] Around the same the same time Pavel Gubarev's party "Novorossiya" lost its power in Donetsk and was banned from the elections, Gubarev himself had survived an assassination attempt. However, Suslov argues that Novorossiya had served its purpose in the sense of mobilizing people: "the confrontation in Eastern Ukraine is continuing but Novorossiya is no longer the key component of its ideological mobilization".[90] He writes that Novorossiya should be understood as a brand "with regional, transnational, and trans-border dimensions implies that difference is created by inscribing ideological meaning on particular territory".[91]

Therefore, even though Novorossiya was never a successful geopolitical project, it sure had reached one goal – destabilizing the region further. As the whole concept of Novorossiya and its revival in the public debate is tightly associated with outside influence (most of it being Russia), it is safe to say that history was implemented as a tool to reach political goals. Even though it is hard to see a success at the first glance (obviously – the project Novorossiya had failed), the whole bringing back of the idea played its part in the Eastern Ukrainian conflict. It broadened the discussion on historical memory and one more aspect of it on the national level. Using certain techniques of persuasion, gathering a support group for such an idea as Novorossiya is not that difficult – especially when one of the biggest advocates for this concept was (and to some extent still is) Vladimir Putin. It is highly possible that most residents of Donbas at the time saw him as a saviour of some sorts and had high hopes for help from Russia.

In their article O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov conducted a survey on the subject of Novorossiya and public opinion on creating a brand new sovereign state. Their research concludes that the concept was not brought to life because of insufficient public support and also death of many

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[89] Tomas Hirst. "Putin's dream on reuniting Russian empire is falling apart". Businessinsider.com https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-puts-novorossiya-project-put-on-hold-2015-5?international=true&r=US&IR=T (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[90] Suslov, *The Production of 'Novorossiya',* 203.
[91] Suslov, *The Production of 'Novorossiya',* 205.

pro-Russian activists. The whole idea was highly promoted by Russian officials and media – according to O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, once the rhetoric became much calmer, the support for "Novorossiya" also declined: "separatist aspirations of Novorossiya activists failed to gain traction across southeast Ukraine with the exception of the Donbas. Rhetoric on Novorossiya in the Russian media waned as the Ukraine crisis became the "war in the Donbas".[92] Why the idea survived a bit longer in Donbas? Researchers suggest the same reasons that were brought up in this thesis – nostalgic views towards the Soviet past (especially amongst the poorer residents of southeast regions). [93] The strive towards sovereignty or even complete independence of Donbas created another concept – Novorossiya morphed into Malorossiya on July 18, 2017.[94] However, as this event falls out of the chosen time frame of this thesis, Molorossiya will not be discussed further.

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[92] O'Loughlin, Toal and Kolosov, *The rise and fall of "Novorossiya,* 142.
[93] O'Loughlin, Toal and Kolosov, *The rise and fall of "Novorossiya,* 143.
[94] Uacrisis.org "From "Novorossiya" to "Malorossiya": what Alexandr Zakharchenko's statement means." http://uacrisis.org/58719-declaration-zakhartchenko (accessed on August 1, 2019).

## 3. Bringing back the past: analysis of historical narratives in separatist statements

Is the past indeed repeating itself in Eastern Ukraine? If it is the case, sadly, it might not even be necessary for historical facts to be universally accepted and completely true – as long as the statements provided by the separatist leaders sound convincing and there is some sort of information to back them up. Again, when it comes to the support of statements, it all depends on how they are presented and what additional information (visual, textual, audio) is used while framing certain memories of the past. In the following section I will analyse how separatist leaders in DNR took familiar historical narratives and made them into additional convincing factors for their political agenda.

### 3.1 "One of ours": building the trust of DNR

Even though there were 4 parties involved in creation of political processes in DNR, political organizations were less of an importance – it was the personality of a leader that mattered more and, subsequently, guaranteed power. Overlooking the material that was chosen for this research, I argue that one of the most effective aspects that helped separatist leaders gain trust was creating the "we are the same as you" image. And once a society believes that "one of ours" will represent and defend their interests the best – it takes little convincing to ensure the public support. Why did people in DNR listen and cheer to the words of Aleksander Zakharchenko and read the book by Pavel Gubarev?

Following the discourse analysis method it is important to understand the person (the messenger) behind the text (the message). Therefore, the following part of this research will present short profiles of the actors whose speeches and statements will be analysed further. As established in the previous chapter that provided a brief overview of the discourse analysis method, texts on their own do not show the full picture. To provide a full meaning of the statements that will be analysed further, I find it necessary to provide some more information on people whose ideas are in the centre of my research. Background information (such as place of birth, upbringing

circumstances, work experience, etc.) provides additional insights that might be useful while assessing texts. Relying on Foucault's approach to discourse analysis and his idea that reality is constructed through social interactional processes, it is also essential to establish power relations between the agents (creators of the message) and the society which is at the receiving end of the text. The following information proves that both Zakharchenko and Gubarev were "one of ours" – simple men that left their ordinary lives, put on military uniforms, took guns in their hands and stood up for what is right for the sake of their own people.

**Alexander Zakharchenko:** 42 year old, former electrician, born in Donetsk. Assumed the position of the Prime Minister of Donetsk People's Republic in 7 August, 2014 and after the elections was appointed as the Head of the Donetsk People's Republic in 4 November, 2014. In September 2014 Zakharchenko led the negotiations for the DNR for the Minsk Protocol and in December 2015 for the Minsk Protocol II.

In his campaign promises Zakharchenko focused on economic growth and general improvement of the nation's wellbeing. According to Reuters reporting, "former mine electrician Alexander Zakharchenko assured voters that he wanted pensions to be "higher than in Poland". The elderly should have enough money to "travel to Australia at least once a year to shoot a dozen kangaroos on Safari".[95] Zakharchenko also emphasised strong support from Russia that was supposed to strengthen the region. Promises to rebuild Donbas as a centre of coal mining and metallurgy industries fuelled up the Soviet nostalgia. As quoted by Reuters, Zakharchenko promised to build "a normal state, a good one, a just one. Our boys died for this, civilians are still being killed for this until now".[96]

Videos that were analysed for this research suggest that Zakharchenko was admired by the public. One of the examples of the respect that he was shown is a special children organization was formed in the end of 2015. The structure of the organization is similar to the "pioneers" of

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[95] Thomas Grove, Gabriela Baczynska. "East Ukraine separatists hold vote to gain legitimacy, promise normalcy." Reuters.com  https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-east/east-ukraine-separatists-hold-vote-to-gain-legitimacy-promise-normalcy-idUSKBN0IJ22G20141030 (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[96] Grove, Baczynska. "East Ukraine separatists hold vote to gain legitimacy, promise normalcy." Reuters.com

the Soviet Union. The young followers of Zakharchenko's ideas were named "zakharovcy".[97] According to the internet newspaper Lenta.ru, the sign of "zakharovcy" is also similar to the one that was used by the "pioneers", but instead of portrait of Lenin there is a portrait of Zakharchenko. This is one of the examples of the Soviet nostalgia that is still strong in the Donbas region. However, even though Zakharchenko approved the idea of establishing this youth organization, he disagreed on the chosen name:

"The fact that they want to meet and establish the organization was known, but I have only heard about the name after the conference. To be honest, we need to make thing clear – it is quite usual for an army battalion to carry the name of its leader. But this is a military thing. In this case, it is peaceful children organization. I am the elected leader of Donetsk Peoples Republic – does it mean that the next time a new leader will be elected they will have to change their name? I think that is irrational. <…> the initiative itself is good, but the name is inappropriate. Maybe people could vote how the organization should be called."[98]

Zakharchenko was celebrated in the local media as a just and strong leader of DNR. When he was killed on 31 August, 2018 in the explosion at the café in Donetsk, the investigation and funeral received a fair amount of coverage.

**Pavel Gubarev:** 36 years old, former advertisement executive, born in Sieverodonetsk. Proclaimed himself the "People's Governor" of the Donetsk Region at the Regional Assembly on 3 March, 2014, after separatists seized the governmental buildings. Gubarev was previously a militant member of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, whose programme rejects globalisation, the United States or the International Monetary Fund and campaigns to join Russia.[99]

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[97] Lenta.ru. "В ДНР появились пионеры-захаровцы." https://lenta.ru/news/2015/12/18/immerbereit/ (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[98] Захарченко о названии детской организации "Захаровцы". YouTube video, 0:32 – 1:29. Posted by "News Front", 12 December, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gukqzAdd9lU&t=2s
[99] Agence France-Presse. "Pro-Russian Gubarev, a symbol of east Ukraine separatism." Globalpost.com https://web.archive.org/web/20140311065542/http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/140309/pro-russian-gubarev-symbol-east-ukraine-separatism (accessed on August 1).

Gubarev was arrested by Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on 6 March, 2014 and charged with "infringing the territorial integrity and independence of the state".[100] After he was released from custody, he established the "Novorossiya" party in Donetsk. Activists of the party envisioned southeast regions uniting in one separate state. However, later that year Gubarev's party was barred from participation in parliamentary elections on 2 November. 2014. Local electoral committee said that the party failed to arrange constituent conference on time. [101]

Gubarev is also known as an author of a book "Факел Новороссии" (Eng. *Torch of Novorossiya*)[102] dedicated to all victims of the conflict and explaining why the concept of Novorossiya is the best way to go about current situation.

Following death of Zakharchenko in 2018, Gubarev presented his candidacy to become a head of the state but was pushed back by Denis Pushilin.

Looking over the portrayal of Zakharchenko and Gubarev on the "News Front" Youtube channel and any other content published in Donetsk's media outlets, it is easy to spot the creation of a strongman leader. If one was to compare media coverage of Zakharchenko's visits with news pieces about Vladimir Putin (or any other leader that is said to be authoritarian), the resemblance is easy to spot. Previous examples show that Zakharchenko tries to be seen as the opposite of the elite, ordinary military man with clear values whose main goal is to defend his people: "If I ever see danger for the land of Donetsk coming from any town, I will come and destroy that danger".[103] By showing his own willingness to fight for what is right Zakharchenko could mobilize others to join in. Simply put – if the highest leader is not afraid to fight, you should not be afraid too and it is a right thing to do.

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[100] Reuters News Agency. " Pro-Moscow protest leader arrested in Ukraine's Donetsk." Reuters.com https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-gubarev-idUSBREA251AN20140306 (accessed on August 1).
[101] Mk.ru. "Дадут ли Новороссии сделать выбор?" https://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/10/30/dadut-li-novorossii-sdelat-vybor.html (accessed on August 1, 2019).
[102] Павел Губарев. "Факел Новороссии." (2016). Accessed through https://www.rulit.me/books/fakel-novorossii-read-411170-1.html
[103] „Если я буду видеть угрозу земле Донецка из любого населённого пункта, ету угрозу я приду и унечтожу там." Quote from: "ДНР. Захарченко: "Не будет больше никакого перемирия. Мы продолжаем наступление!" YouTube video, 6:06-6:20.
Posted by "News Front", January 23, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjMgRE6-VC0

On the contrary, Pavel Gubarev was not very popular in the beginning and was not immediately followed by thousands of supporters. According to reports prepared by news website Lenta.ru, people were hesitant to listen to a self-proclaimed governor at first. [104] However, as the months went on, Gubarev managed to establish himself as one of the leaders of "the movement of national liberation". In his early statements he chose similar image as Zakharchenko – a man in a military uniform with a machine gun, doing everything for the cause and standing up against danger. As the time moved on Gubarev chose an approach that could be called more "diplomatic" – he would appear in civil clothes and emphasize not only the battle in the trenches but also battles in the Parliament. Either way no matter which style of communication both separatist leaders chose in their speeches they strongly rely on recognizable symbols and historical narratives that are close to the hearts of people in Eastern Ukraine.

### 3.2 The power of the speech: analysis of the statements

Because of a broad selection of various (textual, audio, video) materials available on the Internet, I have narrowed down my sources. Most videos in this research were retrieved from a YouTube channel of a news agency "News Front" and selected according to their general theme.

Following the method of discourse analysis, I will also pay attention to various symbols that are being used to reinforce the points that separatist leaders in question are making. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, discourse analysis allows looking into systematic occurrences of specific variables. Therefore the findings of this research are illustrated with exact quotes taken from speeches and statements. To showcase re-occurring tendencies I will split this research into three parts. As the question of this research emphasises on *how* separatists use history to justify violence, the sections are formed according to the ways *how* the history is embedded into discussion. Looking over the selected material, I have set three categories on how historical narratives were used:

- By using visual images and symbols that have historical meaning behind them;

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[104] Lenta.ru. "Русский и бессмысленный." https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/03/06/donbass (accessed on August 1, 2019).

- By creating an even deeper divide within the society and set an image of the enemy;

- By creating a sense that history is repeating itself by using references to the past.

### 3.2.1    Image stronger than words: use of visual symbols

Most of the analysed videos have various symbols that strengthen the message. For example, during one meeting with the press on 2 April 2015 Zakharchenko is sitting in his office which is decorated with both Russian and DNR flags. In addition, there are many Orthodox art pieces and holy icons in his office as well (see Figure 2).



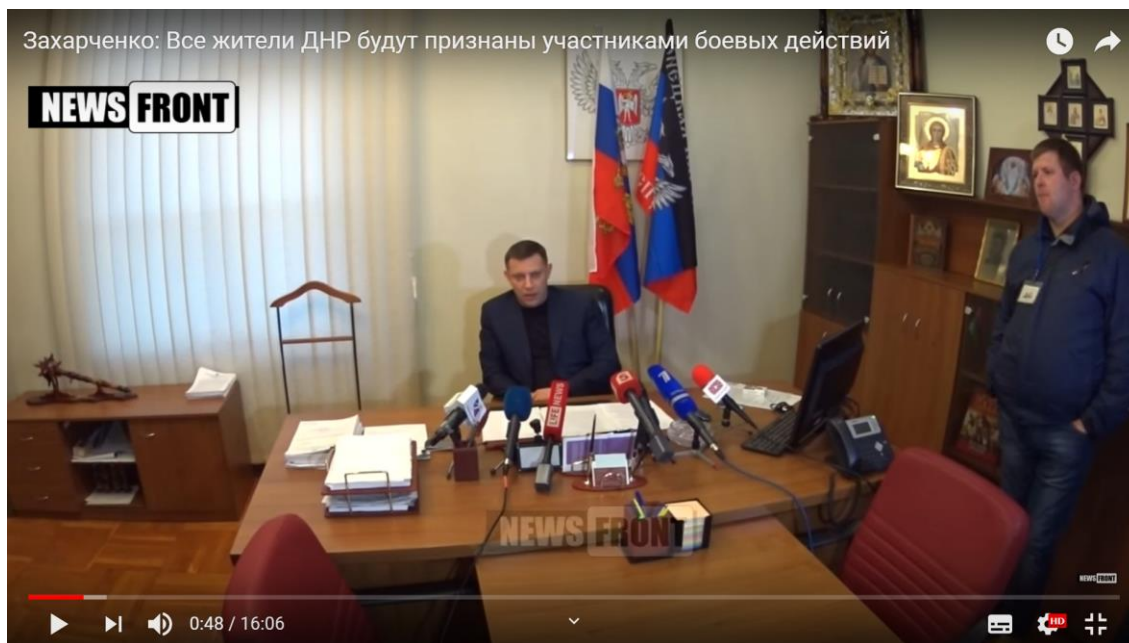**Figure 2 Office of Alexander Zakharchenko**

Therefore, Zakharchenko expresses his strong ties with Russia not only through chosen language, which is Russian, but also symbols that resonate with the population of Donbas. For example, according to Reuters, during one of his campaign trips Zakharchenko lit candles at a Russian Orthodox Church and kissed icons of Jesus and the Virgin Mary before dashing off to

meet about 100 voters in a local factory.[105] Shared religion, as well as language and history, are frequently mentioned throughout his speeches or interviews.

A couple of the statements given by Gubarev are also quite symbolic. The background of his video addresses resembles Zakharchenko's office quite a bit. There is a portrait of Vladimir Putin, next to him – a picture of Venezuelian president (1999-2013) Hugo Chavez who famously aligned himself with Marxist-Leninist governments around the world. Both of the portraits tie with two claims that are noticeable throughout separatist rhetoric – desire of integration with Russia and reminiscence of the communist ideology. There is also a big Novorossiya flag in the back. Gubarev himself often wears the "St. George's ribbon" – the black and orange stripes are originally attached to the award of St. George which is given as a sign of highest bravery (see Figure 3). The award was established by the Russian Empire in 18th century, but St. George's ribbon was utilised by the Soviet army and consequently became a part of a military uniform. Now the ribbon is also considered to be a pro-Russian symbol and is deemed as controversial (or even banned) in many post-Soviet countries.
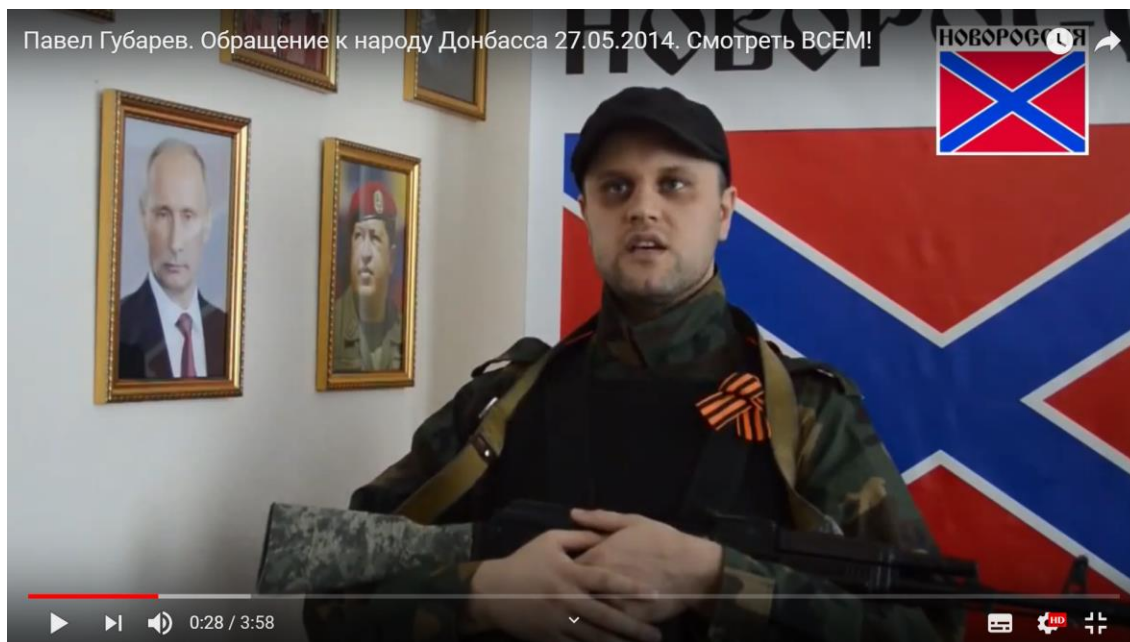


**Figure 3 Video address by Pavel Gubarev**

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[105] Grove, Baczynska. "East Ukraine separatists hold vote to gain legitimacy, promise normalcy." Reuters.

As with the flags of DNR or Novorossiya, the flag of Ukraine is also used to make a statement. In one of the videos published after the battles at Donetsk airport Zakharchenko reaches out to Poroshenko and asks to pay attention to casualties on both sides (see Figure 4): "Poroshenko, come here, take this flag – the symbol of the people who gave their life for your inhuman ambitions. Give this flag to the mothers who's sons died yesterday, the day before yesterday at the airport – they deserve to die with honour, covered with this flag, which they carried when they died".[106]



**Figure 4 Zakharchenko with the flag of Ukraine**

One of the videos chosen for his research shows a commemorative event on Victory day (May 9) that was held next to the damaged monument of Saur-Mogila. Keeping in mind the symbolic meanings behind the date and the place, they definitely amplified the message given by Zakharchenko (more insights will be provided in the section 3.2.3). Looking over just a couple of examples it is quite evident that while showcasing their ideas both Zakharchenko and Gubarev

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[106] "Порошенко, приезжате, заберайте ето знамя - знак тех людей, которые отдали жызни за ваше нечеловечиские амбиции. Это знамя передайте материам, чий сыновья погибли вчера, позавчера в аеропорту - они заслуживают умереть с честью, накрытые флагом, под которым умерали". Quote from: "Захарченко: Порошенко, если не трус, приедь и забери свой флаг. ДНР." YouTube video, 0:14 – 0:40. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdYfcHfQvhY

rely not only on strong words, but also easily recognisable historical symbols, such as flags and military medals. Needless to say, all of them carry a historical meaning behind them and provoke an emotional response from society – which is the ultimate goal of any message. Another way of changing political agenda through history that is noticeable in the statements of separatist leaders is their efforts to divide the society of Ukraine even further and in that way convince people, that the violence is the only way to go about this conflict.

### 3.2.2   Deepening the divide within the society

Any conflict involves heroes and adversaries – and of all the things involving armed confrontation it is up to the leadership of each side to form a negative perception of one another. Many of the statements that were analysed in this research create a feeling of historically formed "us" and "them" – Ukrainian soldiers are addressed as Ukrainians (mostly using insulting nicknames) and soldiers form Donetsk (or, if mentioned, from Luhansk) are what is called in Russian „свои" – "our own" . For example, in one particular video Zakharchenko meets parents of Ukrainian soldiers whose mission is to "bring the truth to the Ukrainian side": "We are the owners of this land; we do not want your land – we just want our own".[107]

In many of his answers Zakharchenko refers to the Ukrainian army as "украинские каратели" (Eng. *Ukrainian punishers*). He uses this description in more than one of his statements; for example, in his speech from May 10, 2015 during the opening ceremony of a monument in memory of the war victims he said the following: "Ukrainian punishers purposefully kept shooting at kindergartens and schools <…> one cannot call them solders and they will answer for their actions as wild animals they are".[108]

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[107] "Донесите свойм солдатам что на этои земле мы хозяйва. Нам не нужна ваша земля - нам нужна наша". Video published on December 25, 2015. Quote from "Захарченко и матери солдат ВСУ в районе донецкого аэропорта." YouTube video, 2:57-3:10. Posted by "News Front", December 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUkfeSPqsSs

[108] "Украинские каратели целенаправленно растреливали детские цады, школы <...> солдатами их называт нельзя, и как с бешеных зверей с них будет отдельный спрос". Quote from "Захарченко: В Донецке заложили монумент в память обо всех погибших жителях ДНР. YouTube video, 1:04-1:26. Posted by "News Front", May 10, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpmkPBGJk6E

Zakharchenko also emphasises uniqueness of the land of Donbas on various occasions: "This is where our ancestors lived; it is not scary to die for this land"[109] or "Donbas is a family, and Ukraine is a state".[110]

He also praises citizens ("our own" people) of DNR as people with concrete values that were carried on throughout generations: "All of the slogans that were heard at Maidan – about the equality, brotherhood, fighting against corruption – we practically implemented them all here. I don't understand why Ukrainian government decided to put down people's declaration of will with tanks, artillery and planes. This is not the land they can control. This is the land of coalminers, metallurgists, farmers, fishermen, doctors and teachers. Those people were serving in the special army divisions under Soviet government. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were fighting a war, and now it is us who are doing it".[111]

This way Zakharchenko emphasises that residents of Donetsk are different from Ukrainians living in Kyiv or Western part of the country. He also points out that this difference comes from the past – people of Donbas are historically stronger (thus reference to the Soviet army), have clear values and therefore should be ready to defend them. Statements alike justify the war as the right and noble thing to do – to die for your land is deemed as heroic. The comparisons with their struggle not carry strong emotional charge and deepen the "us" and "them" divide, but also create a clear narrative of continuation of the fight that was started by ancestors – which in itself is the highest honour and the biggest sacrifice for the motherland that one can make. As an example of that honour both Zakharchenk and Gubarev bring in the memories of World War II and brave resistance of Eastern Ukrainians to Nazi Germany.

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[109] "Здесь жыли наше предки, за ету землю не страшно умереть". Quote from: "ДНР. Захарченко: "Не будет больше никакого перемирия. Мы продолжаем наступление!". YouTube video, 4.41-4.52. Posted by "News Front", January 23, 2015.   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjMgRE6-VC0

[110] "Донбасс это семья, а Украина это государство".  Quote from "Захарченко и матери солдат ВСУ в районе донецкого аэропорта." YouTube video, 2:31-2:45. Posted by "News Front", December 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUkfeSPqsSs /

[111] "Все лозунги которые прозвучали на Майдане, о равенстве, брастве, борьбе с корупциеи, мы практически дословно сделали здесь. Абсолютно не понемаю почему украинская власть решила нормальное волеизъявление народа в виде референдума подавить танками, артилерией и самолётами. Здесь не та земля которую удастся им подавить. Это край шахтёров, металлургов, христян, рыбаков, врачей, учителей. Это те люди которые со времён Советской власти брали в спецподрозделения. Так что мы умеем боевать. Здесь воевали наше деды прадеды, к сожелению воюем теперь мы. Дай Бог чтобы наше дети жыли мирно и не воевали".  Quote from "ДНР. Захарченко встретился с представителями ОБСЕ." YouTube video, 1:17-2:22. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSriR3NIlC8

### 3.2.3    Repetition of the past: references to Stepan Bandera and World War II

Comparing current conflict in Donbas to World War II (in the analysed statements mostly referred to as Great Patriotic War) and creating the feeling of history repeating itself is the most reoccurring way of use of the historical narratives to justify violence. In his statements Zakharchenko often refers to the history of World War II and controversial facts about UPA, OUN and their collaboration with Nazi Germany. He depicts Ukrainian government and military as followers of Bandera's wrongdoings:

(1) "If they want to love Bandera and Shukevich – let them; we do not want to do it. My own grandfather died in 1957 from the hands of Bandera, when he was transporting kids from Lviv. So how can I love Bandera?"[112]

(2) "Glory for the heroes? What heroes? Heroes are those people who fought against the Turk and Tatar, Polish armies, they defended their land. Those who fought against the Swedes, who went to Berlin, defended Kyiv – those people are heroes. And who are those other people – you can read the reports from Wehrmacht. There were only 28 attacks against the Germans during the whole war. <…> what are they going to do in Ukraine – the same as they did to the Jews, push people into ghettos? /*Bystander: It is not us, it is the government /* I am trying to tell them, through you, what we are thinking. For me, Russia is way closer – for a very simple reason. My great-grandfather, grandfather and father served that country loyally and truthfully. We have the same religion, speak the same language, and follow the same customs".[113]

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[112] "Хотят они любит Бандеру, Шукевича - а мы не хотим это любит. У меня дед погиб в 1957 году от бандеровских рук, он детей вывозил из Киева, Львова. Так как я могу любит Бандеру?" Quote from "Захарченко и матери солдат ВСУ в районе донецкого аэропорта." YouTube video, 11:30-12.02. Posted by "News Front", December 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUkfeSPqsSs

[113] "Слава героям? Каким героям слава? Герои ето те, которые боролись против турков и против татар, против поляков, защишяли свою землю. Воевал против шведов, брал Берлин, оборонял Киев - вот ето герои. А ето кто - почитайте  Вермахта. 28 нападений против немцов за всю войну. <...> Эвреэв будете загонять в гетто, вы это хотите сделать в Украине? / *Это не мы, это власть /* Я пытаюсь через вас донести, как мы думаем. Для мениа ближе Россия - по одной простой причине. Мои прадед, мои дед, мои отец служыли верой и правдой стране Россиискои. Одна вера, один язык, одни обычия".  Quote from "Захарченко и матери

The following quotes have a couple of recurrent historical narratives in them, the first being the history of Bandera, which also ties in with mentions of the Holocaust and genocide. As it was established in the beginning of this paper, memories of Bandera are still vivid in Eastern Ukraine and can be used in different capacities. In both quotes persona of Bandera and associations that come with it are clear examples to show the public that separatist side is the "right" side of the conflict, and the followers of Bandera from the West are wrong.

There is also a personal relation to history embedded into Zakharchenko's statements. He mentions his grandfather had died from the hands of Bandera's followers in the quote 1 and explains his close emotional ties with Russia as something that was carried through generations of his family in quote 2. In another statement he appeals to family relations and again depicts the current conflict as a continuation of struggle against oppression: "70 years ago our great-grandfathers and grandfathers gave their lives, now it is our turn".[114]

Gubarev also frequently mentions continuation of the struggle against fascism that was started by the ancestors: "We will attack them just like our grandfathers and great-grandfathers went against fascists Junkers and Fokkers. We will condemn and punish the aggressors, the fascist scum by burying them in Donetsk ground".[115]

As mentioned previously, Zakharchenko creates "us" and "them" divide – he also does that bringing in the facts about the World War II. In the quote number 2 he emphasizes that Ukrainians did not defend their homeland from Nazi Germany ("there were only 28 attacks against the Germans during the whole war"). In the beginning of the same quote he undermines the Ukrainian forces questioning their "heroism". The saying "Слава Украине - героям слава"

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солдат ВСУ в районе донецкого аэропорта." YouTube video, 12:09-12:50. Posted by "News Front", December 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUkfeSPqsSs

[114] "70 лет назад отдавали наше деды и прадеды, а сейчас настал наш черёд". Quote from: "Захарченко: В Донецке заложили монумент в память обо всех погибших жителях ДНР." YouTube video, 1:48-2.02 Posted by "News Front", May 10, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpmkPBGJk6E

[115] "И мы будем бить по ним как наше деды и прадеды били по фашицтким юнкерсам и фокерам. мы осудим их сами, выкинув етих агрессоров, ету фашисткую сволочь с нашей земли. Мы осудим закопав их трупы в Донецкую землю". Quote from: "Павел Губарев. Обращение к народу Донбасса 27.05.2014. Смотреть ВСЕМ!." YouTube video, 3:27-3:45.
Posted by "uaab", 27 May, 2014.  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6PhwqJPgwY

(Eng. *Glory for the Ukraine - Glory for the heroes*) has a strong emotional meaning embedded into it. The phrase was created in 1920s and popularized by nationalist movements led by Bandera during the World War II. However, the phrase carries a controversial meaning. Even though the phrase is now an official greeting used by Ukrainian military and police forces, it is often used by nationalist organizations (such as the "Right Sector") which present themselves as direct followers of Bandera's ideas and are strongly condemned by leaders of self-proclaimed Donbas republics and their citizens. The universal hate towards Bandera is evident in Zakharchenko's New Year's greeting speech which is to be considered as a round-up of 2015: "To contradict the Bandera ideology that is coming from Kyiv, we use the fight for freedom and justice. To contradict the ideology of destruction, we use the ideology of creation. We defended our memories, our history, our religion and our language on the battlefield". [116]

It is safe to say that as a leader of DNR Zakharchenko is a default representation of the state ideology and sets a moral compass for people of Donbas. As was established in the previous chapters, historical memories help him create an image of strong, reliable leader who is worth the trust of the citizens of DNR. Videos showcase not only Zakharchenko's ideas but also people's reactions to them. Every mention of the memory of World War II gets a round of applause and the name of Bandera – a wave of angry exclamations. It is clear that separatist leaders use various speech techniques to convince the audience and ensure the public support. Statistics and strategic information go hand in hand with the reminders of Eastern Ukrainian history to trigger a wider response and ensure that the message resonates with every member of society. Moreover, as the head of the state, Zakharchenko participated in many special events, one of the most important celebrations being Victory Day, celebrated on 9th of May. Again, emphasis on the immensity of the past victories put into the context of a current conflict creates a feeling of participation in "something great". Video from the event in 2015 starts with both wide and close-up shots of a war monument called Saur-Mogila that says "Glory to the Soviet infantry".

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[116] "Бандеровской идеологии Киева мы предпоставили борьбу за свободу и справедливость. Идеологии разрушения мы противопоставили идеологию созидания. Мы отстояли на поле боя нашу память, нашу историю, нашу веру и наш язык." Quote from: "Новогоднее обращение Главы Донецкой Народной Республики Александра Захарченко." YouTube video, 0:58-1:23. Posted by "News Front", January 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afZYuPtqS4Q

**Figure 5 The monument of Saur-Mogila**

Zakharchenko walks on the stage in military uniform and has a limp from an injury. He is greeted by loud round of applause from the crowd, people carry DNR flags. Zakharchenko is also accompanied by a presenter; her speech also included several vivid references to the history of Donbas: "On the 9th of May we commemorate the glorious day of victory against the occupants from Nazi Germany. This day unites both happiness and sorrow. Every year we climb up the legendary mountain of Saur-Mogila which became a symbol of liberation from occupants of Donetsk. But after 70 years nasty fascism found its way back to the land of Donbas. After the battles in August of 2014 this important date from our history books gained a new meaning and new value. Once covered with blood, the sacred hill of Saur-Mogila saw brutal fights again and now the memory of soldiers from the past war is connected to the memory of our generation. Here we praise our warriors and bow to the memory of the fallen defenders and liberators of our native land".[117]

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[117] "9 Майя мы отмечаем славную дату - день победы над немецко-фашисткими захватчиками. Это день, в котором радость и скорбь сплелись в одно целое. Каждый год мы поднимаемся на Саур-Могилу - легендарную высоту, которая стала символом начала освобождения от захватчиков Донецкого края. Но мерзкий фашизм вновь появился на Донбаской земле на прошествие семи десятков лет и памятная дата из учебников истории после августовских боёв 2014 года получила новый смысел и новое значение. Уже однажды абильно политый кровью сакральный для всего Донбаса курган Саур-Могила сново пережыл ожесточенные сражения и теперь память о войнах прошлои войны неизбежно переплетена с историей свидетелями которой стали люди нынешнего поколения. На этом легендарном месте мы воздаём славу

Her speech was followed by comments of Zakharchenko: "Once a wise man said – we have to realize who we were, who we are and who we will be. Who we were? Our ancestors, not only grandparents and great-grandparents, but also those who fought Swedes, Turks in Crimea, took Tsargrad. They are our ancestors. And we also met our enemy here, on the same land, with great glory. And who we will be? A prosperous state with a great, proud nation".[118]

After the speeches were given, Zakharchenko and other DNR officials are shown visiting graves of recently killed soldiers. With this particular video the location is also particularly important. It is emphasized by both speakers that Saur-Mogila is a sacred place for Donetsk residents and marks the sacrifice of their ancestors – which now they have to repeat as the "threat of fascism" has risen again (eg: "after 70 years nasty fascism found its way back to the land of Donbas"). Therefore, the narrative of history repeating itself is being used as a nudge towards fighting and encouraging the society to support the conflict and join the struggle.

нашим войнам и низко склоняем голову перед памятью погибших защитников и освободиделей роднои земли". Quote from: "Захарченко на Саур-Могиле: Когда мы едины – мы непобедимы." YouTube video, 1:50-2:55. Posted by "News Front", April 16, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrD1n9Ohv1U

[118] "Мне когда-то сказал один умный человек - мы должны понять кто мы были, кто мы сейчас и кем мы будем. Ети три вещи. Кто мы были - наше предки, герой, не только деды и прадеды, а и те, которые гоняли шведов под Полтавой, которые гоняли турков в Крыму, которые браи Царьград. Это наше предки. Мы - достойно встретили врага здесь, в етих же самых степях. Какими мы будем? Процветающим государством со славным, гордым народом". Quote from: "Захарченко на Саур-Могиле: Когда мы едины – мы непобедимы." Quote from: "Захарченко на Саур-Могиле: Когда мы едины – мы непобедимы." YouTube video, 3:30-4:02. Posted by "News Front", April 16, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrD1n9Ohv1U
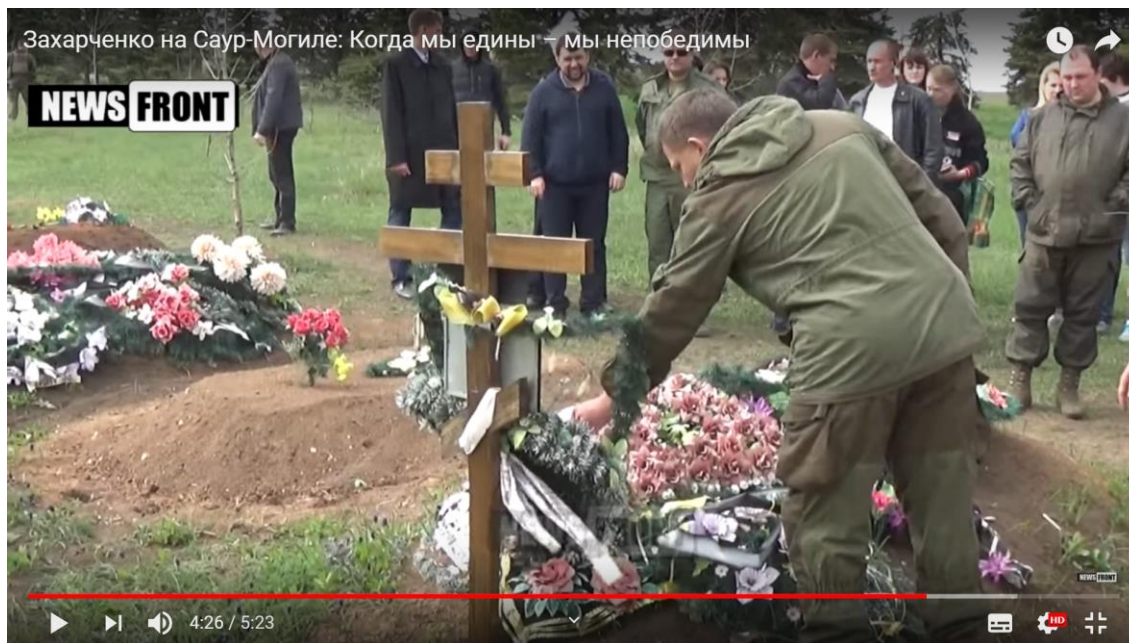
**Figure 6 A. Zakharchenko on Saur-Mogila**

Moreover, the chosen rhetoric creates a quite simple explanation of the situation: "if you are not with us, you are with them". This fits right within the framing theory – by simplifying and providing "proper" interpretation of events, separatist leaders convince their supporters that they are doing the right thing. For instance, in his public address Gubarev very clearly divided the conflict into the "right" and "wrong" side – again, using fascist descriptions towards Ukrainian government: "We are alone against the world. But let me be frank – we will win regardless, just like our grandfathers and great-grandfathers did, as all the nations who chose freedom did. American dollars won't help the Kyiv criminals, nor will the oligarchs who are fighting their own nation together with the junta". [119]

Labelling the actions of Ukrainian government and military as "genocide" uses both – the historic memory and "right" explanation of what the conflict in Donbas is. It is obvious that Zakharchenko's words are deepening the divide into "us" and "them" that was mentioned before.

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[119] "Мы одни против всего мира. Но я скажу прямо - мы всё равно победим, как побеждали наше деды и прадеды, как побеждали все народы мира, выбравшие свободу. Киевским преступникам не помогут ни американские доллары, ни псаки, не их агентура среди месных продажных олигархов, которые сегодня вместе с хунтой войют против своего народа". Quote from: "Павел Губарев. Обращение к народу Донбасса 27.05.2014. Смотреть ВСЕМ!." YouTube video, 2:21-2:50. Posted by "uaab", 27 May, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6PhwqJPgwY

In one of the meetings with media representatives he used the definition of "Ukrainian punishers" (Rus. *Каратели*) that has been heart in his statements before: "It's genocide, their armed forces behave like punishers, it's an operation to punish us. Unfortunately, Ukrainian soldiers who took the oath leaned towards the coup. Truly, they are not officers, those, who even talk about the coup, should behave like real officers – take a gun and shoot themselves so they won't carry the shame and won't spoil the honour of the army". [120]

Zakharchenko also does not hold back with his words showing that he is the same as every other resident in Donbas and shares their anger, fear and despair – calling the government as an assembly of "scoundrels and scum" (Rus. *негодяев и подонков*). In the following quote he again uses the history repeating itself narrative and compares nationalists in Kyiv to Nazi Germany: "This country was torn by a group of scoundrels and other scum. And it has to be united now. We will always remain Slavic Russians. Let the Kyivans remember that Kyiv Rus' was born in their city. The ideals that we all follow must be awakened in their hearts too. We can't just betray the blood of predecessors who fought for this country with fascists. We can't forget the atrocities that they committed. And now there are marches in Kyiv – don't they look familiar? Munich 1938. I think they are very similar. Swastikas, torches, and then they start burning books. And later what – concentration camps"?[121]

The following quotes show more instances of using fascist/nationalist symbols to prove the point of just war. Mentions of swastikas and prospects of building concentration camps without a doubt create a shock factor. Those statements again send a message of "carrying on the fight that

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[120] "Геноцид, вооруженные силы выступают как каратели, происходит карательная операция. К сожелению военные Украины, принявшие присягу, подались военному перевороту. На самом деле ето придатели а не офицеры, и кто даже об етом заикается, должен как настоящий офицер взять пистолет и застрелиться, добы не нести такой позор и честь офицерскую не поганить". Quote from; "ДНР. Захарченко: "Мы пойдем дальше, до Славянска, Краматорска". YouTube video, 00:10-0:38. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mw4cnBok8c

[121] "Эту страну, которую порвали сбор негодяев и подонков, надо обединять. И как были мы славянами русскими, так мы ими и останемся. Пускай киевляне помнят, что Киевская Русь шла с этого города. И те идеалы, по которым мы жывем, за которые воюем, пускай в каждом человеке в сердце проснётся. Нельзя предовать кровь предков, которые за эту землю сражались с фашистами. Нельзя забывать те зверства которые они делали. А у нас в Киеве шествия проходят. Не напоминает вам ничего? Мюнхен 1938 года? По моему очень даже похоже. Свастика, факел, потом книжки будем жечь. Потом что, лагеря?" Quote from; "ДНР. Захарченко: "Мы пойдем дальше, до Славянска, Краматорска". 2:29-3:30. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mw4cnBok8c

was started by predecessors" which is the noblest thing to do. Gubarev also makes a clear point that history is repeating itself and compares the rise of fascist ideology in Kyiv with Nazi Germany. The repetition of events was emphasized in this quote: "Today we are in the year 1942. If we draw the analogy, it's no more the year 1941. We have mobilized and started pushing back. Then will follow 1943, the turning point of taking the initiative. There will also be 1944 when we will push them underground – in both military and political ways. And then 1945 will follow – a year of celebration and victory. It will be a great victory, because we are worth of our grandfathers. We are on the right side, the enemy will be destroyed and we will win". [122]

Here Gubarev draws a precise analogy between the World War II and current situation. By presenting the historical facts in that way he creates a sense of continuation, as in everybody who supports the cause is repeating the heroic victory of their ancestors. Analogies like that resonate even stronger and have a powerful effect in a society that is constantly reminded of historical events. Nationwide annual celebrations of the Victory Day and other significant events that are held to commemorate the sacrifice of, speaking in the words of Zakharchenko and Gubarev, "grandfathers and great-grandfathers", serve as a continuous reminder of the past.

By comparing the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine with World War II Gubarev also makes a promise that after a long struggle there will be a happy ending and the "right" side will win. It is not clear what the actual victory will bring to DNR, but struggles that might follow after are not that important. What matters the most is to reiterate the achievements of past generation. There is little doubt that similar analogies have a great mobilizing power, keeping in mind that this interview was given at an "anti-fascist conference" which had probably united like-minded people.

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[122] "Сегодня мы находимся в 1942 году, если проводить аналогию - уже не 1941 год, мы собрались, мы начали движение в ответ. А будет и 1943 год, год перелома и перехвата инициативы. Будет и 1944 год наступления, мы загоним их в подполия. И военым путём мы можем это сделать, и политическим. И будет 1945 год, год торжества и победы. Будет новая великая победа потому что мы достойны своих дедов. Наше дело правое, враг будет разбит и победа будет за нами." Quote from: "ДНР. Захарченко встретился с представителями ОБСЕ. YouTube video, 5:58-6:41. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSriR3NIlC8

More instances of the "reoccurring history" narrative and clear analogy with the World War II can be seen in one more public address by Gubarev. He is wearing a military uniform and there is again Putin's portrait in the background and flag of Novorossiya as well:

"In this historical turning point we have to follow the example of our fathers and grandfathers who in during the distant 1941 came together, fought for Moscow, managed to defend the capital of our motherland and pushed the fascist invaders back. Now we need help from every resident of the city, we need militiamen, who will get a gun and stand up to defend their families and their motherland".[123]

[…]

"If everybody will not do this now, our families and relatives will face enslavement and mockery from fascist invaders".[124]

[…]

"This is the exact same way our grandfathers and great-grandfathers volunteered during the Great Patriotic War. They went to the front so they can fight fascists with weapons and strength of Russian spirit. Now it is our turn to show that we can follow their footsteps in the time of need and defend our motherland".[125]


The following quotes include quite a direct call for arms with a literal threat of what will happen if people will not rise up to fight the same enemy their ancestors faced "during the distant 1941". According to Gubarev, volunteering for DNR has the same level of honour as being a World War II veteran – therefore, refusing to defend your motherland would be just a shame.

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[123] "В этот решающий исторический момент мы должны ровнятся на пример наших отцов и дедов, которые в долёком 1941 году сплотились в едином порыве битвы за Москву и сумели отстоять сталицу нашей родины и дать отпор фашистк'им захватчикам. Сейчас нам нужна помощь каждого жителя города, нам нужны ополченцы, которые получат оружие и встанут на защиту своих семей, своей отчизны". Quote from: "Павел Губарев - обращение 7июля. Битва за Донецк." YouTube video, 0:51-1:16. Posted by "Dee Dee" 7 July, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH3l-l6tWTA

[124] "Точно также наше деди и прадеды отправлялись добровольцами в Великую Отечественную войну, они отправлялись на фронт чтобы бить фашистов оружием и стойкостью русского духа. Теперь настала наша очередь показать приемственность покалений и в нужный час встать на защиту родины" Quote from: "Павел Губарев - обращение 7июля. Битва за Донецк." YouTube video, 1:40-1:51.

[125] "Если каждый из нас сейчас этого не сделает, нас ждёт порабощение и издевательство над вашими родными и близкими со стороны фашистких захватчиков". Quote from: "Павел Губарев - обращение 7июля. Битва за Донецк." YouTube video, 2:46-3:08

Keeping in mind the broader context of the history of World War II (for example the fact that most of the soldiers who volunteered in the Soviet army were forced to do so) mentions of the "right" thing to do seem unfitting. However, there is high possibility that by mentioning only the heroic part of history separatist leaders use their audience's ignorance and conceivable lack of knowledge.

When speaking on "reoccurring crimes that the world has seen and condemned before", both Zakharchenko and Gubarev use the word "genocide" and emphasise the reason behind why alleged genocide is happening: because Donbas stood up for the right values that were passed throughout history, from generation to generation. Zakharchenko often accuses journalists of not giving enough attention to Eastern Ukraine. Speaking with the press he often emphasizes the hypocrisy of the media. During one of his trips with a group of local and international journalists Zakharchenko said the following: "If there is a terrorist attack in France that takes 10 lives – everybody is outraged. And here, 10 or more people die every day. Why the world is not outraged then, why don't you tell everybody that it's genocide, it's a war against their own people. Why don't you, the press, talk about it? Let the world know about targeted annihilation of the nation. Let Ukraine see – people in Kyiv never saw this. Ukrainian soldiers kill people. Because we said "no" to the military coup in Kyiv and illegal change of the government".[126]

In his video address to the citizens of DNR on 27 May, 2014 Gubarev also goes on to accuse Western society of indifference and described Ukrainian actions as war crimes that resemble the World War II: "The Geneva Conventions are trampled. Fascist hordes coming here from the West, just like seven decades ago, don't value lives of peaceful civilians. It's all because of their criminal political ideas. Notice this – it's not us who are using heavy artillery against peaceful cities. But the journalists who sold themselves to Kyiv are calling us terrorists. I want to ask –

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[126] "Если во Франций в теракте погибло 10 человек, это возмутило весь мир. У нас 10 человек погибает ежедневно. Почему весь мир не возмущается, почему не говорите что это геноцид, это война против своего народа? Почему вы, как пресса, этого не освещаете? Пускай весь мир узнает что здесь происходит своемерное уничтожение народа. Пускай Украйна посмортит - люди в Киеве етого не видели. Здесь людей убивают, украинские военные. А всё из за чего - потому что мы сказали нет военому перевороту в Киеве, нет незаконному свержению власти." Quote from: "ДНР. Захарченко встретился с представителями ОБСЕ. YouTube video, 5:11-6:43.
Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSriR3NlIC8

who are the real terrorists? It was not us who went to Kyiv airport with war. We are just defending our land, our families, our children, from that brown scum that is crawling for us from the West".[127]

In both of these quotes there is a notion that DNR is not the perpetrator in this conflict. In an interview he gave at the same event that was mentioned before (the "anti-fascist forum") Gubarev was again wearing the Georgian ribbon. In the beginning he mentions filling official reports and sending them to international courts that are competent enough to take cases on genocide and war crimes. He also mentions fighting the fascist ideology and drawing attention of the Western countries to the conflict in Donbas: "It is very important, because some in Europe and USA have forgotten – they have a short memory – about the fact that all of this had already happened before and it was condemned by international society. They forgot about Nurnberg tribunal and that fascist ideology was condemned before".[128]

The narrative of "reoccurring history" is also evident in Gubarev's book on Novorossiya "Torch of Novorossiya". The following section of this chapter will provide examples to prove this statement.

While explaining the origins of Novorossiya, Gubarev points out the fact that Donetsk was never in "so-called Ukraine" because it was always a unique territory: "In the local museum of Donetsk you can find an old map from 1912, and then it was called "A plan for the establishment of Novorossiya's coal, metal, steel and railroad production". This is an example of Donetsk in

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[127] "Все Женевские конвенции попраны. Фашисткие орды, вторгшиися к нам с Запада, как и семь десятелетей назад, не во что не ставят жизнь мирных жителей воймя своих приступных, воено - политических целей. Заметьте - не мы сегодня осадили Киевский аэропорт. Не мы бъём из тяжелой артилерии по мирным городам. Но за то киевские записные псаки всё время называют нас террористами. Хочу спросить - кто тут террорист? Мы не ходили к ним в Киев с войнои. Мы зашищаем свою землю, свои семьи, свойх детей от коричневой мрази коротая ползёт к нам из запада". Quote from: "Павел Губарев. Обращение к народу Донбасса 27.05.2014. Смотреть ВСЕМ!." YouTube video, 0:32-1:29. Posted by "uaab", 27 May, 2014.  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6PhwqJPgwY

[128] "Это тоже очень важная вещь, потому что некоторые в Эвропе, США забыли, у них очень короткая память, о том, что это уже было, о том, что мировое сообщество это уже осудило, о том, что был Нюрнбергский трибунал, о том, что идеология фашизма была осуждена." Quote from: "Мощное интервью Павла Губарева на антифашистском форуме в Донецке." YouTube video, 1:27-1:51. Posted by "News Front", 14 May, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xTf5dAIIP8

1912. But even in the times of tsarist Russia Novorossiya became more of a historical name for a couple of administrative-territorial entities. However, Novorossiya was never included into the so-called Ukraine".[129]

As was mentioned in the background chapter, even though the idea of Novorossiya still is far from its realisation, it occurred many times throughout the shared history of Russia and Ukraine. The latest attempt to bring this idea to life surfaced in 2014, on the rise of what Gubarev calls the "Russian Spring".  This is what he has to say on Novorossiya in the beginning of his book:  "If one would erase Novorossiya from our history – a significant part of Russian national pride would simply disappear. What do we instantly remember when we talk about the glory of Russian weapons, about our heroism? […] We remember the fights near Saur-Mogila, when Stalin's army in August 1943 broke through the German Mius-front, […]. Nobody could ever imagine that 71 years later at the same place the army of Novorossiya will fiercely fight the neo-bandera, ukra-fascist junta". [130]

This is one of many instances of this book when Gubarev uses the narrative of history repeating itself. He uses the same definitions that can be found in his and Zakharchenko's statements. Keeping in mind the importance of Saur-Mogila in contemporary Ukraine, its mention as one of the most important symbols of World War II creates a notion that the army of Novorossiya is just as great as the Soviet army was back in a day and is able to achieve great victories (no matter the cost).

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[129] "В краеведческом музее города Донецка висит карта города 1912 года, только называется карта «План завода Новороссийского общества каменноугольного, железного, стального и рельсового производств (Юзовский завод)». Это и есть Донецк образца 1912 года. Но еще в царской России Новороссия стала скорее историческим названием для нескольких административно-территориальных единиц. Однако Новороссия никогда не была так называемой Украиной." Quote from "Факел Новороссии" (Eng. *Torch of Novorossiya*) by Pavel Gubarev (Saint-Petersburg, 2016) p. 2. Accessed through: https://www.rulit.me/programRead.php?program_id=411170&page=1

[130] "Убери Новороссию из нашей истории — и исчезнет изрядная часть русской национальной гордости. Кого мы вспоминаем, когда разговор заходит о славе русского оружия, о нашем национальном героизме? […] Мы вспоминаем об ожесточенных боях у Саур-могилы, когда армии Сталина в августе 1943-го взламывали немецкий Миус-фронт, […] И мало кто мог даже вообразить себе, что 71 год спустя там будут идти бои между армией Новороссии и силами необандеровской, «майданной» укрофашистской хунты." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p.1

The narrative of grandfathers and great-grandfathers, which is quite frequent in the videos that were analysed earlier, occurs in Gubarev's book as well: "Once the Donetsk Russians armed themselves, once they rose up against the followers of Bandera with rifles and carbines that once belonged to their grandfathers, in their hands, all of those Western-Ukrainian passionaries' chose to defend Maidan and hide in Kharkiv and Ternopol, sit everything over in their farmhouses and run away from calls to join the army".[131]

He also mentions more recent history of Ukraine bringing in the regional differentiation: "South-eastern regions of Ukraine were always against the Bandera-like, Russofobic forces: it is evident from the electoral maps of Ukraine from 1991-2012".[132]

Just as in his public addresses, Gubarev likes to draw direct historical analogies in his book too. While explaining his fascination with the idea of Novorossiya he mentions the year he was born as a turning point of the "first" Cold War and now similar events are happening again: "The 1983 was significant because USSR was ruled by the former KGB chief Jurij Andropov; people were full of hope about better future. And during the same year the president of the United States of America Ronald Reagan announced the "Star Wars" program, and shortly after he called the Soviet Union the "empire of evil", because it was 1983 when near the Moneron Island our fighters hit the South Korean "Boeing-747". And that, first Cold War, became even more bitter. I guess it is pretty symbolic: 31 years after that event there is another "Boeing" that had fallen in the DNR, again with passengers. And again Russia and Novorossiya are called "empire of evil".[133]

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[131] "Как только донецкие русы взялись за оружие, как только поднялись против последышей Бандеры с извлеченными из белых хранилищ Соледара дедовскими противотанковыми ружьями и карабинами, все эти западноукраинские пассионарии предпочли охранять Майдан в Киеве, куражиться во Львове и Тернополе, отсиживаться по прикарпатским своим хуторам, бегая от повесток из военкомата." Quote from "Факел Новороссии" p. 5.

[132] "Юго-Восточные области Украины голосовали всегда против самых бандеровских, русофобских сил: это видно по электоральным картам Украины 1991–2012 годов." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 3.

[133] "Тот, 1983-й, год знаменовался тем, что в СССР правил бывший шеф КГБ СССР Юрий Андропов, люди были полны надежд на лучшее будущее. В тот год президент Соединенных Штатов Рональд Рейган объявит о начале программы «звездных войн», а вскоре объявит Советский Союз «империей зла», потому что именно в 1983-м у острова Монерон наши собьют южнокорейский «Боинг-747» — и та, еще первая холодная война, пойдет на круг ожесточения. Наверное, это глубоко символично: ровно 31 год спустя в ДНР упадет другой «Боинг», тоже с пассажирами. И снова и Россию, и Новороссию начнут выставлять «империей зла»." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 12.

As a proof of oppression of Russian people that came around after "fascist victory" in Kyiv, Gubarev gives an example of a new legislation that scrapped the previous law passed by Yanukovich. The law established that Russian language can be officially used as a "regional" language. However, the new government that came to power after the protests at Maidan square reversed the law, which caused outrage in predominantly Russian East and South of Ukraine: "Remember: the smoke from the burning tires on Maidan was not completely scattered yet, when the winners already passed the law prohibiting the use of Russian language as a regional language, where "national language" (Ukr. *дэржавна мова*) is not being used. There are Nazi thugs (Rus. *молодчики*) from the "Right Sector" openly marching in Kyiv: not only with portraits of Bandera, but also with automatic guns". [134] Therefore, in his book he calls people to fight for the right to be Russian: "This is why we rose up for a fight - to remain Russian. To protect our "Russian-ness"! Just as people that lived in Dniestr river area (Rus. *Приднестровцы*), who in 1990 rose up against forced Romanization […]". [135]

Even though this thesis does not focus on possible economic reasons behind the separatist movement, economy is sometimes tied with history: "Of course, "banderovites" (Rus. *Бандеровцы*) continue to entertain themselves and their gullible followers with stories about how after the victory against "vata" Ukraine will torpedo to success. It will be like the new China! That is because people that belong to Ukrainian race are allegedly smarter and more hardworking than "muscovites" (Rus. *москалей-кацапов*). They are stubborn and do not want to remember that Ukraine was prosperous in USSR just because it was a part of a huge country. It was a part of humongous development projects of the Soviet Union. And as soon as this market was gone, Ukraine had plummeted down". [136]

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[134] "Вспомните: еще толком не рассеялся дым от пожаров и горящих покрышек, но победители уже принимают закон о фактическом отказе от использовании русского языка как регионального в областях, где «дэржавна мова» не используется. В Киеве открыто шествуют откровенно нацистские молодчики «Правого сектора»: не только с портретами Бандеры, но и с нарезным автоматическим оружием." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 3.

[135] "Потому мы и поднялись на борьбу, чтобы остаться русскими. Отстоять свою русскость! Как и приднестровцы, которые в 1990-м восстали против насильственной румынизации, […]." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 4.

[136] "Правда, укропитеки-бандеровцы продолжают тешить себя и легковерную паству свою россказнями о том, будто бы после победы над «ватой» Украина ка-ак рванет вперед в развитии! Станет новым Китаем! Потому что люди украинской расы (ее открыли «свободовцы») якобы намного трудолюбивее и умнее «москалей-кацапов». Они упорно не желают понимать, что Украина была процветающей в СССР именно благодаря тому, что являлась частью огромной страны. Участницей громадных проектов развития

This quote also serves the purpose of deepening the fragmentation of society – by using nicknames that also have historical charge in them (for example, Russian soldiers were called "muskovites" by Polish-Lithuanian army in 18th century) Gubarev emphasizes the historical friction between Ukrainians and Russians.

Gubarev also reminiscences about the time when Novorossiya was part of the Soviet Union and was a thriving land. The glory of the past is set as an example what current generation should strive for in order for Novorossiya to succeed: "In USSR Novorossiya was rising and developing. The whole country knew about the progress that is being made in Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Krivoj Rog, Odessa, Nikolaev. Of course there were ups and downs, but in 1980-s this historical territory stood out by its highest level of development in industrial, scientific, educational and agricultural fields".[137]

In the hindsight, an overview of both Zakharchenko's and Gubarev's statements show a couple of patterns. Of course, there are many more factors that were behind the creation of separatist movements in the Eastern Ukraine, looking from historical perspective the "repetition of past events" narrative is definitely the most noticeable one. Active calls to fight for what is right (it being Russian values that were defended by ancestors) were supported by bringing examples from the past and often drawing analogies with World War II. Moreover, by constantly using historical insults (such as "Banderovites", "muscovites" or "vata") they create the image of the enemy that clearly resembles the past. Because many residents of Donbas have extremely negative attitude towards OUN, UPA and Stepan Bandera, it is an effective way to persuade people that history is indeed repeating itself.

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Советского Союза, Империи. Как только такого громадного рынка не стало, все на Украине покатилось вниз." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 9.

[137] "В СССР Новороссия поднималась и развивалась. На всю страну гремели достижения Донбасса, Днепропетровска и Кривого Рога, Одессы, Николаева. Да, конечно, не обошли Новороссию и беды той эпохи, но к середине 1980-х эта историческая область отличалась высочайшей степенью развития всего: индустрии, науки и образования, сельского хозяйства." Quote from "Факел Новороссии", p. 2.

## 4. Conclusion

The impact of history on the political agenda might not be obvious at first sight – a bunch of activists and volunteers who had never held a gun in their hands did not seem as much of a threat to the officials in Kyiv. Protests on the Maidan square in the end of 2013 were expected to calm down after a couple of days (maybe a week or so) and life in Ukraine would go back to its normal flow. But it did not. So is the conflict in Donbas still underway, and among several factors the memory of the past is also at play here.

Keeping in mind the public opinion polls, even though questions about some sort of secession from Ukraine (or even joining with Russia into a one state) gained considerable amount of support in the East, it is still not the majority. The division in Ukrainian society existed for many years, but it took a bunch of activists to escalate the divide to a conflict that some call a civil war. It is safe to say that it takes little effort to trigger a part of society that already feels angry and treated unfairly. In this instance, history is a win-win method for separatists to reach out to the desired demographic. For separatist leaders in DNR the main targets were those people who were raised on nostalgic memories of Soviet glory and disappointed by the treatment of the government of independent Ukraine. Economic decline and low welfare were major contributing factors to the uprising in Donbas. Also, it goes without saying that outside boost (such as support from Vladimir Putin) added weight to separatist ideas as well.

However, the conducted research had shown that history cannot be overlooked when talking about society as diverse and complex as in Ukraine. As the split was already there for many years (and the complicated history is also an element that added to the fragmentation) all it took is to bring back some painful, controversial and proud memories from the past. One of the most vivid and noticeable examples is the image of Stepan Bandera. Even after 70 years his name starts fiery debates both in the Ukrainian Parliament (Rada) and at the dinner table of an ordinary family. What is deemed as heroic in the West is considered criminal in the East – and *vice versa*. Another example might be Novorossiya – a geopolitical concept that was embedded into

Ukrainian national history was not at all a success, but nevertheless it raised discussions and was used to prove the righteousness of the armed conflict in Donbas.

As was set in the beginning, the main objective of this paper was to answer the question "*how* do the separatists in Donbas use historical narratives to justify the violence". Relying on discourse analysis, these are the main ways how separatist engaged with history and used it as an apparatus to achieve political goals:

- By using negative historical memories and applying them in the present, for example, describing the government in Kyiv using historical definitions, such as "Bandera junta", "fascist Kyiv junta", using the "Glory to Ukraine" chant, etc.
- By creating the "history is repeating itself" narrative. Such memories as victory in the Great Patriotic War is still considered one of the proudest, most important achievements to this day, therefore, it is easy to justify the current conflict as the right thing to do. To put it in simple words (exactly what framing technique is used for) – "your grandfather defended this land from fascists – do not be a coward and do so too".
- By creating "us" and "them" divide on historical grounds. For example, separatist often mention that Ukrainians did not fight the right fight during the World War II – they are doing it again now.
- By separatists creating personal relations with history and showing themselves as an example of historical injustice that now has to be avenged (for example telling the stories on how their own relatives were involved in the World War II).

As an overview of academic debate on the subject of Donbas conflict had shown, the "repetition of history" element also works because of the growing Soviet nostalgia – both on historical and economic basis. Looking at the interviews and press conferences that Zakharchenko and Gubarev had held there is a definite reminder of the past economic glory of Donbas which he promises to bring back. Some of the videos found on the "News Front" YouTube channel emphasise how bad things were under the "Kyiv junta" but now, when the DNR is independent, the food is more affordable, citizens have more social guarantees, etc. However, besides the promises of general welfare, Zakharchenko emphasises regaining freedom on emotional level

and restoring the historical justice. The only possible way to reach that goal is an armed conflict – just the way their predecessors used to defend their freedom during the World War II.

It is hard to judge how much influence these statements had on the conflict development itself – reflecting on the whole process of this research it might have been possible to do while concluding interviews with actual residents of Donbas and give the analysis of this topic more personal touch, by basing the research on their answers. The following idea could be an option for further exploration of the topic. However, it is safe to say that words of the trusted leaders shape public perception of the conflict. The frame that was set in the introduction of this thesis that "ethnical Russians in Ukraine are being oppressed and have the right to separate" had proved to be accurate. For instance, if the head of the state (in this case Zakharchenko) often emphasizes that the new post-Maidan government in Kyiv poses a fascist threat, it will create a sense of fear in society that history might be repeating itself and something has to be done about it before it is too late. People are constantly reminded of the past by holding commemorative events (the visit of Saur-Mogila is the perfect example) and including historical references at any given opportunity – while talking about victories, losses, political and economic prospects, etc.

In order to ensure and raise public support for the violence, actors of this research used a combination of factors: historical narratives, figures of speech, general surroundings and appropriate set-ups and locations to deliver the statements. From the perspective of communications those variables seem to be taken out of propaganda textbook and provide a major contribution to rising support towards separatism (during 2014-2015). For example, by mentioning memory of the World War II and associating it with their own grandfathers, Zakharchenko and Gubarev make the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine seem as a continuation of past fight. By standing for "what is right" separatist fighters honour the memory of their ancestors and reach the same level of heroism. Both of them often wear military uniforms with full ammunition and/or militaristic symbols such as St. George's ribbon. And being a military commander himself Zakharchenko gives his words extra credibility – by wearing the military uniform, carrying a gun and showcasing injuries (that do not stop him from fulfilling his duty) he sets an example of contemporary hero, a follower of his ancestors' struggle.

However, the influence of history on Ukraine's political agenda can be explored even further. Stepping forward from my own research, primary focus should fall on the media. As my analysis was focused solely on the material gathered on the Internet, it would also be beneficial to explore the perception of history that is being provided by traditional media (such as television, radio and press) in DNR. Keeping in mind, that when the conflict erupted in 2014 Ukrainian media was gradually pushed back and replaced with Russian channels, analysis of the mass communication outlets could provide valuable insights into this topic.

As another option for further research I would consider a more detailed look into education system in Ukraine. In my research I just grasped a bit on the fact that history textbooks were edited depending on which party had won the elections and formed the government. However, education is the primary reason why history is being interpreted in a certain way. As education system is formed by the state, it all goes down to memory politics and a lack of one concrete apprehension of history. Further research might show that the government in Kyiv shares the blame of creation of separatist movements. Maybe because members of the political elite have put their own aspirations forward, the process of state-building and more importantly nation-building in Ukraine turned out the way it did – with a still existing divide between Western and Eastern regions and no concrete way to resolve it. Of course, economic and social problems had their influence – analysis of those issues would also provide valuable insights into the research of separatism in Ukraine.

In the end of the day, the role of history simply cannot be downplayed. As this study focuses on 2014-2015, it is safe to say that during this particular period of time separatism in Eastern Ukraine held strong positions within its society. A mixture of already existing fragmentation and re-enforcement from the stages and TV screens led to a conflict that eventually (speaking from a current perspective) froze down. As it is not the main purpose of this research, it is difficult to speculate about the reasons of stagnation in Donbas based on the results of this analysis. However, keeping in mind the context of 2019, it may well be argued that using historical narratives to justify violence cannot be considered as an effective long-term strategy.

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## 6. Videos analysed

Videos are listed chronologically, translations of the titles are provided in the brackets:

1. Павел Губарев. Обращение к народу Донбасса 27.05.2014. Смотреть ВСЕМ!. (Pavel Gubarev. An appeal to the people of Donbass 05/27/2014. Watch ALL!). YouTube video, 3:58. Posted by "uaab", 27 May, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6PhwqJPgwY

2. Павел Губарев - обращение 7июля. Битва за Донецк. YouTube video, 3:21. (Pavel Gubarev. An appeal on 7 July. The Battle for Donetsk). Posted by "Dee Dee" 7 July, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH3l-l6tWTA

3. ДНР. Захарченко: "Мы пойдем дальше, до Славянска, Краматорска". (DNR> Zakharchenko: "We will go further, to Sloviyansk, Kramotorsk:"). YouTube video, 5:28. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mw4cnBok8c

4. ДНР. Захарченко встретился с представителями ОБСЕ. (DNR. Zakharchenko met with the representatives of OSCE). YouTube video, 14.43. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSriR3NllC8

5. Захарченко: Порошенко, если не трус, приедь и забери свой флаг. ДНР. (Zakharchenko: Poroshenko, if you are not a coward, come and take your flag. DNR). YouTube video, 1:16. Posted by "News Front", January 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdYfcHfQvhY

6. ДНР. Захарченко: "Не будет больше никакого перемирия. Мы продолжаем наступление!". (DNR. Zakharchenko: "There will be no truce. We are continuing with the offence!"). YouTube video, 6:40. Posted by "News Front", January 23, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjMgRE6-VC0

7. Захарченко: Все жители ДНР будут признаны участниками боевых действий. (Zakharchenko: All of the residents of DNR are considered to be combatants). YouTube video, 16:06. Posted by "News Front", April 2, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hdjiJXuCmw

8. Захарченко на Саур-Могиле: Когда мы едины – мы непобедимы. (Zakharchenko on the Saur-Mogila: When we are together – we are invincible). YouTube video, 5:23. Posted by "News Front", April 16, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrD1n9Ohv1U

9. Захарченко: В Донецке заложили монумент в память обо всех погибших жителях ДНР. (Zakharchenko: A monument was built in Donetsk to commemorate all the fallen citizens of DNR). YouTube video, 8:22. Posted by "News Front", May 10, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpmkPBGJk6E

10. Мощное интервью Павла Губарева на антифашистском форуме в Донецке. (A powerful interview of Pavel Gubarev at the anti-fascist forum in Donetsk). YouTube video, 8:53. Posted by "News Front", 14 May, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xTf5dAIIP8

11. Захарченко о названии детской организации "Захаровцы". (Zakharchenko on the name of "Zakharovcy" organization). YouTube video, 5:28. Posted by "News Front", 12 December, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gukqzAdd9lU&t=2s

12. Захарченко и матери солдат ВСУ в районе донецкого аэропорта. (Zakharchenko and the mothers of Ukrainian soldiers in the outskirts of Donetsk airport). YouTube video, 17:12. Posted by "News Front", December 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUkfeSPqsSs

13. Новогоднее обращение Главы Донецкой Народной Республики Александра Захарченко. (The New Year address of the Head of Donetsk People's Republic Aleksander Zakharchenko). YouTube video, 3:24. Posted by "News Front", January 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afZYuPtqS4Q

14. Губарев: цель восстания Донбасса - будущее, а не только война с нацизмом. (Gubarev: the main goal of the uprising in Donbas is future, not only the war with Nazism). YouTube video, 6.39. Posted by "Информационное агентство Новороссия", 13 February, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvAfvjEvBFY

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 General timeline

As the amount of possible material is incredibly broad, videos in the analysis were selected by the number of views, titles and the main actors. The timeline of events will provide more insights on why years 2014-2015 were chosen for this research.

**2014**

The escalation of events in Eastern Ukraine started on March 3, when protesters occupied government buildings in Donetsk.[138] Later on the same was done in Luhansk and Kharkiv, however, control of the later was regained by Ukrainian authorities the next day.

On April 15, Ukraine launched anti-terrorist operation. The big uproar was caused a month later, when during a clash between protesters in Odessa on May 3 at least 31 activists died in a fire. [139]

On May 11 Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics declared independence by holding a referendum (which was not recognized internationally).

July 17 – Malaysia Airlines MH 17 flight catastrophe; 297 people died. The accident added to a further destabilization in Donbas region and escalated already existing hostility between Western powers, Ukraine and Russia.

On May 26 separatist forces began the seizure of Donetsk International airport.[140] Moths of September and November brought intense fighting at the Donetsk airport. It is estimated that two

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[138] Lina Kushch. "Pro-Russia protesters occupy regional government in Ukraine's Donetsk." Reuters.com https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-donetsk-protests/pro-russia-protesters-occupy-regional-government-in-ukraines-donetsk-idUSBREA220XI20140303 (accessed on August 6, 2019).
[139] BBC World. "Ukraine crisis: Dozens killed in Odessa fire amid clashes." Bbc.com
 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27259620 (accessed on August 1, 2019).

battles took lives of more than 200 soldiers[141]; number of civilian casualties varies depending on the source. [142]

In August Zakharchenko claimed that DNR forces are getting major help from Russian military, such as new armoured vehicles and soldiers trained in Russia.[143] According to Reuters, "in a sign of concern at the latest rebel comments, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko agreed in a phone call on Saturday that deliveries of weapons to separatists in Ukraine must stop and a ceasefire must be achieved, a German government spokesman said".[144]

On September 5 Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko and Russian president Vladimir Putin together with OSCE signed a protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk.[145] Even though Ukraine was in the middle of turmoil, both sides of the conflict held their elections. On October 26 Ukraine held parliamentary elections in Ukraine, pro-Western parties won. Separatist DNR and LRN elected their new leaders on November 2-3.

**2015**

On January 15 Russian-backed separatists announced that they have captured the shattered remains of the Donetsk airport terminal.[146] A week later on January 21 Ukrainian forces admit losing control over Donetsk airport.[147]

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[140] Alan Taylor. "A Year of War Completely Destroyed the Donetsk Airport." Theatlantic.com https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/02/a-year-of-war-completely-destroyed-the-donetsk-airport/386204/ (accessed on August 6, 2019).
[141] Sabina Zawadski and Gabriela Baczynska. "Fighting rages in eastern Ukraine city, dozens dead." Uk.reuters.com https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-fighting/fighting-rages-in-eastern-ukraine-city-dozens-dead-idUKKBN0E70N820140527 (accessed on August 6, 2019).
[142] Full report on the casualties in Eastern Ukraine in 2014-2015 available here: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/9thOHCHRreportUkraine.pdf (accessed on August 12, 2019).
[143] Tom Parffit. "Rebel leader in Ukraine says forces bolstered by '1,200 troops trained in Russia'." Telegraph.co.uk https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11038598/Rebel-leader-in-Ukraine-says-forces-bolstered-by-1200-troops-trained-in-Russia.html (accessed on August 6, 2019).
[144] Thomas Grove. "Ukraine separatist leader says rebels getting tanks and reinforcements." Reuters.com https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis/ukraine-separatist-leader-says-rebels-getting-tanks-and-reinforcements-idUSKBN0GF13120140816
[145] UN Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group (Minsk Agreement) https://peacemaker.un.org/UA-ceasefire-2014 (accessed on July 16, 2019).
[146] Associated Press. "Russia-backed separatists seize Donetsk airport in Ukraine." Theguardian.com

A month later, on February 11, leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany held second talks in Minsk and revised the OSCE deal that was made the year before.[148]

Spring of 2015 was a time of trading accusations on ceasefire violations between Ukrainian and separatist sides.[149] In March, Putin confirms plans to annex Crimea.[150] In addition, reports showed an increased presence of Russian soldiers on the Russian-Ukrainian boarder.[151] [152] However, Putin denied any presence of Russian military near Ukraine.[153]

In May, Poroshenko passed the law banning Soviet symbols which raised the discontent in Eastern Ukraine.[154] Meanwhile, there were big celebrations held in DNR to celebrate The Victory Day on May 9th (as it was celebrated in Soviet Union and is still celebrated in Russia – see the video statements analysis).

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/15/russian-backed-separatists-seize-donetsk-airport-ukraine

[147] Shaun Walker and Oksana Grytsenko. "Ukraine forces admit loss of Donetsk airport to rebels." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/21/russia-ukraine-war-fighting-east (accessed on August 6, 2019).

[148] European Parliament briefing "Minsk peace agreement: still to be consolidated on the ground". http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-548991-Minsk-peace-summit-FINAL.pdf (accessed on August 4, 2019).

[149] Anton Troianovski and Laura Mills. "Diplomats Seek Withdrawal of Heavy Weapons From Ukraine Front Lines." Wsj.com. https://www.wsj.com/articles/four-way-talks-on-ukraine-conflict-start-in-berlin-1428952748 (accessed on August 4, 2019).

[150] Agence France-Presse. "Vladimir Putin describes secret meeting when Russia decided to seize Crimea." Theguardian.com https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/vladimir-putin-describes-secret-meeting-when-russia-decided-to-seize-crimea (accessed on August 4, 2019).

[151] Damien Sharkov. "Fears of New Offensive as Putin 'ramps up pressure' on Ukraine." Newsweek.com https://www.newsweek.com/putin-ramping-pressure-ukraine-border-prompting-fears-new-offensive-324863 (accessed on August 6, 2019).

[152] Maria Tsvetkova. "Exclusive: Russia masses heavy firepower on border with Ukraine – witness." Reuters.com https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-russia-military/exclusive-russia-masses-heavy-firepower-on-border-with-ukraine-witness-idUSKBN0OC2K820150527 (accessed on August 3, 2019).

[153] The Washington Post. "Putin denies Russian troops are in Ukraine, decrees certain deaths secret." Washingtonpost.com https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d_story.html (accessed on August 3, 2019).

[154] Alec Luhn. "Ukraine bans Soviet symbols and criminalises symphaty for communism." Theguardian.com https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/21/ukraine-bans-soviet-symbols-criminalises-sympathy-for-communism (accessed on August 12, 2019).

During the month of August fighting intensifies, mainly in the territories of DNR. [155] Possibly, as a result, on September 3 a new military doctrine was introduced by Poroshenko: he named Russia as the main enemy and vowed to join the NATO. [156] Also, the month of September is of significance because of the longest truce that had been held between separatists and Ukrainian army during the whole conflict.[157]

In the wake of fast developments in the conflict, separatist delay disputed elections that were due in October. [158] During the same month separatists in Donetsk started a small arms withdrawal. [159] The same actions were started from the Ukrainian side. However, the peace did not last long and Ukraine threatened to suspend the withdrawal due to continuous fighting.[160]

### 7.2 List of abbreviations

DNR – Donetsk People's Republic (Russian: Доне́цкая Наро́дная Респу́блика).

LRN – Luhansk People's Republic (Russian: Луга́нская Наро́дная Респу́блика).

OUN – Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Ukrainian: Організація Українських Націоналістів).

UPA – Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainian: Українська повстанська армія).

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[155] Radio Free Europe. "Germany's Steinmeier Warns Of 'Explosive' Ukraine Crisis." Rferl.org https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-crisis-explosive-steinmeier-germany-talks/27191622.html

[156] Reuters News Agency. "Ukraine's new military doctrine names Russia as main aggressor." Reuters.com https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-poroshenko/ukraines-new-military-doctrine-names-russia-as-main-aggressor-idUSKCN0RO28F20150924 (accessed on August 1, 2019).

[157] Associeated Press. "Ukraine's president lauds renewed cease-fire in the east." Businessinsider.com https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-ukraines-president-lauds-renewed-cease-fire-in-the-east-2015-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T (accessed on August 12, 2019).

[158] Laura Mills. "Russia-Backed Rebels in Ukraine to Delay Disputed Elections." Wsj.com (accessed on August 12, 2019). https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-backed-rebels-in-ukraine-to-delay-disputed-elections-1444140302

[159] Yulia Silina. "Ukraine, pro-Russia rebels begin Donetsk arms withdrawal." News.yahoo.com https://news.yahoo.com/ukraine-pro-russia-rebels-begin-donetsk-arms-withdrawal-152455026.html (accessed on August 12, 2019).

[160] Interfax News Agency Ukraine. "Ukrainian Armed Forces to suspend armaments withdrawal if militants continue provocations – Turchynov." En.interfax.com https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/301551.html

### 7.3 List of figures