

2014 takeover of the SBU headquarters in Lugansk as an example of the operation of the Russian special services

Abstract

The author analyzes the seizure of the SBU headquarters in Lugansk in 2014 by pro-Russian demonstrators. The author presents well-documented evidence that the Luhansk SBU was selected by the Russian secret services as a “trigger” of the uprising in the Donbas, due to the accumulation of a huge amount of ammunition, weapons and explosives, thanks to which the separatists could immediately start creating military structures after the attack. In the author’s opinion, the infiltration of the Ukrainian SBU and the Ministry of the Interior was facilitated by the existence of branched clientelist networks within them, enabling politicians hostile to the new prowestern government to steer state institutions in the name of the strategic interests of the Russian Federation.

Keywords

anomie, FSB, GU, Ukraine, SBU, political technologies, rebellion in the Donbas, pro-Russian separatism.

Leaving aside the permanent geopolitical conditions of the rivalry over Ukraine, the immediate reason for the activation of the Russian Federation's policy in Ukraine in 2014 was - perceived by the Russians as a strategic weakening of their military-political potential - the threat associated with the possible loss of this country, which was for Russia part of the so-called 'near abroad', i.e. the territories of the former republics of the USSR post-imperialistically treated by the Kremlin as a Russian sphere of influence.

Military and strategic considerations

Russia, pursuing a hybrid policy¹ (which since the 1920s² has always been pursued below the threshold of a hot conflict), was faced with the task of strategically securing its interests when, as a result of the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance, the creation of a neutral buffer zone from the former satellite states of the USSR failed. The entry into NATO of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1999 and the Baltic states, Romania and Slovakia in 2004 completely changed Russia's military situation, definitely worsening it from its point of view. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia based its security on the nuclear triad and significantly reduced its conventional armed forces to relieve the burden on its crisis-ridden economy. The idea of deploying a US nuclear shield (Ground-Based Midcourse Defence System) in Eastern European countries was interpreted by the Russian Federation as an attempt to deprive it of its nuclear shield³. Talks on the deployment of elements of this shield in, among others, Poland, which had been ongoing since 2002, ended in 2008 with the agreement of Poland and the other countries of the region, despite threats from the Russian Federation⁴. For Russia - convinced that the West

¹ A term used to describe all the activities of the Russian, formerly Soviet, state apparatus aimed at pursuing Russia's strategic interests in a situation of technological backwardness and difference in economic potential. This policy is a specific form of asymmetric conflict, implemented by political means, but also by means of propaganda in all its varieties, disinformation and deception directed at the centres of power of countries perceived by the Russians as hostile.

² For more on Soviet asymmetric actions see: M. Świerczek, *Jak Sowieci przetrwali dzięki oszustwu. Sowiecka decepcja strategiczna* (Eng. How the Soviets survived by trickery. Soviet strategic deception), Warszawa 2021.

³ In the event of a hypothetical pre-emptive nuclear attack by NATO, any retaliatory response by Russia could be intercepted by anti-missile systems. This means that victory in a nuclear conflict, considered to date out of the question due to the certainty of mutual destruction of opponents, became theoretically possible.

⁴ L. Harding, *Russia threatening new cold war over missile defence*, "The Guardian", 11 IV 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/11/usa.topstories3> [accessed: 2 IX 2022]; T. Shanker,

was aiming to weaken it⁵ – this meant that the nuclear umbrella could cease to be a security guarantor. For post-Soviet staffers and Russian power verticals, inclined to see the world in conspiracy terms, this in turn entailed the risk of a conventional conflict with NATO and, consequently, the need to return to the traditional concept of territory as a security guarantor for Russian military thought⁶. Consequently, in the view of the Kremlin elite, keeping Belarus and Ukraine in its sphere of influence at all costs was essential. This was compounded by changes in the Kremlin's perception of Ukraine and Belarus evolving towards a pan-Slavic-imperial paradigm, i.e. denying the peoples of these states the status of separate nations in the name of the conviction that they were merely regional offshoots of the great Russian nation⁷.

Until the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, Russia attempted to keep these states in its sphere of influence through agent-propaganda-diplomatic methods. Only the seizure of Crimea in 2014 marked the beginning of strictly military action, but - at least until now - without entering into direct conflict with the economically and militarily dominant Western bloc⁸. The events of late 2013 and

N. Kulish, *Russia Lashes Out on Missile Deal*, “The New York Times”, 15 VIII 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/world/europe/16poland.html?hp> [accessed: 1 IX 2022].

⁵ The propaganda of the Russian Federation, and before that of the USSR and Tsarist Russia, portrays Western policy as a series of conspiracies against Russia. First it was supposed to be efforts by the Vatican and the Jesuits to Catholicise the Orthodox Church, then intrigues by Britain fearful of Russian expansionism in Asia, and in the 1920s behind-the-scenes plans by the limitrophic and Western states to intervene in the USSR. After World War II, to this day, the role of arch-enemy planning Russia's annihilation has been assumed by the United States. Contrary to the perception, which is quite common in the West, that these theses are merely socio-technical operations designed to consolidate society around the centres of power, there are many indications that such a paradigm of perception of reality is fully accepted by the Russian elite.

⁶ Russia's vast territories exceeded the logistical capacity of both Napoleon's La Grande Armée and Nazi Germany.

⁷ According to the current Russian narrative, Russians are splitting into Greater Russians, Lesser Russians and Belorussians - historically divided, but growing out of the same linguistic, cultural and religious stem. It seems that this concept, promoted by Vladimir Putin among others, is secondary to Russia's post-imperial interests, but it must be assumed that this propaganda also influences its creators. Cf.: В. Путин, *Статья Владимира Путина «Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев»*, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [accessed: 17 V 2023].

⁸ NATO's defence spending was USD 1,189,875 million in 2022. See: *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2022)*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf, p. 7, table 2 [accessed: 17 V 2023]. The Russian Federation spent USD 86.4 billion on its armed forces in the same year (due to warfare, it was USD 65.91 billion in 2021). See: *Military spending in Russia from 1993 to 2022*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1203160/military-expenditure-russia/> [accessed: 17 V 2023]. In 2022, Russian expenditure on armaments therefore represented 7.2 per cent of NATO expenditure. It follows that Russia has no real possibility of waging a conventional war against the Alliance.

early 2014 were interpreted by Russia as a putsch that was a conspiracy of Western states⁹, so from its point of view it was necessary to move to counterattack in order to diminish the geopolitical damage caused by the Ukrainian opposition's seizure of power. In this analysis, the defensive nature of NATO as emphasised by the Alliance's authorities is irrelevant. What is important is the way its actors interpret political reality. The Russians - as is evident from the statements of Vladimir Putin and his associates - are convinced that the expansion of NATO is aimed at the strategic marginalisation of Russia. Therefore, in order to understand the process described, an analytically legitimate tool is to adopt their perception of the problem.

What is significant here is that in 2014 Russia, in taking action against Ukraine, was too weak to decide on open warfare and to expose itself to the inevitable sanctions of the West. Operational logic indicated that it was only possible to step up its hybrid policy, however, in such a way as to avoid internationalising the conflict. For this reason, the Russian authorities decided to:

- a) quickly and efficiently implement a policy of accomplished facts¹⁰,
- b) pretend that the events in Ukraine are the result of internal processes taking place in that country.

This was only possible with the intensive agent infiltration of Ukrainian institutions by the Russian secret services¹¹. If there had been no agents in the Ukrainian army, SBU or administration, it would have been impossible either to take over Crimea without resistance from the Ukrainian armed forces or to initiate an insurrection in eastern Ukraine. Indeed, the actions of the Russians were initially so inept and on such a small scale that the routine actions of the Ukrainian

⁹ I. Lopatonok, O. Stone, *Ukraine on Fire*, YouTube, 20 VIII 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKcmNGvaDU8> [accessed: 23 VIII 2022]; the same, *Revealing Ukraine*, YouTube, 9 III 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhu3lfgHhCI> [accessed: 10 VIII 2022]; *Профессор из Оттавы доказал: в гибели «Небесной сотни» виновны мятежники евромайдана*, Live Journal, <https://urb-a.livejournal.com/12511220.html> [accessed: 2 IX 2022]; *Профессор Иван Качановский (Канада): Масштабное расследование бойни на майдане*, https://ruskline.ru/opp/2015/oktyabr/17/professor_ivan_kachanovskij_kanada_masshtabnoe_rassledovanie_bojni_na_majdane [accessed: 1 IX 2022]; *Освещение убийств на Майдане СМИ на Западе – грубое искажение» Интервью с Иваном Качановским*, East and West, 5 III 2019, <https://eastandwest.me/2019/03/05/interviu--ivan-kachanovski-snaiperi-maidan/> [accessed: 28 VIII 2022].

¹⁰ An example is the flash takeover of Crimea.

¹¹ See: *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич. „ГОРДОН” (2017)*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQOxmkC5YNc> [accessed: 24 IX 2022]; *Кузьмук о министрах обороны Украины Саламатине и Лебедеве и главе СБУ Якименко*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxC1SPlwZg> [accessed: 25 IX 2022]; *У нас на всех уровнях управления государством огромное количество агентов ФСБ*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwNoS6Ay_0w [accessed: 4 IX 2022].

force structures should have neutralised the threat from separatists controlled by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (Russian: Федеральная служба безопасности Розопассийской Федерации, FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces (Russian: Главное управление Генерального штаба Вооружённых Сил Российской Федерации, GU).

As a case study to illustrate this claim, the events that occurred in eastern Ukraine will be described and their course and background will be analysed¹².

Any provocation aimed at triggering collective aggression in a community requires two necessary conditions to be met: the existence of a real conflict generating strong inter-group tensions and the absence of a decisive counter-action by the state power sector at the beginning of the process¹³.

Ukraine - as a result of historical developments dating back to the 17th century¹⁴ - is disintegrating into two distinct ethnoses¹⁵: Western Ukraine (as a result of several hundred years of influence from countries within the Western civilisation¹⁶) and Eastern Ukraine (which, for over three centuries, has been part of Russia, where Byzantine and Mongolian-Ottoman civilisations overlapped). The differences between these groups - apart from the different language, traditions, historical references necessary for national self-identification¹⁷ - also included the economic and political sphere. The East was closely integrated economically with Russia, in addition to being the political base for the Party of Regions (Ukrainian:

¹² The pro-Russian uprising in the Donbass was supposed to be part of coordinated armed uprisings covering the entire east and south of Ukraine. However, thanks to the decisive actions of non-state structures (mainly originating from the Right Sector and Igor Kolomoisky's security companies), the activity of Russian agents in the south of the country was effectively blocked.

¹³ This was also the basis of the Kielce pogrom of 4 July 1946, which was based on long-standing tensions between the Polish and Jewish populations, reinforced by national stereotypes based on folk mythology and the passivity of the Militia and Security Office, which could intervene. See: S. Wójcik, *Na 30-lecie wyborów w Polsce* (Eng. For the 30th anniversary of elections in Poland), "Zeszyty Historyczne" 1978, n. 43, pp. 16-43.

¹⁴ On 18 January 1654, the so-called Pereyaslav settlement was concluded between the Hetmanate and Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the plenipotentiary of Tsar Alexei I of Russia, whereby Ukraine was placed under the authority of the Tsar. This ended the domination of Poland in the East, initiating the russification of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

¹⁵ Ethnos - a group of people who have a sense of common origin, a common culture and feel a group bond; also: a set of characteristics characteristic of such a group of people. From: *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/etnos;2557154> [accessed: 6 X 2022].

¹⁶ These include: Republic of Poland, Hungary, Austria-Hungary, numerous German settlers.

¹⁷ For example: in the east of Ukraine, the myth of the Patriotic War and the cult of Lenin remained important elements of identification. In the west of the country, which was hostile to the Russians and the communists, these elements were eliminated both from people's consciousness and memory and from the public space.

Партія регіонів). There was no cultural-historical community between the east and west of Ukraine, and economic-political interests and linguistic-cultural traditions closely tied the eastern oblasts to Russia.

Until the mid-2000s, however, there was no apparent hostility between the inhabitants of these regions, due to the high degree of Sovietisation of the population living in this former republic of the USSR and the lack of a strong state identity policy. Paradoxically, it was only the Orange Revolution and the institutional building of a historical-national community based on the Western Ukrainian anti-Russian tradition that caused a rift between the Russian-speaking east and the fully-Ukrainianised west¹⁸. This split was quickly reflected in political representation, as the Russian-speaking east of Ukraine became the political base of the Party of Regions¹⁹, while western Ukraine voted for parties appealing to nationalist, anti-Russian and pro-European rhetoric.

The attempt to forge a national identity in a society that was ethnically and linguistically diverse was arguably a necessity in order to preserve the unitary character of the ethnically heterogeneous young state. However, because the identity was based almost entirely on the historical mythology of western Ukraine, this was used by the Russian Federation to polarize the east and west of Ukraine. Such a conflict could have become a tool of hybrid politics in an asymmetric struggle to maintain a strategic territorial buffer. The Russians used a whole range of means in their struggle for eastern Ukraine, including a multi-source²⁰ narrative that emphasised the religious-historical-cultural unity of peoples originating from Ruthenia. Myths based on historical past were created or revived to bring Ukrainians (more broadly: Ruthenians) into conflict with the West. The West, in turn, was associated with the archetype of the quasi-colonial exploiter, with references being made both to the anti-Polish Taras Bulba from the 16th century and to the Volhynian slaughter.

¹⁸ A manifestation of this conflict sanctioned by law was the attitude towards the Russian language, which was eradicated from the public space by parties with a nationalist profile (despite the so-called Regional Languages Act of 2012) and was finally deprived of its official language status on 23 II 2014. See: S. Laack, *Mehrheit stimmt für Russisch als zweite Amtssprache* (Eng. Majority votes for Russian as second official language), Tagesschau, <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/ukraine344.html> [accessed: 24 IX 2022]. With 68 per cent of the population speaking Russian (Ukrainian only 57 per cent) and with 45 per cent using it at home on a daily basis, this was a politically risky move and, as it turned out, led - with the help of Russian agents - to an outbreak of public discontent. For more on Ukraine's ethno-linguistic problems, see: В.Є. Хмелько, *Лінгво-етнічна структура України: регіональні особливості й тенденції змін за роки незалежності*, http://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/articles_HVE/16_linguaethnical.pdf [accessed: 25 IX 2022].

¹⁹ *Виктор Янукович. Удар властью*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyMSuxjpEhE> [accessed: 3 IX 2022].

²⁰ These range from historical works to products of popular culture.

The reconstruction movement from eastern Ukraine was supported, combined with a widely publicised initiative to search for the bodies of Red Army soldiers in order to promote the idea of the 'brotherhood of arms of brotherly nations'. Above all, however, with the help of the secret services, Ukraine's state institutions were infiltrated, initially using KGB agents operating when Ukraine was still a republic of the USSR²¹. These agents' files were taken to Moscow in the autumn of 1991²². The growing socio-economic recession in Ukraine caused by the crisis and rampant corruption was conducive to recruitment activities, especially as members of the informant network inherited from the KGB occupied key positions in the state administration and actively participated in the appropriation of post-Soviet assets. In this way, an oligarchic regime was being created, masked by a sham democracy²³. The collapse of Ukrainian statehood was evident both in the economic sphere (Ukraine transformed from the tenth industrial power in the world into one of the poorest economies in Europe²⁴), and in public life, where state institutions began to have a facade character²⁵. However, the process of socio-economic regression took a different course in the agricultural western part of the country and a different one in the industrialised, collaborative east of Russia. On a macro-structural level, this was reflected in significantly higher wages²⁶ in the eastern part of the country and in the better quality of municipal services provided there. Thus, an economic

²¹ See: Гиркин (Стрелков). Донбасс, МН17, Гага, ФСБ, полудохлый Путин, Сурков, Божий суд. "ГОРДОН" (2020), YouTube, 18 V 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf6K6pJK_Yw [accessed: 1 IX 2022].

²² The operation to transfer the dossier to the headquarters was led by the then deputy chairman of the Ukrainian KGB, Yevgeny Marchuk, 1st head of the SBU and fourth prime minister of Ukraine. See: В. Вятрович, *Конец советской империи. 1991-й в Украине в документах КГБ*, <https://argumentua.com/stati/konets-sovetskoj-imperii-1991-i-v-ukraine-v-dokumentakh-kgb> [accessed: 6 IX 2022].

²³ Apparent democracy consists of retaining all the formal features of the system, while informal control of all the institutions of the democratic state by oligarchic capital.

²⁴ According to the International Monetary Fund, per capita income in Ukraine was already the lowest in Europe in 2021 (i.e. before the war). See: IMF, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/UKR> [accessed: 30 IX 2022].

²⁵ In 2022, despite the ongoing war and the authorities' tightening of the fight against corruption, Transparency International ranked Ukraine 116th out of 180 countries worldwide, deeming it the most corrupt country in Europe. See: Transparency International Ukraine (Трансперенци Інтернешнл Україна), *Corruption Perceptions Index*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/ukraine> [accessed: 17 V 2023]; *Russischer Angriff auf Kiew – Patriot-System offenbar beschädigt*, Spiegel, 16 V 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/ukraine-russland-news-kiew-meldet-alle-18-raketen-abgeschossen-a-8025e47a-db57-473b-a2a8-6c83443171e3> [accessed: 17 V 2023].

²⁶ *Ukrainian salary map*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ukrainian_salary_map.png [accessed: 24 IX 2022].

factor has been added to the cultural and linguistic differences - the reluctance of wealthy regions to contribute to economically lagging territories²⁷. This caused a steady increase in the level of the so-called counter-intelligence risk level based on the sense of linguistic, cultural and economic distinctiveness of the population living in eastern (and south-eastern) Ukraine. In a situation of growing social crisis, a so-called *trigger*, i.e. an event releasing collective emotions, strong enough to overcome fears of legal consequences and induce unlawful actions, was needed²⁸. Such a trigger was the Euromaidan in Kiev²⁹, which resulted in President Yanukovich fleeing the country. The population of eastern Ukraine felt that groups hostile to Russia and building their electorate on anti-Russian rhetoric, had seized power. Thus, to the already existing separatist motivation was added the feeling that political representation capable of protecting the group interests of this population had been lost³⁰. They were reinforced by the belief that the creation of a new power was the result of a forcible putsch with no social legitimacy. **From the Russian point of view, this was the most convenient moment to turn differences of interest between eastern and western Ukraine into open conflict.**

The first stage was to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension. Rumours were spread about buses from Kiev bringing activists of the Right Sector (Ukrainian: Правий сектор), who were to pacify by force the east of the country favouring Yanukovich³¹. In doing so, they used rhetoric created for the earlier electoral struggle, according to which parties in western Ukraine referring to nationalism were labelled fascist³². This allowed for the reactivation of the myth of the Patriotic

²⁷ An identical motivation, economic, underpins most of the well-known separatist movements, including in Catalonia, Scotland or the Afrikaner movement in South Africa. Cf. Y. Ryabinin, *The Basic Causes of the Contemporary Separatism*, "Journal of Geography, Politics and Society" 2017, no. 7(1), pp. 5–9.

²⁸ See in more detail: R. Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism*, University of South Florida 2004.

²⁹ The Maidan speeches are increasingly interpreted not as a grassroots action, but as an initiative of the main funder, i.e. oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who later promoted Petro Poroshenko to the presidency. See: *Новая Украина. Фильм 1. Дикие деньги*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4_u2LOzqIg [accessed: 10 IX 2022].

³⁰ Previously, the guarantor of the interests of the Russian-speaking population living in the east of the country was Yanukovich, who came from the Party of Regions. Cf.: *Виктор Янукович. Удар...*

³¹ *Донбасс: война, изоляция, безысходность. Новости никому не нужного региона*, YouTube, 23 XII 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yk7ilJMdo14> [accessed: 17 IX 2022].

³² Later, this term was replaced by the name 'Nazis' (Russian: нацисты) to further emphasise the connotations with World War II groups collaborating with Germany. On the characteristics of nationalist parties and their ideological links to Nazism in Russia's optics, see Igor Lopatonok's 2016 documentary *Ukraine on Fire*.

War³³ and the fear of the Bandera³⁴. The state-run Russian TV channels (widely received in eastern Ukraine) showered viewers with footage of the events in Maidan. The focus was primarily on attacks on the militia by Right Sector activists (especially when wearing symbols that might have been associated by commentators with fascism). Shots of the riots were edited to increase the dynamics of the depicted events and appropriate background music was added. Parallels were drawn between the Ukrainian nationalist movement³⁵ and present-day behaviour, e.g. by equating torchlight marches by members of the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) with those organised by the Right Sector or by emphasising the symbolism common to members of Ukrainian nationalist groups (*Wolfsangel*³⁶). This was fostered by mistakes made, including the cancellation of the so-called Regional Languages Act, de facto removing the right to the native language from more than half of the Ukrainian population, and by the decommunization of public spaces striking at the historical identity of eastern Ukraine (especially the heavily sovietised Donbas, inhabited in large part by an indigenous Russian population³⁷). Thus, there was an overlap of several important reasons that could lead to an intensification of separatist activities in the east of the country. These were: ethno-linguistic and cultural-historical differences, a higher standard of living in the eastern part of the country (reflecting the dividing line between the eastern and western parts of Ukraine) and the forcible deprivation of the economically privileged, Russian-linked eastern region of its previous political representation.

From the point of view of Russian planners, the conditions for the separation of the south-eastern part of Ukraine from Ukraine had been met, which was

³³ See: the unofficial anthem of the Donbass, the video for which was produced by the Donetsk State Music Theatre. The accumulation of symbolism linking the Patriotic War to the civil war that has been ongoing since 2014, and combining it with dynamic editing and music, is clear evidence of the way in which the perception of political reality is shaped by the people of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. See: «Донбасс за нами». *Официальный клип премьеры*, YouTube, 11 V 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQUiYm6iK7c> [accessed: 1 VIII 2022].

³⁴ Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ. Офицер спецслужб – о «русской весне» и о том, почему в СБУ до сих пор работают сепаратисты*, Аргумент, 16 XII 2015, <https://argumentua.com/stati/kak-zakhvatyvali-luganskuyu-sbu> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022]; *Что происходит в Луганске: захват СБУ и торги с властями*, Odessa Daily, 17 IV 2014, <http://odessa-daily.com.ua/news/chto-proishodit-v-luganske-zahvat-sbu-i-torgi-s-vlastyami-id64412.html> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].

³⁵ Battalions “Nachtigall” and “Roland”, 14. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (SS-Galizien).

³⁶ A modification of the Eihwaz rune used by the Nazis. In Ukrainian nationalism it symbolises the letters of the slogan ‘the idea of a nation’.

³⁷ During the USSR era, ex-prisoners were sent to the Donbass mines and steel mills from the RFSSR with work orders. Most of these people - after receiving housing and social bonuses intended for miners - settled permanently in the Donbass.

necessary to maintain at least part of the previous territorial buffer zone. However, due to the aforementioned huge potential difference between the Russian Federation and the West, this operation had to be presented as the result of internal processes taking place in Ukraine. Its course had to be planned in such a way as to avoid a war that could turn into a proxy war, weakening Russia militarily, politically and economically³⁸. The main objective of Russia's hybrid actions at the time was to reduce the geopolitical damage caused by removing the pro-Russian Yanukovich from power, but without provoking an open war with Ukraine, which could lead to a strategic loss for the Russian Federation as a result of Western involvement. After their experience in Afghanistan, the Russians knew how difficult it is to end a conflict when the opposing side receives financial support and modern weapons and their country is subjected to economic sanctions³⁹. For this reason, operational camouflage (from the Russian maskirovka) was necessary, consisting of a simulated separatist uprising by a section of Ukrainian society.

One of the factors contributing to rioting is the occurrence of a fight-or-flight syndrome response in people⁴⁰. The catalyst for this physiological response may be psychosocial factors, especially in the case of crowd action. The sheer drastic reduction of the participants' personal area⁴¹ causes the secretion of stress hormones, and the hormonal response may be a preparation for either an act of fight or flight. The interpretation of the degree of threat by the participants in a crowd at the time of such a reaction can therefore lead to either an act of collective aggression or to mass panic, which often engulfs a crowd in situations that are not necessarily

³⁸ Such a situation emerged after 24 II 2022 Ukraine in conflict with Russia received and is receiving support in many areas from the West. Russia, on the other hand - as a result of the sanctions imposed on it and the use of modern weapons on the frontline - is slowly depleting its resources. Although Russia's strategic goals in this conflict remain unknown (only Putin's public declarations are known), the internationalisation of the conflict could threaten the stability of his regime.

³⁹ Eight years after the end of these operations, Russia chose to engage in open conflict and knowingly exposed itself to the consequences of such a decision. At present, there is a lack of information as to whether this was due to making a huge error of judgement or whether the Russians decided to incur these costs in the name of expected strategic gains.

⁴⁰ The reaction of the sympathetic nervous system to a threatening situation to prepare the body for fight or flight. In the first moments after a stressor has been triggered, it stimulates the adrenal glands to secrete adrenaline and noradrenaline. This phenomenon was described as early as the 1930s in the work of Walter B. Cannon's *The Wisdom of the Body* (London 1932).

⁴¹ The intimate zone, personal zone, social zone and public zone are the types of distances that a person conventionally maintains when interacting with others, depending on the situation in which they find themselves. See in more detail: E. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Published by Anchor, 1990.

On 5 April 2014, the Luhansk SBU, with the assistance of the Kiev 'Alpha' assault subdivision⁴⁶, conducted 40 searches in seven locations⁴⁷. 13 persons were arrested⁴⁸ on suspicion of belonging to a diversionary network led by Russian military intelligence⁴⁹. The action was prompted by the appearance on the internet of recordings in which masked people were calling for a fight for Novorossiya⁵⁰ and the earlier discovery of several secret arms depots⁵¹. To spread these messages, Party of Regions activists⁵² organised meetings between separatists and journalists working for the FSB. The Ukrainian internal service obtained information that this

⁴⁶ On 5 IV 2014, 150 officers of the "Alpha" assault subdivision arrived in Luhansk. However, the very next day - for unknown reasons - the SBU leadership was unable to send these men to defend the seat of the Luhansk SBU. See: *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...* It was not possible to organise help either from the SBU headquarters or from neighbouring regions, despite the fact that - allegedly - General Aleksandr Petrulevich was in constant telephone contact with SBU head Valentin Naliwajchenko and, through him, with Interior Minister Arsen Avakov. From: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁴⁷ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия экс-главы СБУ в области*, Гордон, <https://gordonua.com/publications/petrulevich-terroristicheskie-gruppy-gru-rossii-uzhe-v-kieve-i-zhdut-signala-29825.html> [accessed: 1 IX 2022].

⁴⁸ Among those detained were later leaders of the separatist movement: Alexei Kariakin (owner of a gun shop) and Alexei Relke. The SBU failed to arrest Valery Bolotov (the first leader of the Luhansk People's Republic), Leonid Ruban (ataman of the Donskoy Cossacks of the Luhansk region) and Alexei Mozgovoy (later commander of the 'Prizrak' battalion). See: *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...* They were supposed to have been warned of the arrest by the former head of the Luhansk SBU, Aleksandr Tretiak, who (after fleeing to Russia) had received this information from the still active Luhansk SBU officers. From: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁴⁹ В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ. Год безнаказанности*, "День" 2015, no. 60. Underground, separatist structures have been developed by the GU of the Russian Federation in eastern Ukraine since at least 2004. Reconstructionist clubs and military veterans' associations, among others, have been used. See Tatiana Oriel's interview with General Petrulevich. Т. Орел, "Бульвар Гордона" 2017, no. 15, also: <https://www.openforest.org.ua/33282/> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022]; *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...*

⁵⁰ In Tsarist Russia, Novorossiya was the name given to the areas conquered by Russia in its wars with Turkey in the 18th century, including the east and south of present-day Ukraine, part of Moldova and Transnistria. The area underwent intensive industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries and became the industrial basin of first Russia and then the USSR. From: *Институт истории РАН возрождает понятие "Новороссия"*, interview with Yuri Petrov, Director of the Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences, BBC News Russian, 16 VII 2014, https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/07/140716_russia_ukraine_history_paper [accessed: 15 IX 2022].

⁵¹ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ: воспоминания очевидцев*, Radio Svoboda, 6 IV 2017, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28414815.html> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].

⁵² The deputy chairman of the Luhansk organisation of the Party of Regions, Rodion Mironshchik, was responsible for organising the interviews conducted by journalists from the Russian Federation. From: *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

particular group of separatists was planning coordinated speeches for 10 April 2014 calling for secession throughout eastern and south-eastern Ukraine⁵³. Lugansk was to be a central element of this process⁵⁴. During searches at the detainees, a large amount of weapons were found⁵⁵, which were taken to the SBU headquarters in Lugansk. The detainees were taken to the detention centre of the Luhansk Interior Ministry. Among them was a staff officer of the Russian military intelligence service, Major Bannyh, who testified during interrogation that of all the separatist groups supported by Russia⁵⁶, only the groupings in Donetsk and Lugansk were ready for action⁵⁷. He allegedly said that the plan of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces was to occupy Ukraine in three stages: from the south-east through the centre to western Ukraine⁵⁸. However, this is General Aleksandr Petrulevich's version. Some observers, on the other hand, believed that the arrests were deliberately carried out in such a theatrical manner⁵⁹ and so ineptly⁶⁰, as to provoke

⁵³ See Tatiana Oriël's interview with General Petrulevich...; Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁵⁴ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

⁵⁵ This included 300 machine guns, anti-tank weapons, five pistols, smoothbore weapons, grenades, Molotov cocktails, explosives. From: В. Топба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*; *СБУ разоблечила диверсионную группу, планировавшую захват власти в Луганской области*, Tass, 5 IV 2014, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1099728?utm_source=ru.wikipedia.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ru.wikipedia.org&utm_referrer=ru.wikipedia.org [accessed: 28 IX 2022]. However, it is unclear whether this information corresponds to the truth, or whether the authorities merely seized weapons confiscated from Kariakin's legitimate shop and provided the information to diminish the number of SBU-owned weapons seized by the rebels. Kariakin maintained that the weapons presented in the recordings and seized by the SBU were dummies.

⁵⁶ Such structures were to be created in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Odessa, among others.

⁵⁷ See Tatiana Oriël's interview with General Petrulevich... During the interview, Petrulevich recalled, among other things, the testimony of Major Bannyh; *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...* In Luhansk, Bannyh contacted Bolotov, whose unit was inspected. See: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁵⁸ Information from: Tatiana Oriël's interview with General Petrulevich... and *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...* Interestingly, despite giving such sensational testimony proving the Russian Federation's aggressive plans, Bannyh was already handed over to Russia by Ukraine in September 2014. In turn, the officers in charge of his case lost their positions and were subsequently removed from the SBU. Identically, the Ukrainian authorities dealt with two more GU officers, captured in May 2015 and handed over to Russia. From: *Военный конфликт в Донбассе...*

⁵⁹ Most of the searches were unsuccessful, which convinced people that these were blind actions of the repressive authorities and not deliberate undertakings of the state apparatus. It is noteworthy that the decision to carry out such a wide-ranging action was taken by General Petrulevich, allegedly against the opinion of Luhansk operational officers. See: *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

⁶⁰ Despite the tense situation in the region, those arrested were not transported to Kiev, but remained in federalist-controlled Luhansk. The same applied to the seized weapons. That this was the result

local anti-Maidan activists into open revolt⁶¹. The fact that the operation may have been coordinated by the Russian special services is suggested by the fact that six hours later a video appeared on the internet in which a masked activist took off his balaclava and declared: *My name is [Dmitry] Bolotov⁶², I am the so-called People's Governor of the Lugansk region and I call on everyone to oppose⁶³*. Presumably this was a provocation, as it turned out that one of the detained activists was a registered militia agent⁶⁴, and in the crowd attacking the SBU building, officers of this service recognised their own agents. It is worth adding that the file with the data of the agents was taken to Russia by the previous head of the Luhansk SBU, Alexander Tretiak⁶⁵.

On 6 April 2014, from early morning, a crowd of thousands gathered in front of the SBU headquarters⁶⁶, making demands for the release of 'political prisoners' (i.e. members of the GU-led armed group detained during the night⁶⁷). Earlier, the gathering had dispersed Euromaidan supporters in the centre of Luhansk and entered the administration headquarters. Governor Mikhail Bolotsky was forced to write his resignation from office. A tricolour flag was flown in front of the Ukrainian government headquarters and Valery Bolotsov was appointed as the 'people's governor'⁶⁸. This may indicate either information chaos among the protesters or the at least partly grassroots nature of the uprising, as - according to the SBU's findings - Bolotsky was so pro-Russian that he was in regular contact

of intrigue may also be evidenced by the accumulation of a surprisingly large number of combat weapons at the SBU headquarters and the attribution to the Luhansk region of its importance for future secession. See *ibid*.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² Dmitry Bolotov, through Ivan Sherdec, head of the local association of Afghanistan veterans, was linked to Aleksandr Yefremov, who headed the local organisation of the Party of Regions. This clearly indicates that he was pursuing a specific political-military plan, rather than a spontaneous speech by people agitated by the upheaval in Kiev.

⁶³ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁶⁶ In the initial phase of the rally, the number of participants was estimated at a thousand people. From: *СБУ по требованию митингующих освободила арестованных активистов в Луганской области*, Tass, 6 IV 2014, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1101119/amp> [accessed: 23 IX 2022]. Later, however, their number was to increase to a minimum of 5,000. From: *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

⁶⁷ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*

⁶⁸ *В Луганске появился «народный губернатор»*, Интерфакс, 21 IV 2014, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/372935> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022]. Bolotov was Yefremov's man who controlled Luhansk on behalf of the Party of Regions. See also: Tatiana Oriel's interview with General Petrulevich...

with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu⁶⁹. At the same time, the seizure of state administration buildings in Donetsk and Kharkiv took place⁷⁰.

In addition to miners⁷¹ and workers transported in buses from factories owned by Russian oligarchs⁷² the protests were attended by many participants from outside Lugansk (probably so-called polit-tourists from the Russian Federation⁷³, including people from conspiracy theories and not from political groups⁷⁴). It is known that 3,500 Russian students were among them⁷⁵ and that people from the local social margins, who were paid⁷⁶, were given alcohol⁷⁷. Among the civilians were men in field uniforms and balaclavas on their heads⁷⁸. Interestingly, the traffic militia (GAI⁷⁹) did not block the entry of buses carrying protesters, even though they had been consistently turned back in previous days⁸⁰.

⁶⁹ В захвате админзданий Луганска участвовали 3,5 тысячи студентов из России, “Телеканал Прямий”, 15 XI 2017, <https://prn.ua/ru/v-zahvate-adminzdaniy-luganska-uchastvovali-3-5-tyisyas-hi-studentov-iz-rossii-eks-sotrudnik-sbu/> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].

⁷⁰ Военный конфликт в Донбассе...

⁷¹ Как начиналась война на Луганщине... The miners were angered by the Ukrainian government's withdrawal of funding for the mines. See: *Донбасс: война, изоляция, безысходность...*

⁷² Tatiana Oriel's interview with General Petrulevich... It is noteworthy that the Donbass industrial workers are most often descended from the families of Russian prisoners who were forcibly sent to work in the Donbas mines under the USSR. See: *Виктор Янукович...*

⁷³ В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*; «ЛНР». *История одной авантюры*, YouTube, 28 III 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu97AEWt8HY> [accessed: 1 X 2022].

⁷⁴ Speakers at the rally included Lyubov Bondarenko, who warned of a plot. It was to be linked to the action of sending children on holiday. See: *В Луганске штурмовали здание СБУ*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rpgpZvmW4k> [accessed: 18 IX 2022]. Separatist movements were assumed to intermingle with groups of anti-Western conspiracy theorists. See: «ЛНР». *История одной...*

⁷⁵ В захвате админзданий Луганска...

⁷⁶ Как начиналась война на Луганщине...; *Что требуют «федералисты» с автоматами от луганского СБУ?*, YouTube, 7 IV 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWnmaI-2cvI> [accessed: 17 IX 2022].

⁷⁷ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

⁷⁸ Ibid. The majority of these were Cossacks from the Dons and members of army veterans' associations, as well as the Luhansk Guard and Luhansk Self-Defence formed after the forcible seizure of power in Kiev.

⁷⁹ Colloquial abbreviation for the Russian name: Государственная автомобильная инспекция Министерства внутренних дел Украины, ГАИ (Ukrainian: Державна автомобільна інспекція Міністерства внутрішніх справ України, ДАІ/ДДАІ).

⁸⁰ Как начиналась война на Луганщине...

Access to the building was defended by a line of 70 unarmed militiamen, who had not been ordered to strongly resist the crowd⁸¹. It is unclear why the militiamen were positioned in front of the building instead of being deployed on the ground and first floors to defend access to the doors and windows. The five-storey SBU headquarters in Luhansk has about 25-30 windows on the street side, but there are only a few windows on the ground floor⁸². It is impossible to get to the windows on the first floor without using a ladder. It would therefore have been sufficient for militiamen with shields and batons and SBU officers to guard them from the inside of the building and stand at the entrance door, which would have effectively prevented the intrusion of the crowd⁸³. It is clear from the recordings that only a dozen or so people⁸⁴ from the former airborne troops were active during the assault (in its initial stages)⁸⁵. The role of the militia seems even more ambiguous when one considers that General Vladimir Guslavski, who heads the Lugansk Interior Ministry, played the role of intermediary between the SBU and the protesters. At the demand of the crowd - after consultation with General Petrulevich and the prosecutor's office - he released the detainees who had been arrested the day before⁸⁶, who immediately joined the crowd and led a further assault⁸⁷. This happened despite Guslavski's guarantee that he would personally lead them to court on 7 April⁸⁸. Some witnesses later claimed that Guslavski demanded that the SBU agree to release the arrested, threatening the impossibility of stopping the crowd otherwise⁸⁹. Interestingly, the protesters let him through

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² МВД Украины: сепаратисты в Луганске не брали заложников и не минировали здание СБУ, Деловой Петербург, 9 IV 2014, https://www.dp.ru/a/2014/04/09/MVD_Ukraini_separatisti [accessed: 16 IX 2022].

⁸³ This was clear to most observers of the events there. See: О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*

⁸⁴ The attackers attempted to break down doors, climbed onto the roof above the entrance and also tried to enter through windows smashed with stones. See: *В Луганске штурмовали...*; *У Луганську захоплено будівлю СБУ*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvtjtTA_5z8 [accessed: 16 IX 2022]; *Все оружие СБУ под контролем сепаратистов в Луганске*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ruk63o8IQ_Q [accessed: 25 IX 2022].

⁸⁵ One of the attackers climbed onto the roof above the SBU's duty station and unrolled a flag with the symbol of landing troops, while some of his colleagues wore landing craft caps. See: *В Луганске штурмовали...*

⁸⁶ *СБУ по требованию митингующих освободила...*

⁸⁷ Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁸⁸ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

⁸⁹ *Захват Луганского СБУ: появились признания свидетелей*, Апостроф, 16 XI 2016, <https://apostrophe.ua/news/society/accidents/2016-11-16/zahvat-luganskogo-sbu-poyavilis-priznaniya>

without any problem into the SBU building, accompanied by shouts of “Militia with the people!”⁹⁰. This was due to the protesters’ belief that the Luhansk militia (threatened with criminal cases due to their participation in the Kiev incidents) were reluctant towards the new government⁹¹. In the opinion of former SBU head Valentin Naliyavchenko, Guslavski most likely directed the incidents, or at least did not try to counteract them in any way⁹². This may have been due to the fact that the militia in the Russian-speaking east was staffed by people from the Party of Regions⁹³, who pursued party interests rather than state interests⁹⁴. The same applied to the political elite drawn from the Party’s circles and to the communists⁹⁵. They were hostile to the new government and convinced that it had been created by a violent coup. Hence, they showed a desire to federalise this region of the country under the protection of the Russian Federation as a safeguard against the ‘dictate of western Ukraine’⁹⁶.

svideteley-/77260 [accessed: 5 VIII 2022]; *Что происходит в Луганске...*

⁹⁰ *Захват Луганского СБУ: появились...*

⁹¹ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

⁹² Ibid; «Двери войны в Луганской области открыл – генерал Гуславский», – заявил на суде Ефремов, YouTube, 4 III 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5a7-UEI9f0> [accessed: 11 IX 2022].

⁹³ This version is hardly consistent, as prior to secession Luhansk was jointly controlled by the Party of Regions and Batkivshchyna (Ukrainian: Всеукраїнське об’єднання „Батьківщина”, Polish: Wszzechukraińska Koalicja „Ojczyzna”). See: *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич... Batkivshchyna took full control of the Interior Ministry after Yanukovich’s escape. The Udar and Svoboda parties were given the SBU and the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Ministry of Defence, respectively. General Vladimir Zamana, who heads the Ministry of Defence on behalf of Svoboda, was ostracised for treason in 2019. See: Г. Гусев, «Западные дипломаты не верили, что мы выстоим». Александр Турчинов рассказывает как весной-летом 2014 года занял все высшие посты в Украине, заново строил власть и начал АТО, Бабель, 23 VIII 2021, <https://babel.ua/ru/texts/68499-zapadnye-diplomaty-ne-verili-chto-my-vystoim-aleksandr-turchinov-rasskazyvaet-kak-vesnoy-letom-2014-goda-zanyal-vse-vysshie-posty-v-ukraine-zanovo-stroil-vlast-i-nachal-ato> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].*

⁹⁴ *Как начиналась война на Луганищине...*

⁹⁵ Activist of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Ukrainian: Комуністична партія України) Spiridon Kilinkarov was said to have received USD 500,000 from the party’s leader Peter Simonenko to expand the separatist movement in the south and east. See: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

⁹⁶ The preparation for the political act of separatism was the creation, shortly after Yanukovich’s escape, of local quasi-forces structures such as the ‘Anti-Maidan’, the Luhansk Guards, the People’s Popular Movement (Russian: *ополчение*). As early as March 2014, there was a seizure of the administration of the Luhansk region as a result of the same tactics used by Maidan activists. See: *Как начиналась война на Луганищине...*

However, there is no verified information on how many SBU officers were in the building, although an alarm was sounded and all officers were ordered to report for duty⁹⁷. According to the staffing levels of the Luhansk SBU, there were 600 employees⁹⁸, but witnesses claimed that only 40⁹⁹ or 70 officers¹⁰⁰ turned up at the place of duty, according to various sources. However, it is known that General Petrulevich, who was in charge of this facility, instead of distributing long weapons to the staff and setting up machine guns in the most important parts of the building, ordered officers (including those from the 'Alpha' assault subdivision and those on duty¹⁰¹) to give up even their service pistols¹⁰². He later maintained that under Ukrainian law it was not allowed to use weapons against unarmed civilians¹⁰³, so he had to negotiate with the crowd and renounced the use of force¹⁰⁴. In doing so, he added that in the event of opening fire on the crowd, the armed forces of the Russian

⁹⁷ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*

⁹⁸ Even assuming that half of them were women or civilian workers, together with the militiamen, the authorities theoretically had more than 300 officers at their disposal. Given the aforementioned number of windows available to the crowd, it would have been sufficient for each to be defended by ten people.

⁹⁹ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...* In contrast, General Petrulevich claimed that there were 120 armed officers in the building..

¹⁰⁰ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...* Information of symbolic importance is that 70 officers wanted to actively defend their headquarters. After it was seized, 60 officers joined the separatists, but it is unclear whether they were the same ones who turned up at the SBU headquarters after the alert was issued on 6 IV 2014. See: Tatiana Oriël's interview with General Petrulevich...; *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...* The situation seems even more complicated in the light of reports that a few weeks before the assault, General Petrulevich dismissed the head of the internal department (i.e. the SBU's internal police), which meant that there was no control over the officers' actions. This decision was taken despite warnings from operational officers that the situation was escalating and an attack on the SBU was to be expected. The change in the position of head was one of many personnel changes initiated by General Petrulevich and clearly paralysed the unit's activities. See also: *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹⁰¹ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹⁰² О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...* General Petrulevich later explained that Ukrainian law prohibits the use of weapons against civilians. In doing so, he stressed that the protesters used Chechen tactics from the time of the anti-Russian uprising - women with children, teenagers and old people walked in front of the militants, causing Russian soldiers to refuse to shoot at the crowd. See Tatiana Oriël's interview with General Petrulevich...

¹⁰³ *Захват Луганского СБУ: появились...* Apparently, the use of weapons against civilians was only legally authorised after the declaration of the АТО.

¹⁰⁴ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

Federation, which were assembled at the border, would certainly have entered the region¹⁰⁵.

Despite the fact that the SBU had already been trained on how to deal with crowds attacking the headquarters of the service and occupying the buildings of the local administrations¹⁰⁶, there were no bars installed in the windows¹⁰⁷, no metal barriers, sandbag embankments, etc.¹⁰⁸ Lugansk officers had a holiday schedule spread out for the period, despite the fact that pro-Russian separatists had been picketing in front of their service headquarters for three weeks¹⁰⁹. In addition, the SBU armoury was secured only with dummy mines¹¹⁰, as General Petrulevich feared that the protesters might cause the entire arsenal to explode due to carelessness¹¹¹.

Despite repeated requests from the SBU to the Interior Ministry for support¹¹² the militia not only failed to send reinforcements there (and the Luhansk garrison of the Interior Ministry numbered 12,000 officers¹¹³), but even let the protesters pass close to the building¹¹⁴. A group of aggressive men immediately emerged from the crowd and began throwing stones and smoke crackers, and also tried to force the doors and windows above the rain shelter above the main entrance. From the videos filmed by the participants, it appears that neither the militiamen nor

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. It is true that the Russian Federation has amassed armed forces on the border with Ukraine. See also: Г. Гусев, «Западные дипломаты не верили...

¹⁰⁶ Prior to the Luhansk attacks, a mob attacked SBU buildings in 1994 in Sevastopol and in 2014 in Khmelnytsky. See: В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*; О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*

¹⁰⁷ The bars were removed in the mid-1990s as part of the so-called 'Euro-reconstruction' campaign, i.e. building a better relationship between the power structures and society. See: *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

¹⁰⁸ This was later used to accuse General Petrulevich by General Guslavski of provoking the riots and of facilitating the protesters' occupation of the building. See: *Захват Луганского СБУ: появились...*

¹⁰⁹ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

¹¹⁰ *Захват Луганского СБУ: появились...*

¹¹¹ It is hard to believe, but there were, among other things, large quantities of explosives in the SBU armoury.

¹¹² Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

¹¹³ *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

¹¹⁴ The sabotage of the force sector's actions and the militia's support of the crowd's actions was a prelude to the mass conversion of officers to the separatists' side. See: *Наливайченко объяснил, почему террористам позволили захватить СБУ в Луганске*, *Obozrevatel*, 30 IX 2015, <https://incident.obozrevatel.com/crime/93216-nalivajchenko-obyasnil-pochemu-terroristam-dali-zahvatit-luganskoe-upravlenie-sbu.htm> [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].

the SBU officers attempted to intervene in any way¹¹⁵. SBU officers later said that although they had not received any orders from the leadership¹¹⁶ and had not even been issued with pepper gas and batons¹¹⁷, they defended themselves using water, fire hoses and smoke candles¹¹⁸. However, there is no indication that there was much resistance, as only eight people were lightly injured during the assault¹¹⁹. Later, after the seizure of the SBU headquarters, SBU officers claimed that the fighters posing as Ukrainian Airborne Army Reserves were in fact mercenaries from Russia (or FSB¹²⁰ and GU officers). This could be evidenced by the fact that they wore watches set to Moscow time¹²¹, as well as using Chechen tactics of hiding behind women, old people and teenagers.

The protesters got their hands on all the hard disks of the official computers, most of the operational documentation, and even official ID cards, eavesdropping equipment¹²² and encryption machines¹²³, although General Petrulevich claimed that he had given the order to destroy the documents¹²⁴. They also seized the untouched contents of the armoury, the keys to which they had received from General Petrulevich himself¹²⁵. In addition to the information from witnesses that

¹¹⁵ Amongst the crowd, individual militia officers could be seen idly watching the events, unperturbed by the demonstrators. On the side of the building, a column of militiamen in anti-riot protectors stood in the street, calmly smoking cigarettes. See: *В захвате админзданий Луганска...*; Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

¹¹⁶ *Как начиналась война на Луганицине...*; Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...

¹¹⁷ *Как начиналась война на Луганицине...*

¹¹⁸ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*; Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

¹¹⁹ *Что происходит в Луганске...*

¹²⁰ General Petrulevich claimed that the SBU officers who directed the action even showed him their identity cards. See: *Захват СБУ в Луганске – версия...*

¹²¹ В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*

¹²² The Luhansk SBU received new Western equipment from Kiev shortly before the incidents. From: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...*

¹²³ *Как начиналась война на Луганицине...*

¹²⁴ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...* In doing so, he forgot the version of General Petrulevich, who claimed that there were no operational documents in the Luhansk SBU, which he had taken over just before the incidents, as they had been taken to Russia by the former head of this structure, Tretiak. See also: Б. Буткевич, *Как захватывали луганскую СБУ...* In turn, an SBU officer who witnessed the events declared that the officers tried to rescue the documents without orders from the management. See. *Как начиналась война на Луганицине...*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* General Petrulevich later denied this and maintained that the doors had been opened with a blowtorch. In doing so, he did not mention that the attacking mob - in order to set about removing the door locks in this way - would have had to know that the mines attached to them were

General Petrulevich did not give the order to destroy documents and equipment, it is also known that his deputy allegedly threatened officers who burned documents on their own with prosecution¹²⁶. Later, one of the detained SBU officers heard a Russian militant say of General Petrulevich: *Attaboy general! How brilliantly and courageously he behaved and planned everything perfectly!*¹²⁷. The decision-making chaos was further reinforced by the behaviour of the middle management, who were mainly busy taking private cars out of the area to protect them from damage¹²⁸.

The separatists were well aware of the layout of the corridors, they knew where the weapons were being brought in (and even that the rifles seized the day before were there¹²⁹). The reinforced entrance door was opened almost as soon as the assault began¹³⁰, presumably from the inside. It turned out that the SBU armoury contained several thousand submachine guns¹³¹ (of the military type, not the militia type, i.e. with a fixed butt), machine guns, grenades and even explosives. All this indicated that someone had deliberately carted off army supplies to the Luhansk SBU¹³². Despite the capture of the armoury (which was an obvious threat to Ukraine's internal security), neither the militia nor the army surrounded the seized building. The separatists themselves erected makeshift barricades in front

dummies, which in turn would not have been surprising in light of the information that the 'storm troopers' came from the landing force reserve. See: *Экс-начальник Луганской СБУ Петрулевич: Террористические группы ГРУ России уже в Киеве и ждут сигнала*, Гордон, 2 VII 2014, <https://gordonua.com/publications/Petrulevich-Terroristicheskie-gruppy-GRU-Rossii-uzhe-v-Kieve-i-zhdut-signala-29825.html> [accessed: 22 IX 2022].

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*

¹²⁸ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹²⁹ О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*

¹³⁰ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹³¹ There were some 300 Kalashnikovs seized during searches conducted on 5 IV 2014, which were deposited in the armoury instead of being transported to Kiev. See: *Военные действия в Луганске: Захват базы СБУ террористами, а люди покидают опасный регион*, YouTube, 6 VI 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbwOdOIM3Ns> [accessed: 17 IX 2022].

¹³² As mentioned earlier, the full-time staff of the Luhansk SBU (including cleaners, maintenance workers, etc.) numbered 600. Several thousand machine guns and explosives were completely unnecessary for the SBU's militia-investigative work. See: О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...* Turchinov tried to explain this by saying that in the Ukrainian army's plans Luhansk was the most important city for the defence of the entire region. However, it was forgotten to explain why the weapons for mobilisation were stored in the SBU and not in military units. See: Г. Гусев, *«Западные дипломаты не верили...»; Внутри Луганской СБУ: взрывчатка, патроны, арсенал автоматов*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRFU7OChuXs> [accessed: 15 X 2022]; *Все оружие СБУ под контролем...*

of the building¹³³ with bottles of petrol spread on them¹³⁴ and a tent city with a TV screen displaying the content of the Russian TV channel Rossiya 24 (Russian: Россия 24). They also formed the United Staff of the South-Eastern Opposition (Russian: Объединённый штаб Юго-Восточного сопротивления)¹³⁵ and began recruiting volunteers to continue the fight¹³⁶.

On 7 April, Valery Bolotov and Alexei Relke, who remained in the building and led the rebellion from there, gave a television interview. In it they stated, among other things: *We were allowed by the general himself, that is, the head of the SBU, to take these weapons, issued bulletproof vests and the rest. He turned out to be a real man, he behaved honestly!*¹³⁷ In return for his help, General Petrulevich was to be released from captivity that very evening¹³⁸ (he himself later recounted that he had broken out of captivity with the help of an SBU agent, who, after putting a balaclava over his face, led him out, telling the guards that they were going to buy cigarettes¹³⁹).

The 300 separatists were supposed to remain in the building after the assault¹⁴⁰ and were preparing to defend it¹⁴¹. This turned out to be unnecessary, as the 'Alpha'

¹³³ В. Торба, *Захват Луганской СБУ...*; О. Стрижова, *Годовщина захвата луганского СБУ...*; *Что требуют «федералисты»...*; *Луганская СБУ в плену вооруженных сепаратистов: что творится внутри*, YouTube, 9 IV 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqyvtrWBbxs> [accessed: 24 IX 2022].

¹³⁴ *Что происходит в Луганске...*

¹³⁵ *Возле СБУ в Луганске готовятся к штурму и продолжают укреплять баррикады*, Схід.info, https://cxid.info/113524_vozle-sbu-v-luganske-gotovyatsya-k-shturmu-i-prodolzhayut-ukrepyat-barrikady-foto.html [accessed: 22 IX 2022].

¹³⁶ *Что происходит в Луганске...*; *Оружие. СБУ Луганск 24.04.2014*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU1SfQwIVRg> [accessed: 1 X 2022]; *Русская весна. Начало*, YouTube, 15 I 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkIAOnth3_U [accessed: 3 IX 2022].

¹³⁷ See: *Что происходит в Луганске...* General Petrulevich later claimed that the militants wanted to deliberately discredit him in this way, as they knew that he was in charge of the ATO in the Luhansk region.

¹³⁸ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹³⁹ He did not explain how they wanted to buy cigarettes in the middle of the night in a riot-ridden city or why any separatist inside the already occupied SBU headquarters would walk around wearing a balaclava on his head. See: *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...*

¹⁴⁰ *Захват управления СБУ в луганской области: день восьмой*, "Укринформ", 13 IV 2014, https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-other_news/1647726-zahvat_upravleniya_sbu_v_luganskoj_oblasti_den_vosmoy_1623586.html [accessed: 5 VIII 2022].

¹⁴¹ And this despite Maidan Self-Defence Commander Andriy Parubiy offering them amnesty and USD 100,000 to leave the building. See: *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...* According to another version, the proposal came from Yulia Tymoshenko. See: *Русская весна...* At the same time, the SBU found that a Russian bank had paid 45 million hryvnias to the separatists occupying the SBU headquarters. From: *Что происходит в Луганске...*

special unit drawn from Kiev¹⁴² was unable to launch an attack on the building due to the sabotage of preparations by the Lugansk militia and administration¹⁴³. Shortly afterwards, Acting President Alexander Turchinov decided to (...) *seek a political solution to the conflict*¹⁴⁴. This attitude could be explained by the diversion undertaken not only by the local power structures¹⁴⁵, but also by the central levels¹⁴⁶. It was also most likely due to the total chaos in the structures of the new government, which was so devoid of tools of control that acting President Turchinov learned of the Russian occupation of Crimea from television¹⁴⁷. To his questions about the army's actions in the face of the invasion, Chief of the General Staff General Yuri Ilin replied calmly that (...) *they were going to figure out the situation*¹⁴⁸. Shortly afterwards, General Ilin left for the Crimea occupied by the Russians and issued a proclamation to Ukrainian soldiers not to shoot at their Russian brethren¹⁴⁹. Despite the unsuccessful seizure of the building in a violent action

¹⁴² *Что происходит в Луганске...*

¹⁴³ Tatiana Oriel's interview with General Petrulevich...; *Генерал СБУ Александр Петрулевич...*

¹⁴⁴ *Наливайченко объяснил...* An analysis of the subsequent course of the ATO shows that this was a decision forced by the weakness of government forces in Luhansk, rather than a genuine attempt to find a consensus. This was demonstrated by the subsequent course of the ATO, during which combat aircraft were used against the separatists at the request of Acting President Turchinov (despite resistance from the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces). See: Г. Гусев, «*Западные дипломаты не верили...*»; *Военные действия в Луганске...*; «ЛНР». *История одной...*

¹⁴⁵ The extent of the collaboration with the Russians is evidenced by the fact that after the occupation of Crimea, 70 per cent of soldiers from the Ukrainian army units there, 90 per cent of SBU officers and 99 per cent of militia officers went into the service of the Russian Federation. There were also commanders appointed by the new Ukrainian government, such as Rear Admiral Denis Valentinovich Berezovsky, who was appointed as the new commander of the Black Sea Fleet before surrendering it to the Russians and becoming commander of the Russian Pacific Fleet. In contrast, the 25th Brigade, deployed at the beginning of the ATO to Slavyansk in Kramatorsk, laid down its arms and went over to the side of the separatists. See: Г. Гусев, «*Западные дипломаты не верили...*»; *Державна зрада! Капітан здав росіянам єдиний український підводний човен – ТСН*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wlWVAuAV4U> [accessed: 29 IX 2022]; *ЗРАДА в КРЫМУ. Главные предатели Украины РЕШИЛИСЬ на НЕПОПРАВИМОЕ – Гражданская оборона*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZa6k6EВYX8> [accessed: 28 IX 2022]. Igor Girkin, in an interview with Ukrainian journalist Dmytro Gordon, explained this by the moral readiness of both the army and services of Crimea and Donbas to reject Ukrainian statehood. It was underpinned by poverty, corruption, poor equipment. See also: *Гиркин (Стрелков). Донбасс...*; *Русская весна...*

¹⁴⁶ Ministers and heads of the Interior Ministry, secret services and other state services also fled to Russia with Yanukovich. They all left behind structures staffed by trusted people. See: Г. Гусев, «*Западные дипломаты не верили...*

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ It must be stressed that General Ilin, even if he had not been a traitor, would not have been able to do anything, as the Ukrainian Armed Forces at that time had 5,000 soldiers capable of action

and the failure of attempts to bribe the federalists, the SBU building was not cut off from water, electricity, gas and external supplies, nor was the area cordoned off tightly. This, in turn, allowed the permanent presence of civilians and journalists on the premises¹⁵⁰, while the occupiers could peacefully dictate their conditions to the authorities.

The rebels demanded the release of “political prisoners”¹⁵¹, amnesty for militiamen and Berkut (Ukrainian: Беркут) officers accused of exceeding their powers during the protests in Kiev’s Maidan¹⁵², and the holding of a referendum in the Lugansk region to decide on the region’s self-government¹⁵³. At this stage there was no secession slogan, although the implicit threat of secession came in the form of the establishment of a Parliament of the Lugansk Republic if the authorities did not comply with their demands. However, even after a few days, there were still no political demands put forward and no ideological basis formulated¹⁵⁴, other than the demand for the restoration of Russian as an official language and an increase in the pool of funds remaining in the region¹⁵⁵. Sergei Dunayev, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada (i.e. the Ukrainian parliament) on behalf of the Party

(unfortunately, there were only 4,500 sets of boots in the army). The Ukrainian government sent the 79th Brigade from Nikolaev to Perekop, but only two armoured personnel carriers managed to cover the 186 km route. For this reason, Yulia Tymoshenko effectively put the administration of the eastern oblasts in the hands of the oligarchs, as they had huge private armies at their disposal. See: Г. Гусев, «Западные дипломаты не верили...; Новая Украина. Фильм 1... In Luhansk, the Ukrainian government paid only 1/4 of the funds for the army, state services and social obligations. The remaining funds came from private donors. See: *Военные действия в Луганске...*

¹⁵⁰ *Как начиналась война на Луганщине...*

¹⁵¹ They were mainly concerned with Luhansk Guards leader Alexander Kharitonov and pro-Russian regional council member Arsen Klitchayev.

¹⁵² A large proportion of the militia formations involved in the Maydan fighting were brought in from the eastern regions of the country.

¹⁵³ *Захватчики здания СБУ в Луганске выдвинули требования*, http://fraza.ua/news/08.04.14/192963/zahvatchiki_zdanija_sbu_v_luganske_vydvinuli_trebovanija.html [accessed: 21 IX 2022]; *Что требуют “федералисты”...*

¹⁵⁴ Instead, there was a combination of political ideas and conspiracy theories mixed with religious sentiment. See: *Военные действия в Луганске...*

¹⁵⁵ *Захват управления СБУ...* This can be explained by the fact that the forcible seizure of the SBU building was the responsibility of people with a low level of political culture, who did not identify with the Ukrainian language and were paid only to carry out kinetic actions. See: *Военные действия в Луганске...* Demands for federalisation had been raised in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Ukraine since 2004. On 22 II 2014, a congress of deputies from the south-eastern regions was held in Kharkiv, during which the decision to disobey the ‘Kiev junta’ was taken. Thus, it can be concluded that the separatist concepts of a federal state were well known to both the political elites of the eastern regions and the authorities in Kiev. See: Tatiana Oriël’s interview with General Petrulevich...; Г. Гусев, «Западные дипломаты не верили...; Виктор Янукович. Удар...

of Regions, helped the rebels to develop some kind of political position¹⁵⁶. Already at this stage, the separatists were repeating slogans in line with Russian propaganda about a ‘fascist coup in Kiev’¹⁵⁷ and the need for Lugansk’s self-defence against the Nats (a diminutive name for nationalists - editor’s note). At the same time, a number of local initiatives by pro-Russian-separatist circles aimed at blocking the advance of the Ukrainian National Guard and Right Sector¹⁵⁸ towards Lugansk have been reported throughout the region¹⁵⁹. Interestingly, the emerging checkpoints and barricades on the routes leading in this direction were manned not only by pro-Russian activists, but also by road militia¹⁶⁰.

On 8-9 April 2014, crowds of demonstrators gathered around a Luhansk military unit, demanding that the army remain neutral¹⁶¹. The unit’s command declared that the soldiers would not leave the barracks and would not intervene in the political processes, so the crowds dispersed and only observers remained on site to report on possible movements of the armed forces and to block the army’s exit from the barracks¹⁶².

During this time, the nucleus of a separatist armed formation was being established. The separatists were recruiting and training volunteers, using seized supplies of weapons. At the same time, they used terror against political opponents and pro-Ukrainian media, including the introduction of ‘people’s courts’, which allowed the audience gathered in the courtroom to vote on sentences (including the death penalty)¹⁶³. The launch of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in eastern

¹⁵⁶ *Что происходит в Луганске...*

¹⁵⁷ Posters bearing the likenesses of ‘fascists’ appeared in front of the occupied SBU headquarters: Petro Poroshenko, Alexander Turchinov, Vitali Klitschko, Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Oleg Tiagnibok. They were accompanied by a gallery of traitors, opened by Viktor Yanukovich, Alexander Yefremov and Mykola Azarov. This shows that the separatists were not controlled by the previous authorities. See: *Захват управления СБУ...* In the east of Ukraine, Yanukovich was considered a coward who could not decisively solve the problem of the Maidan. See also: *Виктор Янукович. Удар...*

¹⁵⁸ In addition, rumours were spread about a huge number of buses with Right Sector activists allegedly travelling from Kiev and western Ukraine to violently pacify separatist protests in the east.

¹⁵⁹ So-called block-posts (improvised checkpoints for entry into the territory) were set up in Krasnaya Lucha, Rubezhny, Anthracite, Rovnki, among others.

¹⁶⁰ *Красный Луч. Перекресток. 07.04.2014 год*, <http://redrey.com.ua/news/city/4158--07042014-> [accessed: 22 IX 2022]. The road militia worked closely with the pro-Russian Luhansk Guards, which already numbered 8-10,000 members. See: Tatiana Oriël’s interview with General Petrulevich...

¹⁶¹ Attacks on administration buildings, military and Border Guard units began on 5 IV 2014 across the region. Most military units went outside the Luhansk borders without orders. See: *Военные действия в Луганске...*

¹⁶² *Что происходит в Луганске...*

¹⁶³ *Военные действия в Луганске...*

Ukraine by the Ukrainian authorities and the deteriorating situation in the region triggered a mass exodus of the population - almost half of the population left the 500,000-strong city of Luhansk¹⁶⁴.

This was the beginning of an armed insurrection that quickly transitioned into a covert intervention by the Russian army in Ukraine. Without the seizure of the arms depot in Lugansk, the creation of armed insurrectionary structures would have been much more difficult.

Conclusions

The events described in the article cannot be explained by phenomena characteristic of post-Soviet state structures, such as, inter alia, immanent corruption and incompetence resulting both from the inability of officials to perform tasks other than routine and from learned passivity as a means of defending themselves from having to make dangerous decisions. Even the most corrupt Third World regimes usually retain the capacity to act violently when the system is threatened¹⁶⁵. The behaviour of high-ranking SBU and militia officers during the storming of the SBU headquarters was unbelievable from the point of view of the pragmatics of the actions of any force structures in a situation of threat to (internal and external) state security. The lack of any prevention, attempts to prevent the gathering of crowds, the stopping of buses with participants at the city corners, the arrest of aggressive and drunken people¹⁶⁶, and finally the use of between 6 and 20 per cent of the SBU's personnel and less than one per cent (0.58 per cent) of the garrison of the Interior Ministry to protect one of the most important places for state security cannot be explained in simple way. **The only explanation for carrying out such a large number of activities contrary to elementary security principles could be the conscious tactics of the leadership of the state services.** And although on the surface this may sound like a conspiracy theory, the mechanism of these events is easy to understand. Throughout the post-Soviet space, a specific socio-political situation was created, consisting

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Already in 2015, more than one million Donbas residents fled the ATO zone. It is noteworthy that the Russian army, operating clandestinely, tried to control the anarchy flooding eastern Ukraine. The liquidation of warlords increasingly difficult to control, including Giwi, Betman, Motorola, Batia and Alexei Mozgovoi, probably served this purpose. See: «ЛНР». *История одной...*

¹⁶⁵ This can be seen in historical examples, e.g. in the bloody suppression of social protests in the People's Republic of Poland or now, when the heavily corrupt Iranian regime is still able to respond with brutal aggression to group speeches by the public.

¹⁶⁶ As is known from witness accounts, these activities overlapped, and this in turn gave the police legal grounds to intervene.

in the desire of the ruling (or aspiring to power) political groups to fill the most important positions in the secret services, police formations, judiciary, prosecution, administration and army. This was driven, on the one hand, by a desire to control state institutions which, due to their high level of corruption, could potentially put politicians involved in illegal activities at risk, while, on the other hand, state positions (especially in better-paid managerial positions) were a way of securing the families, friends and acquaintances of politicians interested in building their own clientelistic networks at the taxpayer's expense.

It follows that the Russians did not need to corrupt and recruit individual officers or officials if they had access to influential central and local politicians. Each of them, as a result of their extensive clientelistic networks, was a sociometric star¹⁶⁷ in the sense that from each of them extended wide networks of influence over all state institutions. Each of the lower-level politicians was linked to the protector by a clientelistic-type bond, i.e. he owed his position, his accolades and his promotions to the support of the protector. Therefore, not only did he or she have obligations to the protector, but also realised that his or her livelihood was dependent on them¹⁶⁸. Those with links to local politicians were mainly employed in the decision-making centres of hierarchical state institutions, where submission to orders was mandatory. Individuals so placed obeyed the orders of the protectors, who in turn carried out the orders of curators from the Russian secret services. In this way, these institutions could be used for purposes contrary to the interests of their state.

The east and south-east of Ukraine were the electoral home of the Party of Regions¹⁶⁹, so for the leadership of the Party of Regions, Yanukovich's loss of power and subsequent takeover by the 'Maidan' parties was equivalent to being deprived of the benefits of corruption (including the opportunity to build a political base using state positions). In turn, for the entire Russian-speaking community

¹⁶⁷ In the social sciences, a 'sociometric star' is understood to be the person "who received the most positive choices during sociometric research. This is the person who is most frequently chosen as a potential interaction partner, towards whom many people have positive feelings of affection, friendship, etc., or who is chosen as a competent person."

¹⁶⁸ This situation became more complicated in later years, related to the fact that a number of competing centres of influence emerged in Ukraine. Those outside Ukraine, uninterested in taking into account the existing networks of arrangements, pursuing foreign interests, also played an important role.

¹⁶⁹ For a map illustrating Yanukovich's support (as leader of the Party of Regions) in the elections, see: *Карта распределения голосов по областям между лидерами на выборах Президента Украины впервомтуре*, [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B5_%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%8B_%D0%BD%D0%B0_D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B5_\(2010\)#/media/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Ukraine_ElectionsMap_2010-1_ru.svg](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B5_%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%8B_%D0%BD%D0%B0_D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B5_(2010)#/media/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Ukraine_ElectionsMap_2010-1_ru.svg) [accessed: 7 X 2022].

living in the east and south, it was synonymous with the loss of any party representation, which in turn resulted, among other things, in the questioning of both basic rights and the use of the native language. Thus, the central and local structures of the Party of Regions had a private and political interest in initiating a separatist movement. In doing so, they wanted to force political concessions on the new government, with which its activists could return to power, if only in their electoral strongholds. This overlapped with the genuine agitation of a large part of the population caused by the curtailment of their rights to their own culture and language, which eventually took the form of a demand for the federalisation of this part of Ukraine¹⁷⁰. **The Russian services were thus able to take advantage of the situation and reach officers and officials dependent on their patrons, they were able to create and at the same time heat up public opposition, which, due to the actions of provocateurs from the FSB and GU, exceeded the limit set by the law, resulting in further radicalisation of the participants' attitudes¹⁷¹.**

Such actions by the Russian services made it possible to simulate the intra-Ukrainian nature of events and, above all, to avoid Western intervention. It also succeeded in hiding the real (geopolitical and aggressive) nature of the actions from citizens, both their own and from eastern Ukraine, by describing Moscow's next steps as 'defence of the Russian minority against Western Ukrainian nazism'.

The close clientelistic link between state services and politicians has been used by the Russian services as a tool to paralyse the Ukrainian power apparatus, necessary to escalate an internal conflict serving exclusively the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation.

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¹⁷⁰ Although the term 'pro-Russian groups' is commonly used, they did not, at least initially, promote slogans of joining the Russian Federation. Both the Party of Regions and the Russian-speaking population wanted autonomy, whereby linguistic and cultural rights would be preserved, as well as the corrupt-clientelist structures of the existing government. Only further escalation led to the russification of the movement and ultimately to the incorporation of the two republics into the Russian Federation.

¹⁷¹ Participants in the events in Luhansk were automatically faced with a choice: to answer to the Ukrainian prosecutor or to escalate tensions to a level where the structures of the Ukrainian state would become powerless against the criminals.

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