

## *Chapter 9*

# **Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian-Ukrainian War**

Anton Shekhovtsov

The Russian-Ukrainian war<sup>1</sup> began in late February 2014, when Russian troops and special-operation units started the military occupation of Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The occupation was a covert operation: Moscow denied any involvement, arguing that these were native, that is, Crimean, insurgents who seized regional governmental buildings and blocked the work of official Ukrainian offices, police and military bases. The whole process of foreign occupation was described by Moscow as an indigenous political development.<sup>2</sup> The occupation forces installed their own "authorities" of Crimea and held an illegitimate referendum on the separation of Crimea from Ukraine on 16 March 2014 in a move that was interpreted by the Council of the European Union as "clear breach of the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, as well as of Russia's specific commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity under the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 and the bilateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership of 1997."<sup>3</sup> A month later, on 17 April, Russia's president Vladimir Putin admitted the deployment of Russian troops in this Ukrainian republic.<sup>4</sup> The initial denial of Russia's military involvement in Crimea was important: not only did it confuse the international community – although few Western, let alone Ukrainian, leaders actually doubted this involvement – but it also bought Russia time to swiftly replace the Ukrainian authorities with Russian or Russia-controlled ones.

The Crimean operation can be described as an act of Russia's hybrid warfare – that is, blending conventional and irregular approaches – against Ukraine. András Rácz, of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, analysed the Russian hybrid war in Crimea and, later, in east Ukrainian oblasts, highlighting the war's three phases: preparation, attack and stabilization.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this chapter is to show that, far from being a spontaneous local

uprising, the first stages of the Russian-Ukrainian war were characterized by significant involvement of various representatives of Russian far-right movements. This chapter focuses on the involvement of one such movement underpinned by Aleksandr Dugin's neo-Eurasianism that, on the basis of existing research,<sup>6</sup> can be defined as an ideology centred on the idea of building a totalitarian, Russia-dominated Eurasian Empire that would challenge and eventually defeat its eternal adversary represented by the United States and its Atlanticist allies. More specifically, this chapter shows that Russian neo-Eurasianists had sought to be – and indeed became – involved, both directly and indirectly, in the first two phases of Russia's hybrid war identified by Rácz. In particular, the neo-Eurasianists encouraged dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian authorities, strengthened the pro-Russian separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine, fuelled ethnic and social tensions, launched disinformation actions and declared alternative political centres.

To that end, I first briefly discuss the approach of Dugin's neo-Eurasianism towards Ukraine, and then trace the connections between Russian neo-Eurasianists and their Ukrainian allies during the preparatory (2005–2013) and attack (2014) phases of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

## UKRAINE IN THE NEO-EURASIANIST PERSPECTIVE

The first references to Ukraine based on Dugin's geopolitical theories appeared in the first half of the 1990s when Dugin was a co-leader of the extreme right *Natsional-Bol'shevistskaia Partiiia* (National-Bolshevik Party, NBP) that he co-founded with Russian ultranationalist avant-garde writer Eduard Limonov in 1993.<sup>7</sup> The 1994 political programme of the NBP clearly enunciated that it did not consider the current borders of either Russia or the post-Soviet states as fixed or uncontested. The NBP's programme declared that the party would denounce the Belavezha Accords, which dissolved the Soviet Union and founded the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991, and revise the borders of Russia. Furthermore, NBP's Russia would annex the territories of post-Soviet states "where the Russian ethnic population constituted more than 50% of the overall population through local referenda and their support from the Russian side." Particular territories to be annexed by National Bolshevik Russia were also named: Crimea (Ukraine), Northern Kazakhstan and the Narva region (Estonia).<sup>8</sup>

Dugin's neo-Eurasianist works, most importantly, *Osnovy geopolitiki* (The Foundations of Geopolitics), which had been published shortly before he left the BNP,<sup>9</sup> proposed a more detailed and elaborate view on Ukraine.

For Dugin, Ukraine as a state, "makes no geopolitical sense": Ukraine "does not possess any peculiar cultural message of universal significance, or geographical uniqueness, or ethnic exceptionalism."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, for Dugin,

the territory of Ukraine is torn between the Eurasian heartland (Russia) and the West; it can only exist as a cordon sanitaire between these two alleged geopolitical centres of power. As such, it undermines the security of Eurasia:

The sovereignty of Ukraine represents such a negative phenomenon for Russian geopolitics that it can, in principle, easily provoke a military conflict. ... Ukraine as an independent state with some territorial ambitions constitutes an enormous threat to the whole Eurasia, and without the solution of the Ukrainian problem, it is meaningless to talk about the continental geopolitics. ...

The existence of Ukraine in its current borders and with a current status of "a sovereign state" is identical to an enormous blow to the geopolitical security of Eurasia and to the military incursion on its territory.

Continued existence of unitary Ukraine is inadmissible. This territory must be divided into several zones corresponding to the range of geopolitical and ethnocultural realities.<sup>11</sup>

Dugin distinguished four ethnocultural regions, or "geopolitical constituents," of Ukraine: "Western Ukraine," "Little Russia"<sup>12</sup> (Ukrainian territories to the east of the Dnieper river), "Right bank of the Dnieper river" (Ukrainian territories to the west of the Dnieper river but not including Western Ukraine) and, finally, Crimea.<sup>13</sup>

"Western Ukraine," according to Dugin, consists of Volhynia, Galicia and Transcarpathia, and is alien to the Russian culture and, hence, to the Eurasian heartland. Rather, "Western Ukraine" belongs to Mitteleuropa (Middle Europe) dominated by Berlin and consisting of Germany, Italy and most of the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, the entirety of "Western Ukraine" needs to be severed from the rest of Ukraine. In a later article Dugin argued that "Western Ukraine" belonged to Mitteleuropa even if, in ethnic terms, "West Ukrainians" were of Slavic origin.<sup>14</sup>

Neo-Eurasianism holds that the "Great Russian ethnic group" and Orthodox "little Russian population" dominate "Little Russia," which is linked to Russia in terms of culture, history, ethnos and religion. This zone may constitute "an independent geopolitical region with a broad autonomy, but in an unconditional and solid union with Moscow."<sup>15</sup>

In its turn, the "Right bank of the Dnieper river," or "Central Ukraine," "is ethnically dominated by little Russian ethnos and language, but the prevalent denomination there is Russian Orthodoxy."<sup>16</sup> In the neo-Eurasianist doctrine, this implies that "Central Ukraine," like "Little Russia," fully belongs to the Eurasian heartland.

Finally, Crimea should be granted "a special status and provided with a maximum autonomy under Moscow's direct strategic control, but with due consideration of socio-economic interests of Ukraine and ethno-cultural demands of the Crimean Tatars."<sup>17</sup>

The Russian-Georgian War in August 2008 radicalized, to a certain degree, Dugin's views. He seemed to welcome the decision of Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel, France's president Nicolas Sarkozy and the United Kingdom's prime minister Gordon Brown to refuse offering the NATO Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine at the 20th NATO Summit held in Bucharest in April 2008. According to Dugin, that refusal was a grace period granted to Russia by "Old Europe," which was, according to him, resisting the forces of Atlanticism so that Russia could strengthen itself. The war in August 2008, however, marked the end of this "grace period." For Dugin it was a watershed: Russia had to act decisively if it wanted to position itself as a global power. Thus, Dugin actively supported Russia's invasion of Georgia and craved for the complete occupation of that country. For him, the Russian-Georgian war was an existential battle against Atlanticism beyond Russia and Georgia: "If Russia decides not to enter the conflict ... that will be a fatal choice. It will mean that Russia gives up her sovereignty. ... We will have to forget about Sevastopol [i.e. the Ukrainian city located in Crimea]."<sup>18</sup>

Dugin's book *Chetvertaia politicheskaiia teoriia* (The Fourth Political Theory),<sup>19</sup> published after the Russian-Georgian War, reflects his radicalized neo-Eurasianist views on Ukraine. On the one hand, he repeated the thesis of a Ukraine comprised of antagonistic zones: "Little Russia is narrower and wider than Ukraine. In Ukraine, there are several large geopolitical enclaves: Galicia, Volhynia, Crimea, Novorossiia [New Russia],<sup>20</sup> part of which is within Russia's borders."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, given his perception of the Russian-Georgian war as the intensification of the alleged Atlanticist attack on Russia (and Eurasian heartland), Dugin argued that time was running out "to disrupt the annexation of Ukraine by the Atlanticist empire."<sup>22</sup> By the "annexation," Dugin meant, first and foremost, Ukraine's presumed bid for NATO membership.

It was high time that Russia started "to break the ground of the CIS space for the construction of a new imperial building."<sup>23</sup> Dugin believed that Russia could no longer rely on the French-German negative attitudes towards Ukraine's membership in NATO, and had to act on its own. He argued that "extending Russian influence in post-Soviet space" would not necessarily imply "direct colonisation in the old tradition." As he claimed: "In our world, more sophisticated and efficient network technologies are developed that allow to achieve the same results with the different means – with the use of information resources, social organisations, faith-based groups, and social movements."<sup>24</sup> However, Russia's direct action was also possible:

It cannot be excluded that a battle for Crimea and Eastern Ukraine awaits us.

Only a short time ago, the most hot-headed among the Russian hawks presumed only an internal conflict in Ukraine, as well as political, economic and

energy pressure [on Ukraine] from the Russian side, but now a possibility of a direct military clash no longer appears unrealistic. Building an empire always incurs costs: [there are costs] for those who help Washington to build its global empire, and for those who want to assert an alternative structure of the world order based on multipolarity (in other words, for us).<sup>25</sup>

This brief discussion of Ukraine in the neo-Eurasianist perspective allows us to highlight several points. First, neo-Eurasianism considers Ukraine “an unnatural state” consisting of four major regions with allegedly different geopolitical loyalties. Second, a sovereign and united Ukraine constitutes a major threat to the geopolitical security of Russia and the envisioned Eurasian Empire. Third, in order to neutralize this threat a Russia guided by neo-Eurasianist principles needs to dismantle Ukraine as a sovereign state through non-military measures (or a combination of non-military and military resources, which can be defined as hybrid warfare) and put most of the Ukrainian territories, especially Crimea and “Eastern Ukraine” under Moscow’s direct control.

## GEARING UP FOR THE WAR

Dugin conceptualized the need for the destruction of Ukraine already in the 1990s, but specified the means for doing so in 2009 in his *Chetvertaia politicheskaiia teoriia*. However, Dugin and neo-Eurasianist organizations became involved in the non-military measures aimed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity already in 2005.

The timing was determined by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine – a series of mass protests against the fraudulent “victory” of Ukraine’s corrupt, pro-Russian prime minister Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 presidential election.<sup>26</sup> The success of the Orange Revolution, which had led to the second run-off of the presidential election in which Yanukovich’s contender, pro-Western Viktor Iushchenko, won, seemed to have scared Putin and the Russian ruling elites. They feared that a similar protest could take place in Russia and put an end to Putin’s regime. The significant contribution of young, active Ukrainians to the success of the Orange Revolution prompted the Russian establishment to launch a pre-emptive defence force by reviving, mobilizing and consolidating a pro-regime youth movement. In order to counter the largely imaginary threat of a “colour revolution” in Russia, the authorities sanctioned the creation of several “patriotic” youth movements: “Nashi” (Ours), “Rossiia molodaia” (Young Russia), “Molodaia gvardiia” (Young Guard), and some others. One of those movements was *Evraziiskii soiuz molodezhi* (ESM, Eurasian Youth Union) – under the leadership of Pavel Zarifullin and Valerii

Korovin – a National Bolshevik youth wing of Dugin’s *Mezhdunarodnoe evraziiskoe dvizhenie* (MED, International Eurasianist Movement). It is unclear who funded the ESM from 2005, but an analysis of the Russia-based Centre of Economic and Political Reforms shows that the ESM received several presidential grants amounting to more than 18.5 million Russian roubles between 2013 and 2014.<sup>27</sup>

The ESM was active not only in Russia, but also in other countries, including Ukraine. Between 2005 and 2007, branches of the ESM were established in the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Sevastopol and some others. These branches cooperated with the Ukrainian cells of the NBP, as well as with Ukrainian far-right parties such as the *Rus’kyi blok* (Russian bloc), the misleadingly named *Prohresyvnna sotsialistychna partiia Ukrainy* (Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, PSPU) led by Natalya Vitrenko, and *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood) headed by Dmytro Korchyns’kyi. Both Vitrenko and Korchyns’kyi were members of the Highest Council of Dugin’s MED.<sup>28</sup>

The Ukrainian branches of the ESM remained on the margins of Ukrainian political life, while most of its activities were limited to anti-NATO protests and other similar anti-Western actions, and did not produce any significant result in terms of undermining the Ukrainian state. Moreover, some of the Ukrainian members of the ESM did not share the radical anti-Ukrainian ideas of neo-Eurasianism. For example, after two Russian members of the movement and one Ukrainian activist of the ESM vandalized Ukrainian state symbols on the Hoverla mountain in 2007,<sup>29</sup> this led to a split in the Ukrainian ESM, as many did not support this act of vandalism. This also led to the termination of any cooperation between the ESM and the *Bratstvo* party, and Korchyns’kyi left the Highest Council of the MED. The radicals, however, welcomed the act and were outspoken in their resentment of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Kostiantyn Knyryk, an ESM activist from the Crimean town of Bakhchisaray, made no secret of the anti-Ukrainian agenda of neo-Eurasianism: “Our foremost priority is to focus on the creation of the empire; the first goal is to break Crimea away from Ukraine. To join it to the empire first.”<sup>30</sup> Because of the anti-Ukrainian thrust of neo-Eurasianism and the Hoverla mountain incident, Pavel Zarifullin, the leader of the ESM, and Dugin himself were banned from entering Ukraine in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

The neo-Eurasianist movement largely disappeared from Ukraine by 2008, due to the 2007 split and the measures against the ESM on the part of the *Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy* (SBU, Security Service of Ukraine).<sup>31</sup> Some activists left the movement for ideological reasons, some moved to Russia to continue their anti-Ukrainian work outside the country itself, some joined other pro-Russian organizations and some abandoned political involvement completely. The minority stayed in the movement, but was hardly visible until the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014.

However, Russian neo-Eurasianists were more successful in cooperating directly with a number of pro-Russian organizations in Ukraine. One of these organizations was the above-mentioned PSPU led by Vitrenko who, at that time, could be described as “the premier representative of radical anti-Westernism in Ukraine.”<sup>32</sup> Vitrenko often took part in various conferences featuring either Dugin or other members of his neo-Eurasianist movement. Dugin called her “a charismatic politician ... advocating Eurasianist Slavic views”<sup>33</sup> and “a leader of the pan-Ukrainian resistance [to the US].”<sup>34</sup>

Vitrenko's political narrative consisted of three main points. First, she promoted the idea of creating a political union of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Second, she rejected any form of Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU and the United States – the West in general. Third, she labelled all advocates of Ukraine's independence as Ukrainian ultranationalists or even Nazis. She freely substituted “NATO” with “Nazism” (and vice versa) in her political speeches, attempting to create a strong association between Nazism and the West in general, and – appealing to the Soviet mythology of the “Great Patriotic War” – portrayed a struggle between the “fascist” West and “anti-fascist” Russia.

Yet another pro-Russian organization that Dugin's neo-Eurasianists cooperated with in Ukraine was the “Donetskaia Respublika” (Donetsk Republic, DR). This organization was created in summer 2005 by Andrii Purhin, Oleksandr Tsurkan and Oleh Frolov, as a response to the “Orange Revolution” and presidency of Viktor Iushchenko who advocated a pro-Western foreign policy of Ukraine. The DR was officially registered in December that year, but by autumn leaders of the organization had already taken part in the protest demonstration in Kyiv together with the activists of the ESM.<sup>35</sup>

For the DR, the cooperation with the ESM was apparently the most important organizational link with Russia. In August 2006, the DR's leaders, namely Purhin and Frolov, as well as Knyryk and several other Ukrainian ESM activists, went to a summer camp in Russia organized by the ESM. Vitrenko and Oleksandr Svistunov, the leader of the Rus'kyi blok, also took part in the camp where they delivered lectures to the participants. Apart from lectures, seminars and social activities, the participants of the camp were engaged in training for violent street protests. One of the trainers was Oleh Bakhtiiarov who had been Dugin's associate since the 1990s and lived in Kyiv where he was close to the local branch of the ESM.

In November 2006, DR and ESM activists collected signatures to hold a referendum on the independence of the “Donetsk republic.” The referendum never took place, but the SBU and police took notice of the group, and cases were brought against the leaders of the DR under three articles of the Ukrainian Criminal Code: “Actions aimed at the forcible change or overthrow of the constitutional order or the seizure of state power,” “Infringement on the

territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine,” and “Violation of citizens’ equality based on their race, nationality or attitude to religion.”<sup>36</sup> The criminal cases hindered the process of building the DR as a functional structure; in 2007, a Ukrainian court outlawed the DR, and it went underground.

Neither the persecution nor banning of the DR, however, stymied its activities. In 2008, the DR, together with several other pro-Russian organizations, held a convention featuring Pavel Kanishchev, one of the leaders of the Moscow branch of the ESM, and Knyrik as the leader of the ESM’s Crimean cell. The convention declared the creation of the Donetsk Federal Republic. Its declaration also referred to a resolution of the “convention of popular representatives of South-Eastern Ukraine” that, in particular, renounced the existence of the Ukrainian nation, arguing that

[the congress] considers the totally forced Ukrainisation of South-East [of Ukraine] as a form of humanitarian genocide aimed at the destruction of the indigenous Russian population (*russkie*), replacement of Russian concepts by the “Ukrainian” ones. Considers as a humanitarian crime against the Super-Ethnos of the Russians (*Russy*) the artificially created community “Ukrainian nation” that does not exist as such and divides the single people into “Ukrainians” and “Russians” (*rossiiane*). The primordial people of the Rus is the Russian (*russkii*) people as an indivisible foundation of the Great Russian Race.<sup>37</sup>

The resolution also demanded from the Ukrainian parliament to adopt a “law on the federal structure of Ukraine” through the change of the Constitution of Ukraine.

In 2009, the DR declared the “state sovereignty of the Donetsk Federal Republic,” uniting the territories of six Ukrainian southeastern oblasts: Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Kherson.<sup>38</sup> The same year, the DR held a camp where – as it appears from the photos taken there<sup>39</sup> – activists were trained in firearms and making Molotov cocktails.

The DR largely curtailed their activities in 2010. One possible explanation is that the deaths of three activists of the DR including Tsurkan – the DR believed that the SBU poisoned them with mercury vapour<sup>40</sup> – might have delivered a blow to the organization. A more feasible explanation, however, is that the DR’s activities aimed at destabilizing the Ukrainian state were no longer necessary after pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich was elected president of Ukraine in February 2010, and another pro-Russian politician, Mykola Azarov, became prime minister. The DR apparently felt that it did not need to attack Ukraine’s sovereignty as long as the country was ruled by the pro-Russian forces.

The relation between the reduced activities of the DR and the outcome of the 2010 presidential elections may also explain why the DR resumed its



activities and extensive cooperation with the ESM in 2012. This was the year of parliamentary elections in Ukraine, and the pro-Russian forces struggled to retain their power in the parliament, and, thus, undermined the national-democratic pro-Western forces. At that time, Yanukovich's allies adopted "anti-fascist" rhetoric attacking the Ukrainian far-right Svoboda (Freedom) party. Since Svoboda also cooperated with the Ukrainian national-democrats, two "anti-fascist" organizations, Russia-based World without Nazism and the International Antifascist Front founded by Yanukovich's major ally Vadym Kolesnychenko, mobilized against the entire national-democratic opposition to Yanukovich trying to discredit it as "fascist."<sup>41</sup> The DR, with its insistence on the dangers of Ukrainian pro-Western "fascism," fit well into the campaign against the opposition to Yanukovich.

There was another important factor that contributed to the reinvigorated activities of the DR in 2012. It was also the time of heated debates on the direction of Ukraine's foreign policy. Russia developed its Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) and wanted Ukraine to be part of it. The second option for Ukraine was the Association Agreement with the EU. Politicians close to Yanukovich seemed to be divided on the foreign policy issue: some supported the idea of Ukraine joining the ECU; others clearly favoured the rapprochement with the EU and the West in general. It seems viable to suggest both Moscow and Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians and officials promoting the integration into the ECU contributed to the mobilization of the radically anti-Western DR in 2012 as leverage on Yanukovich.

Hence, the idea of the integration into the ECU dominated the contacts between the DR and ESM, as well as between other Ukrainian pro-Russian and Russian organizations, in 2012. On 18 February 2012, activists of the DR and ESM took part in a small round table "The Future of Donbass" in Luhansk. Around twenty Russian and pro-Russian participants adopted a resolution which, in particular, argued that "the ultimate aim of the relations between [Russia and Ukraine] had to be a transition from the regional integration to the building of a new form of the interstate integration"<sup>42</sup> – that is, the Eurasian Union as the next step in the development of the ECU.

On 11 March 2012, representatives of various Russian and Ukrainian organizations held a round table "Ukraine and Donbass for the Eurasian Union" in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don to discuss the creation of the Eurasian Union. This conference featured DR's Purhin, Andrey Kovalenko, the leader of Moscow's ESM, and Serhii Baryshnikov, associate professor at the Donetsk National University who was known for promoting Dugin's books and neo-Eurasianist ideas at his lectures.<sup>43</sup> Kovalenko, in particular, stated that the Russian authorities were going to mobilize movements of Russian compatriots abroad, so pressure groups of this kind could become "a basis for the broad integration movement." The conference itself concluded with

an initiative to create an international non-governmental organization (NGO) Ukraine for the Eurasian Union, as well as establishing a special NGO for Donbass named Donbass for the Eurasian Union led by Baryshnikov.<sup>44</sup>

On 24 May 2012, the ESM announced on its website that the DR opened the embassy of the Donetsk Republic in the Russian Federation: the “administration of the Embassy was temporarily housed in the headquarters of the Moscow branch of the ESM.” The announcement also argued, intrinsically rejecting the territorial integrity of Ukraine, that the opening of the embassy would “contribute to strengthening of the relations between the residents of the Donetsk Republic and the rest of Russia, and to the matter of reunification of the lands of historical Russia artificially disunited in 1991.” Furthermore, the DR was going to issue passports of the Donetsk Republic, and the residents of the above-mentioned six southeastern oblasts of Ukraine had priority in applying for these passports.<sup>45</sup>

Conferences focused on the Eurasian integration of Ukraine continued. On 28 July 2012, Donetsk hosted a round table “Regional reintegration as a steppingstone of the Eurasian unification” that featured Russian and Ukrainian pro-Russian activists, including ESM’s Kovalenko and other members of the neo-Eurasianist movement, DR’s Purhin, and Baryshnikov.

A similar but larger conference, titled “Donbass in the Eurasian Project,” took place between 24 and 25 November 2012 in Donetsk and brought together activists from twenty Russian and Ukrainian pro-Russian organizations. The conference opened with a panel chaired by Baryshnikov as the head of the “Donbass for the Eurasian Union” and featured papers of the leaders of the ESM Kovalenko and Valerii Korovin (who conveyed greetings from Dugin), as well as Purhin and two other pro-Russian activists from Donetsk. The conference adopted a resolution that, in particular, stated:

The participants of the conference declare its principal aim – the creation of the Eurasian Union. ...

Donbass can and must become a steppingstone and a support region for the launch of the genuine Eurasian project. Being a geopolitical and historical product and heritage of the Russian line of development, our land represents an optimal trans-regional model of the future integration. Our region is an organic part of the Russian world (*Russkii mir*), an epicentre of Novorossia – the last bulwark and guarantee of the unity of Ukraine and Russia. The current conditions actualise the issue of turning Donbass from the purely socio-economic reality into the political factor.<sup>46</sup>

The DR’s activities went beyond conferences and round tables. On 4 April 2013, it organized an attack on a cultural centre in Donetsk that hosted a workshop on Internet technologies. John F. Tefft, US Ambassador to Ukraine

until May 2016, opened the workshop, but left before the attack. Several reports stressed the inactivity of the police during the incident; furthermore, the police later stated that there had been no violations of the public order.<sup>47</sup> This reinforced suspicions that the DR had high-ranking patrons in the region who condoned their anti-Ukrainian and separatist activities during Ianukovych's rule.<sup>48</sup>

However, the DR became less active afterwards and mobilized again only after the Ukrainian revolution, Ianukovych's flight to Russia and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war that started with the Russian occupation of Crimea at the end of February 2014.

### NEO-EURASIANISTS AT WAR

The victory of the Ukrainian revolution implied that Ukraine would not join any Russia-led integration projects – the outcome which neo-Eurasianists considered as a blow to their agenda regarding Ukraine. Their allies in Ukraine, pro-Russian movements and organizations such as the DR, interpreted the pro-Western revolution as a direct threat to their ambitions too. Encouraged by the annexation of Crimea by Russia, they continued mobilizing against the revolution and engaging in active resistance to the former opposition to Ianukovych that formed the interim government after Ianukovych and several ministers of Azarov's government fled to Russia. Ukrainian oligarchs such as Rinat Akhmetov, who supported Ianukovych in the past, had significant assets in east Ukrainian oblasts (especially the Donetsk oblast) and who thus held formal and informal power in the region, seemed to be attempting to put pressure on the interim government by facilitating or, at least, not impeding the pro-Russian separatist activities.<sup>49</sup> For example, the local SBU office arrested Purhin on 19 March 2014 for his involvement in the violent protests,<sup>50</sup> but he was reported to be already free on 22 March.<sup>51</sup> The oligarchs who exerted influence on the local law enforcement structures unlikely wanted east Ukrainian oblasts to cede to Russia, but they thought that they could control the pro-Russian separatists and use them as leverage on the interim government to protect their assets which they thought were threatened by the new authorities.

However, the allegiance of pro-Russian separatists and ultranationalists lay not with the Ukrainian oligarchs but with Russia. They became important actors in the initial phase of the war in southeastern Ukrainian oblasts.<sup>52</sup> Pavlo Gubarev, a former member of the Russian fascist organization *Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo* (RNE, Russian National Unity) and Vitrenko's PSPU, declared himself the "People's Governor" of the Donetsk oblast on

3 March 2014 at an assembly of the regional parliament which was occupied by pro-Russian separatists including DR activists. During the separatist rallies and seizures of the regional government and SBU buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk, some of the participants waived flags of the ESM, although it is unclear who did this: the DR activists, local activists of the ESM or Russian members of this neo-Eurasianist movement.

By the end of February 2014, Dugin was actively engaged in promoting neo-Eurasianist and anti-Ukrainian messages using the neo-Eurasianist and Russian mainstream media, as well as posting comments on the developments in Ukraine on his social networking sites on Facebook and its Russian equivalent VK (or V Kontakte).<sup>53</sup> In general, Dugin's message consisted of four major ideas: first, that Atlanticists brought Nazis to power in Ukraine thus declaring a war on Russia; secondly, that the interim government was a Nazi junta and had no legitimacy; thirdly, that Ukraine did not exist anymore; and finally, that Russia must act decisively to prevent the Atlanticists from establishing control over the entire territory of former Ukraine.

Dugin also directly instructed particular members of the pro-Russian separatist movement in Donetsk. At the end of March 2014, Iekateryna Gubareva, the spouse of Pavlo Gubarev who was arrested at that time by the Ukrainian authorities (he was released in May that year), uploaded a video of her Skype conversation with Dugin which provided an important insight into Dugin's relations to the pro-Russian separatists and his instructions to them.<sup>54</sup>

During this conversation, Dugin made several major points. The first point concerned political legitimacy: the only legitimate power in Ukraine belonged, despite his flight to Russia, to Ianukovych; no existing administrative or bureaucratic structure in Ukraine was legal anymore; pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine had to reject all elections scheduled by the interim government and the Ukrainian parliament because that would legitimize the "Nazi junta" in Kyiv. Second, Dugin insisted on the existential threat of the "Nazi junta" arguing that it was preparing a genocide of the Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine. The third point referred to the need of the launch of large-scale subversive activities: Dugin called for organizing a general strike in southeastern oblasts; forming armed self-defence units and taking hostage representatives of the "junta"; mobilizing for the war with the government forces; dismantling the border between the southeastern Ukrainian oblasts and Russia; and eliminating Ukrainian border guards and customs officers. The fourth point concerned the role of Russia: according to Dugin, Moscow was not content with the annexation of Crimea and would "liberate" the southeastern oblasts of Ukraine too by deploying peacekeeping forces in the region.

Taking into account Russia's tactics in its war on Georgia in August 2008 and his belief that "extending Russian influence on the post-Soviet space"

could be realized through hybrid warfare, Dugin seemed to envision the following situation: first, pro-Russian separatists would start a “civil war” in the southeastern parts of the country and be helped by Russian volunteers if the Ukrainian-Russian border came under the control of Russian border guards and pro-Russian separatists; then, a “civil war” would escalate and Russia would have a reason to send peacekeeping forces thus occupying at least the southeastern oblasts.

Following Dugin's involvement, the ESM started to give instructions to the separatist movement too. On 8 April 2014, the ESM issued an official statement appealing to the “people of the South-East.”<sup>55</sup> In this statement, the ESM, to some extent echoing Dugin's instructions, called for the extensive violent mobilization of pro-Russian separatists who needed to take power in their hands, block railways and highways, take control of the communication nodes and airports, build barricades between the oblasts, dismantle the Ukrainian-Russian border, take as many hostages as possible, put pressure on the members of Ukrainian power structures who remained loyal to the interim government, engage in information warfare, etc.

The ESM also advertised the means of providing financial support for the separatists and became actively engaged in coordinating recruitment of volunteers who were willing to go to the war with the Ukrainian government forces. However, it seems impossible to establish how successful or efficient the ESM was in recruiting the volunteers. Not only the ESM, but other Russian fascist organizations too were involved in the recruitment process during the Russian-Ukrainian War, including the RNE, NBP, Russkoe Impereskoe Dvizhenie (Russian Imperial Movement), E.N.O.T. Corp, various Russian Cossack movements, and many others.

There is no conclusive evidence that the Russian authorities or power ministries directly sanctioned the recruitment of Russian volunteers with the aim of sending them to Ukraine to help the separatists. However, two important observations suggest that Russian officials either were involved in this process or, at least, did not hinder it.

First, not a single criminal case was opened in Russia against Russian citizens for their fighting on the side of the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. Russia's Criminal Code includes two articles that can potentially be applied in this context.<sup>56</sup> Article 208 “Organisation of an Illegal Armed Formation or Participation in It” punishes those who participate in armed formations that are not provided for by a federal law, or in armed formations in a foreign country that are not provided for by the law of that country, for purposes contradicting the interests of the Russian Federation. Article 359 “Mercenarism” punishes those who, in particular, are engaged in recruitment, training, financing, or any other material provision of a mercenary, and also the use of him in an armed conflict or hostilities, as well as those who participate

as a mercenary in an armed conflict or hostilities. Despite the fact that several Russian ultranationalist organizations not only articulated their support for pro-Russian separatists, but also publicly advertised their recruitment and training activities, none of them was prosecuted. On the other hand, the Russian authorities prosecuted those Russian citizens who fought in east Ukrainian oblasts against the separatists and Russian troops or were allegedly involved in recruiting volunteers for the pro-Ukrainian forces.<sup>57</sup>

Second, two prominent Russian ultranationalists, Aleksandr Belov and Dmitrii Demushkin, declared that Russian officials tried to persuade them to send members of their organizations as volunteers to Ukraine to fight on the separatists' side.<sup>58</sup> According to Belov, he was approached by the Russian security service (Federal'naia sluzhba bezopasnosti (FSB, Federal Security Service), while Demushkin argues that he was first contacted by Russia's vice prime minister Dmitry Rogozin, a former leader of the far right Rodina (Motherland) party, and then by the FSB. Belov and Demushkin declined to take part in the war, and the Russian authorities started to persecute them for various, apparently unsubstantiated, reasons.

Nothing of the kind happened to the Russian neo-Eurasianists. Several of their allies took up posts in the self-proclaimed separatist Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and other separatist regions. Purhin became the "first vice prime minister" of the DNR, while another leader of the DR, Oleh Frolov, became a member of its "parliament." Kostiantyn Knyrik, the leader of the Crimean branch of the ESM, became the head of the Information Centre called South-Eastern Front. Aleksandr Proselkov, the leader of the ESM cell in Russia's Southern Federal District, was appointed "deputy minister of foreign affairs" of the DNR; Proselkov was killed in July 2014 under strange circumstances. Aleksandr Borodai and Igor Girkin ("Strelkov") – two associates of Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian businessman and owner of Marshall Capital Partners,<sup>59</sup> who also cooperated with Dugin<sup>60</sup> – became "prime minister" and "minister of defence" of the DNR correspondingly. Since then, however, the positions of most have changed – some lost the positions they once had, some moved back to Russia.

For their involvement in Russia's war on Ukraine, the United States imposed sanctions on the ESM and Marshall Capital Partners, as well as on individual leaders of the Russian neo-Eurasianist movement such as Aleksandr Dugin, Andrei Kovalenko, Pavel Kanishchev, and on their close allies Andrii Purhin, Pavlo and Iekateryna Gubarevs, Igor Girkin, Aleksandr Borodai and Konstantin Malofeev.

The importance of the neo-Eurasianists and their Russian and Ukrainian allies declined after August 2014 when regular Russian troops made their first large-scale incursions into Ukraine through the Ukrainian-Russian border, uncontrolled by the Ukrainian authorities.<sup>61</sup> However, together with

other Russian organizations, the neo-Eurasianists contributed to the planned “civil war” in east Ukrainian oblasts as the initial phase of the larger Russian-Ukrainian war.

## CONCLUSION

Dugin's neo-Eurasianist movement had become involved in the attempts at undermining Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity since 2005 as a response to the pro-Western turn of Ukraine's foreign policy that took place after the Orange Revolution. Armed with Dugin's ideological assumptions that Ukraine was an artificial state threatening the security of Russia and the envisioned Eurasian Empire, the ESM, the youth wing of the neo-Eurasianist movement, started to actively disseminate Dugin's ideas in Ukraine, form cells in various Ukrainian cities and build contacts with pro-Russian Ukrainian organizations.

Guided by Dugin's idea that incorporating Ukraine into Russia's sphere of influence might be implemented through a combination of non-military and military resources, that is hybrid warfare, the ESM's activities in Ukraine were focused on creating a fertile ground for the preparatory phase of the war. In particular, using András Rácz's terms, the ESM encouraged dissatisfaction with the central Ukrainian authorities and strengthened local separatist movements, especially the DR, and fuelled ethnic and social tensions in east Ukrainian oblasts.

During the attack phase, the ESM encouraged, and took part in, creating alternative centres of power opposing the official Ukrainian authorities. Dugin and his Russian followers directly instructed their allies in the Donetsk oblast to seize administrative buildings and telecommunications infrastructures, establish communication and information monopoly, break the morale of the police and armed forces, take hostage representatives of the central power and disable border guards.

The idea behind the neo-Eurasianists' activities at this stage of the Russian-Ukrainian War was to launch a “civil war” in Ukraine that would offer Russia a chance to send in the occupation forces under the guise of peacekeeping forces. Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 suggested this development: Russia used peacekeeping and regular forces to occupy the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008. However, Russia did not deploy the peacekeeping forces in the Ukrainian case; instead, it sent regular troops to back the pro-Russian separatists who started losing the fight to the Ukrainian government forces in August 2014. The Russian military incursion signalled the start of a new stage of the war in which the previous activities of the Russian neo-Eurasianists were no longer required.

Evidence suggests that the influence of Dugin's neo-Eurasianism exists outside Ukraine too. The 2014 report of the Czech Security Information Service assesses that Russia is creating in Europe a structure "ideologically based on Dugin's expansionist Neo-Eurasianism (which is in a way acceptable to all European political parties, from left-wing extremists and populists to right-wing extremists)."<sup>62</sup> Dugin himself argues that neo-Eurasianists "need to collaborate with all forces [in Europe], Right or Left, who share our principles."<sup>63</sup> One example of this collaboration is Dugin's contacts with the representative of the Greek left-wing populist Coalition of the Radical Left (widely known as Syriza) and the extreme right Chrysí Avgí (Golden Dawn).<sup>64</sup> Moreover, neo-Eurasianism has influenced a number of French, Serbian and Brazilian volunteers who went to Eastern Ukraine to fight the Ukrainian government forces: they were inspired by Dugin's works and openly referred to their group of foreign fighters as "Eurasianists."<sup>65</sup>

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