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Anna Taranenko,

*Candidate of Political Science (PhD), Associate Professor,
Department of International Relations and Tourism, Kyiv International University
taranenkoann@yahoo.com; ORCID: 0000-0003-0268-009X.*

CONFLICT IN DONBAS AS A MANIFESTATION OF TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY CHALLENGES

Political instability processes are particularly significant for transitional societies. The problem of political transformation is urgent for Ukraine as a nation in transition. The goal of this article is to study the conflict in Donbas as a manifestation of transitional society challenges and Ukraine's move toward democratization. The utilized method is qualitative case study. Among the study results, one can mention that the current conflict in Donbas is a manifestation of transitional society challenges. The conflict in Donbas can be viewed as a confrontation related to post-Soviet political space transformation, in particular, democracy transit. The practice of «hybrid wars» is not a particularly new concept in the international conflicts dimension, yet it appears to be a significant challenge for transitional societies. The armed conflict in Donbas became a turning point in the identity development of Ukrainians as a society in transition. Ukraine needs to investigate and implement the most successful examples of previous conflicts' resolution. One of the instruments that can assist in overcoming the challenges of democratic political and economic transition and respective conflict resolution is international organizations. Despite internal weaknesses of the latest years, the EU has been actively supporting Ukraine, specifically, in the conflict resolution efforts. The UN is another important platform for the conflict resolution efforts. Besides, the UN has traditionally been active in supporting transitional democracies. It can be concluded that the potential of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations can be further utilized in order to search for reliable mediators, new valuable expertise and ideas' exchange. Besides, while analyzing the topic of democracies in transition, one should look at the potential of civil society groups for establishing and sustaining peace.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, transitive societies, nations in transition, Ukraine, Donbas, the European Union, the United Nations, democracy, political modernization, Eastern Europe*

Introduction. Nation states in the 21st century have to confront a number of new challenges presented by globalization, rapid growth of information and communication technologies, climate change, migration crisis and international terrorism. Despite integrating factor of globalization and further convergence of financial, trade, transportation, and communication systems, fragmentation and regionalization trends are also present and remain strong. The above-mentioned processes related to political instability are particularly urgent for transitional societies. The **problem** of political transformation is **urgent** for Ukraine as a transitional state, therefore it needs to be studied in greater detail. Transformation in a broad sense (systematic change) is a timeless process of transformations of the system, its elements, connections and relations between them (Dorohuntsov & Chyzhova, 2010, as cited in Konotop, 2013, p. 53). One of the most significant aspects of political transitional processes at the current stage is democratization. The process of democratization has intensified in the post-Soviet countries starting from the end of the 20th c., including Ukraine. Yet, due to ineffective state institutions and leaderships, the internal weakness of most Black Sea Economic Cooperation transitional countries and their vulnerability to outside pressures, as well as their inadequate or lacking integration into new security frameworks, the overall climate of regional insecurity intensified (Sperling et al., 2003, p. 213). Therefore the current conflict in Donbas may be regarded as a manifestation of transitional period of the country's political development and has to be studied further.

Goal and Objectives. The **goal** of this article is to study the conflict in Donbas as a manifestation of transitional society challenges and Ukraine's move toward democratization. The **objectives** of the study are to characterize the present state of Ukraine as a nation in transition, to

trace current democracy development in the country, analyze the present stage of the conflict development in Donbas and suggest respective methods of the confrontation resolution. Multiple authors claim that Ukraine is presently going through the process of rapid political and economic transformations, complicated by an armed conflict in the East of the country. Per Bulbeniuk (2016, p. 108), it can be assumed that the extremely problematic advancement of Ukraine on the path of modernization is not only a question of politics, economy and social life, but also a question of functioning of the axiological and ideological sphere of the country's existence. Schadrina (2014, as cited in Gulay, 2015, p. 95) notes that informal political practices that permeate legitimate state institutions play an important role in the functioning of transitional societies, which, unfortunately, given the realities of socio-political development and the lack of a systemic course for modernization, include Ukraine. Polischuk (2018, p. 47) notes that in societies with developed democracies, citizens have a wide range of opportunities to participate in the political life of their country or, at least, to influence important political decisions. In transitional societies, the real opportunities of citizens to make political efforts are limited mainly by electoral functions (Polischuk, 2018, p. 47). At the same time Semeniuk (2013, p. 112) underscores that the transformation of Ukrainian society institutions in the context of the global space restructuring, as well as growing social inequality seriously affects the social role of cultural capital, simultaneously influenced by diametrically opposed factors.

Latest Publications Review. Ukraine is currently facing the challenges of democratic society development. The speed and depth of changes observed in the world lead to a fundamental conclusion about the complex and contradictory process of restructuring and instability of the entire political space, and, consequently, the modern system of international relations in general (Troian, 2013, p. 141). Thereby a transitive society is a special stage of its development, which is influenced by various factors that ultimately affect the direction of development of the society, whether it is positive or negative – it will either move to a new higher stage of development or an irreversible process of degradation will begin (Kovaleva et al., 2019). According to Martínez and Núñez Martínez (Sroka et al, 2017, p. 261), the third democratic wave, from the mid-seventies to the nineties of the 20th century ran through the southern and eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia-Pacific. At the same time, per Hopmann (Sperling et al., 2003, p. 155), the transition to a fully democratic society, in which more than the outward appearance of democracy is established and in which democratic values are truly internalised throughout the population, is unlikely to take place rapidly. Talking in general about Black Sea Economic Cooperation countries (BSEC) Manoli (Sperling et al., 2003, p. 213) notes that these states are at different stages of political and economic transition towards democratic societies and market economies; they concurrently face an often antagonistic external environment.

Ukraine is challenged by developing a strong market economy and implementing efficient rule of law institutions. Together with the processes of global changes, Ukraine faced the fact of multidimensional transformation, which took place in parallel with the processes of democratization and creation of a modern nation-state, formation of a single political nation and state identity (Bokoch, 2017). Bokoch (2017, p. 47) notes that, in addition, the still ongoing process of national statehood formation is complicated by external aggression and the need to confront the information war. According to Democracy Index 2019, Ukraine is characterized by hybrid regime, ranking 5-6 out of 10 (Democracy Index 2019). The transition to democratization of the post-Soviet countries has become one of the determining causes of the «color revolutions» in Georgia (2003), Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2010), Ukraine (2004, 2014), as well as the «velvet revolution» (2018) in Armenia (Lansky & Suthers, 2019; Shirinyan, 2018; Iskandaryan, 2018, as cited in Mihr, 2020, p. 35). Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia (since 2018) provide very interesting examples of «belated democratization» with a not yet clear outcome (Mihr, 2020, p. 40). The disagreement between Russia and Ukraine over a number of political and ideological issues, including the Black Sea fleet, led to annexation of the Crimea and military conflict in Donbas. Moreover, the new geopolitical hotspot in Eastern Europe became the target of a mix of hybrid tactics matched by classical military

actions, designed to legitimize Russia's presence and destabilize the country from within (Mihr, 2020, p. 58).

The conflict in Donbas has been studied by A. Bebler, E.C. Dunn, M.S. Bobick, A. Kudriachenko, A. Mihr, B. Parakhonsky, H. Yavorska, M. Rozumny, V. Smoliy, S. Kulchytsky, A. Sroka, F. Castro-Rial Garrone, R. Torres Kumbrián, J. Sperling, S. Kay, V. Papacosma and M. Hargreaves. Bebler (2015) analyzes the confrontation in Ukraine in the framework of frozen conflicts in Europe. Dunn and Bobick (2014) analyze the conflict from the viewpoint that Ukraine belongs to the traditional Russian sphere of influence. Kudriachenko (2018) looks at practical steps of Donbas and the Crimea integration into political, legal and socio-cultural space of Ukraine. Parakhonsky and Yavorska (2020) research the aspects of war and peace relations and emphasize the importance of security strategy elaboration. Smoliy and Kulchytsky (2016) analyze the role of Donbas and the Crimea in economic, social, political and ethno-cultural space of Ukraine from the viewpoint of historical experience, current challenges and prospects.

Problem dimensions that have not been studied previously. As noted, multiple authors researched the conflict in Donbas from different perspectives. While analyzing the confrontation in Donbas, the author of this article will look precisely at the aspect of the current conflict as a manifestation of transitional society challenges.

Method. The utilized **method** is descriptive case study. This methodology is appropriate for analyzing complex social phenomena. The goal set by the researcher in a descriptive case study is to describe the data as they occur (Zainal, 2007, p. 3). The author will look at national and international peer-reviewed studies, monographs, national and international legislation, analytical reports and statements of political leaders on the topic. A case study is expected to capture the complexity of a single case, and this methodology developed within the social sciences (Johansson, 2003). This methodology is applied to social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics, but also to practice-oriented fields such as environmental studies, social work, education, and business studies (Johansson, 2003). Thus, the selected descriptive case study method can be a viable option for international relations and political science research.

Results and Discussion. The conflict in Donbas can be viewed as a confrontation related to post-Soviet space transformation. Previous similar conflicts took place in Transnistria, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The «Ukrainian card» may be viewed as a significant asset in the big geopolitical game involving Western countries in order to demonstrate Russia's capacity to impact world politics. The Ukrainian conflict is being used for many purposes of Putin's regime, however the key ones are putting pressure on the Western countries in order to have an upper hand in negotiations concerning the whole range of Russian interests (Rozumny, 2017, p. 63). Among the strongest points of the Russian Federation's foreign policy potential one can name its «hard power leverage» (military capacities and vast natural resources), as well as «soft power tools» (deep sense of patriotism of the Russian people). Apparently, one of the biggest weaknesses of the country's foreign policy is insufficient level of funding. The weak point of Putin's neoimperial project is unbalanced economic model, archaic social order, external markets' structure vulnerability, negative demographic trend and isolationist mindset of the Russian people (Rozumny, 2017, p. 77). At the moment this mindset protects the regime from external threats, however in the long-term perspective it poses the threat of one more moral and cultural bankruptcy (Rozumny, 2017, p. 77). As evidenced by the Russian Federation's case, legitimization of violence in the current day world increasingly less depends on authorized international organizations – the UN Security Council, OSCE and other security organizations. Military actions are preceded and accompanied by large-scale information operations aimed at shaping respective perception of their legitimacy even though those contradict international law (Parakhonsky, 2016, p. 32).

The practice of «hybrid wars» is not a particularly new concept in the international conflicts dimension, and it appears to be a significant challenge for transitional societies. Over time the conflicting parties have started using more up-to-date and intricate methods of waging information and hybrid wars. As Berezovets (2015, p. 31) notes, the experience of «hybrid wars» in Russian rendition has a long pre-history. Interestingly, propaganda technologies used by Russia against

Ukraine during the Crimea occupation (2014), are to a large extent similar to the events of Soviet-Finnish war of 1939. In order to explain the reason of the Soviet Union's attack against neutral Finland, the official propaganda coined the term «White-Finns» derived from the White Guard Finns (Berezovets, 2015, p. 31). Two decades prior to the Finnish conflict a similar term had been used with regard to Poland named exclusively «lordly Poland» (panska Polscha) and the Polish were denoted as «White Guard Poles», i.e. opponents of communism (Berezovets, 2015, p. 31). Dunn and Bobick (2014, p. 411) hold that Russia's new political technologies – war without war – become the potential basis for a new mode of government that challenges not only the territorial expansion of liberal democracy, but also its very conceptual foundations. Besides, it can be interpreted as one more manifestation of transitional society challenges related to security threats.

Yet, the «zero sum» game propelled by the Russian leadership may as a result serve as an integration driver. Russia's aggressive policy aimed at provoking conflicts may become a vital factor for key global actors' consolidation around set norms. Similarly, global challenge of Nazi Germany in the 20th century urged the world community to jointly overcome this crisis, which allowed to live for half of a century in relatively stable and predictable international political space (Rozumny 2017, p. 82). Besides, current political challenge can, in fact, become a consolidating factor for the Ukrainian nation. As Myronova (2016, p. 5) notes, the internally displaced people who moved to Ukraine-controlled territories from Donbas and the Crimea have proven love for Ukraine with their own choice and each one of them contributes to the development of the cities, which forcedly became their second home.

The armed conflict in Donbas became a turning point in the development of national and civic identity of Ukrainians as a nation in transition. The revolution of dignity laid foundations for a new civil society, non-existent for many years in post-Soviet countries (Hnyp, 2019, p. 21). One can also note the importance of soft power tools for the Ukrainian society integration, such as mass media, sound information and culture policy. In particular, one can stress the significance of cooperation with European culture sector representatives in this regard. The development of European co-production will promote access to alternative sources of financing for domestic film production, as well as the possibility of access to the European film distribution market, which will have a positive impact on its economic profitability (Bakalchuk, 2018, p. 48). At the same time, the involvement of the Ukrainian party in the programs of popularization of European cinematographic products will contribute to further development of national identity in Ukrainian society as part of the European cultural space (Bakalchuk, 2018, p. 48). In any case, use of soft power, as any kind of political impact largely depends on the context. While spreading its values and ideas, a country should create conditions that are conducive to such influence. For example, utilizing soft power is more efficient in open societies with decentralized power and democratic regime (which includes freedom of speech) (Kapitonenko, 2010, p. 28). Therefore, Ukrainian leadership should once again focus on economic growth, well-being of the people and fighting domestic policy challenges, pertinent to societies in transition. The current Presidential office is going to make considerable efforts to resolve the conflict in 2021. The President took active stance in renewing negotiations in Normandy format, continued the initiatives of prisoners-of-war exchange and started the much-debated troop withdrawal in certain sections of the contact line in Donbas.

One of the instruments that can assist in overcoming the challenges of political and economic transition and respective conflict resolution is international organizations. Regional conflicts as further integration challenge still torments the European Union political stability. The principle of good neighbourliness contained in the European Neighborhood Policy's (ENP) founding documents underpins the ENP's objective of settling conflicts between neighbours involved in territorial disputes, yet the policy was unprepared to deal with the conflicts that arose over the 12 years that followed the ENP's creation (Novakova & Petrov, 2016, p. 8). The aforementioned processes are even more salient in transitional countries, like Ukraine.

Yet, despite internal weaknesses of the latest years, the EU has been actively supporting Ukraine, in particular, in the conflict resolution efforts (Jarábik et al., 2018). The EU reacted quickly to the Ukraine crisis of 2014 by allocating generous funding for macro-economic

stabilization and since then, the EU has mobilized over \$4.2 billion through three packages of macro-finance assistance (MFA) for Ukraine, which is the largest MFA the EU has ever provided to a non-EU country (Jarábik et al., 2018). The United Nations is another important platform for the conflict resolution efforts. In particular, the UN Security Council passed S/RES/2166 resolution of July 21, 2014 that condemned the downing of Malaysia Airline flight 17, while S/RES/2202 resolution endorsed the «Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements» on February 12, 2015 (UN Documents for Ukraine: Security Council Resolutions, 2020). Turan (2016) holds that although in the current state-centric international system the responsibility for ensuring positive intra-state peace primarily lies in each state, it is essential to render addressing the absence of positive peace as an international norm. This would allow the UN to assume responsibility and pro-actively offer measures for positive peacebuilding for the ultimate goal of approaching sustainable intra-state peace universally, in case the given states lack the necessary institutions and political will (Turan, 2016).

The UN is actively supporting transitional democracies. To this end, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) collaborates with national governments and other actors to rebuild public confidence and restore peace and the rule of law in post-conflict nations and transitional democracies (Democracy. United Nations, 2020). OHCHR has actively supported transitional justice programmes in more than 20 countries around the world over the past 15 years, thereby the Office tries to ensure that human rights and transitional justice considerations are reflected in peace agreements and reparations programmes (Democracy. United Nations, 2020).

The potential of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations can be further utilized in order to search for reliable mediators, new valuable expertise and ideas' exchange. For instance, one can recall the role of American President Jimmy Carter in resolving the Cyprus conflict. Carter had previous successful experience of conducting Camp David negotiations between Egypt and Israel, signed SALT-II agreement with Leonid Brezhnev. Still the Cypriot problem remained unsolved. Despite this diplomatic setback Jimmy Carter continued his involvement in the conflict resolution even after the end of his presidency. In 2002 he won a Noble Peace Prize for decades of conflict resolution efforts and democracy advancement. After Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 the ex-president visited the country as a member of non-governmental organization «The Elders» (Kovalsky, 2019, p. 45).

Besides, while analyzing the topic of democracies in transition, one should look at the potential of civil society groups for establishing and sustaining peace. Putnam (1993, as cited in Shamaileh, 2017, p. 27) explores the relationship between social capital and the performance of democratic institutions through analyzing the differences in civic associational membership between Northern and Southern Italy. The author finds significant evidence of a causal link between the prevalence of civic associations in Northern Italy and its higher level of democratic performance relative to Southern Italy (Putnam, 1993, as cited in Shamaileh, 2017, p. 27).

As a **conclusion**, one can state that the current conflict in Donbas is a manifestation of transitional society challenges. The conflict in Donbas can be viewed as a confrontation related to post-Soviet political space transformation, in particular, democracy transit. The practice of «hybrid wars» is not a particularly new concept in the international conflicts dimension, yet it appears to be a significant challenge for transitional societies. The armed conflict in Donbas became a turning point in the identity development of Ukrainians as a society in transition.

Ukraine needs to investigate and implement the most successful examples of previous conflicts' resolution. One of the instruments that can assist in overcoming the challenges of democratic political and economic transition and respective conflict resolution is international organizations. Despite internal weaknesses of the latest years, the EU has been actively supporting Ukraine, specifically, in the conflict resolution efforts. The UN is another important platform for the conflict resolution efforts. Besides, the UN has traditionally been active in supporting transitional democracies. The potential of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations can be further utilized in order to search for reliable mediators, new valuable expertise and ideas' exchange. This aspect is related to **prospects** of further research on the Donbas conflict resolution.

In particular, it is worthwhile investigating the potential of civil society groups for establishing and sustaining peace. One should also further look into the notion of Track II diplomacy and its utilization for the Donbas conflict resolution. Besides, the topics of nations in transit, democratic peace theory and educational peace theory can be explored in greater detail.

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Тараненко Ганна,

кандидат політичних наук, доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин та туризму,

Київський міжнародний університет

Конфлікт на Донбасі як прояв проблем перехідного суспільства

Політична нестабільність особливо характерна для перехідних суспільств. Проблема політичної трансформації є актуальною для України як перехідної держави. Метою цієї статті є вивчення конфлікту на Донбасі як прояву викликів перехідного суспільства та руху України до демократизації. Для дослідження було використано метод якісного тематичного дослідження (case study). Серед результатів дослідження можна зазначити, що нинішній конфлікт на Донбасі є проявом викликів перехідного суспільства. Конфлікт на Донбасі можна розглядати як протистояння, пов'язане з пострадянською трансформацією політичного простору, зокрема, транзитом демократії. Практика «гібридних війн» не є принципово новим поняттям у вимірі міжнародних конфліктів, проте, вона являє собою значний виклик для перехідних суспільств. Збройний конфлікт на Донбасі став поворотним пунктом у розвитку ідентичності українців як перехідного суспільства. В Україні необхідно дослідити та впровадити найбільш успішні приклади врегулювання попередніх міжнародних конфліктів. Міжнародні організації є одним з інструментів, який може допомогти подолати виклики перехідного періоду та відповідного врегулювання конфлікту на Донбасі. Незважаючи на внутрішні слабкості останніх років, Європейський Союз активно підтримує Україну, зокрема, в зусиллях з врегулювання конфлікту. ООН є ще однією важливою платформою для розв'язання конфліктів. Крім того, ООН традиційно активно підтримує перехідні демократії. Можна зробити висновок, що потенціал міжнародних міжурядових та неурядових організацій може бути надалі використаний для пошуку надійних посередників, нових експертних знань та обміну ідеями. Крім того, аналізуючи тему демократій у перехідному періоді, слід звернути увагу на потенціал груп громадянського суспільства для налагодження та підтримки миру.

Ключові слова: *розв'язання конфліктів, перехідні суспільства, транзитивні суспільства, Україна, Донбас, Європейський Союз, Організація Об'єднаних Націй, демократія, політична модернізація, Східна Європа.*