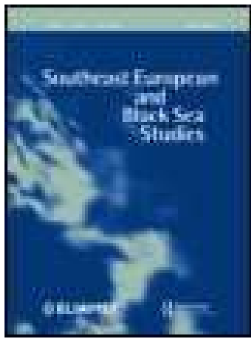

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Radicalization of Russians in Ukraine: from 'accidental' diaspora to rebel movement

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ABSTRACT
The article examines different types of macropolitical identities in Ukraine and their interaction in establishing political order in the country. The authors argue that political institutional design was unfavourable to the Russian diaspora in eastern and southern regions. It hindered stable development of post-Soviet identity between Russians in the country. But during the Euromaidan protests, the Russians reacted to unpleasant political situation by exploring who they were and what social and political goals they had. Having been incipient for decades, the identity of the diaspora evolved in a soaring way within three or four months. The violent actions of the newly established government in Kiev radicalized the Russian diaspora. Diasporants started establishing alternative authorities in regions where government had no monopoly on the use of force. The involvement of Russia and international volunteers complexifies the situation in Donbass and the identity formation process in unrecognized republics also known as DNR and LNR.

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Protests on Maidan (the central square in the Ukrainian capital city of Kiev) started in October 2014. Protesters adhered to different ideologies and valued sometimes political projects and strategies that were contradictory in their very nature. Events that were called 'Euromaidan' started as a peaceful demonstration organized by middle-class representatives. The demonstrators were in favour of signing the Association Treaty between Ukraine and the European Union that was postponed by the government. Therefore, the uniting ideological platform that brought together people with different perspectives was the elusive idea of system reform on the European basis. This idea entailed that European integration was the only right choice in order to make the Ukrainian state effective. However, different groups and individuals combined this idea with their own agenda, including outright nationalist or even jingoist doctrines. But the protest movement gained momentum every week and disseminated its message to the Ukrainian province until it faced the highest degree of escalation in bloody clashes with law enforcement units on 19 February 2014. Euromaidan protesters seized control of strategic locations in the capital city of Kiev that

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led to the collapse of political regime headed by President Wiktor Janukowich. The newly established authorities were headed by the parliamentary Speaker Aleksander Turchinov and by elected president Petr Poroshenko (since June 2014).

Within the literature and media there is no clear picture of ongoing processes in Ukraine. Recent works by Sakwa (2015) and Wilson (2014) provide us with a descriptive approach and reflections on the media coverage which is basically not enough to understand the reasons for different political actors' behaviour in the Ukrainian crisis. Some explanatory elements can be found in publications on the long-term political developments in Ukraine such as the works by D'Anieri (2007), Kuzio (2011), Ruiz-Rufino (2013) and Tokarev (2015). All this literature addresses the issues of the Russian minority and its interest representation from the point of Ukrainian nation-building. The differences which the Russians face in interpreting their identity and cultural heritage have not been covered by researchers since Laitin's profound work (1998).

The article discusses one of the most profound consequences of Euromaidan such as the formation of two unrecognized republics in eastern Ukraine. There is no doubt that the process is evolving and the situation in Donetsk and Lugansk 'peoples republic' is changing rapidly. Therefore, most comments on all ongoing events in Ukraine and Donbass lack balance and theoretical arguments. What we are trying to present is an explanatory framework for the formation of two unrecognized republics in the eastern Ukraine. In order to do that we take into account two levels of analysis – international and intra-Ukrainian ones.

On the national level, we discuss several long-standing features of the Ukrainian political system that allow us to demonstrate why every power transition in Ukraine is so uncomfortable to political actors and social groups. We claim that the Russians in the eastern Ukraine constitute an 'accidental' diaspora. We understand 'accidental' diaspora as a social group that shares a cultural rather than an ethnic identity. Regarding the Russians in Ukraine we posit that the diaspora consists of those who describe themselves as simultaneously Russian-speaking, closely tied with the Russian cultural heritage and favouring deep cooperation between Ukraine and Russia. In this sense, the Russian diaspora was one of the biggest minorities in the country. Under 'maidanization' of Ukraine this identity group found itself deprived of many political rights and tried to articulate its interests. We combine the theory of relative deprivation by Gurr (1970) and the model of political radicalization by della Porta (1995) in order to show how after the Euromaidan the newly established Ukrainian authorities failed to come to terms with the Russian protesters in the eastern Ukraine. We realize that there is a widening gap between actual events on Donbass and their representation both in the Western and Russian media. Therefore, we face a lack of credible data that can be overcome only partially by taking into account some polls and public comments. Nevertheless, available data allow us to conclude that the uncooperative and inflexible strategy of the newly established Ukrainian authorities was the profound reason for some of the Russian diaspora organizations opting for more aggressive tactics which led to overt secessionist rebellion.

On the international level, we discuss the most recent developments in the relations between Russia and the West, their impact on the Ukrainian crisis and the current Russian approach to the formation of two unrecognized republics in the eastern Ukraine. We point out that Russian involvement in the military actions in Donbass between two unrecognized republics and the Ukrainian army was limited. This involvement was determined by two long-standing objectives. The first one was to protect the Russian diaspora in Ukraine and to provide it with more political rights. The second amounted to avoiding the collapse of

state institutions in Ukraine in order to preserve the space where the first objective can be achieved. The involvement of the USA and the European Union in the conflict resolution process (so-called Minsk negotiation process) made the situation much more complex. As a result, the Russian diaspora in Ukraine and the unrecognized republics undergo additional pressure that can alter their core identity.

Ukrainian political system: winner takes it all

During the years of its independent existence, Ukraine did not managed to consolidate its political class into one that would encompass the whole country. A typical feature of Ukrainian politics was the priority of personal profit over national interests. The Ukrainian political system implies that the winner of elections gets almost absolute power in the country due to lack of checks and balances (Grigor'ev, Buriak, and Goliashev 2014). This is why new elites that come to power change not only the top authorities in Kyiv, but also the heads of all 24 regions of Ukraine, appointing loyal people. In most cases, the new elites that come to power represent discrete groups of regional interests (Donetsk, Dniepropetrovsk, etc.). They then spread their influence to other parts of the country, forcing out local authorities and take control over resources or resource management. The stakes are very high, which turns every election into a crisis. And all this has made the Ukrainian system especially unstable compared to other post-Soviet states (Wilson 2014, 39–49).

When the country was independent, the Russians in Ukraine tended to support political parties and presidential candidates from the east of Ukraine (Party of Regions, Communist Party, etc.). These forces were facing competitors emanating and drawing support from the west of Ukraine. Almost every nationwide election showed deep and constant regional divisions between the east and the west (Sakwa 2015, 58–59). Ukrainian oligarchs, who profited from the executive authority's inability to consolidate power, exploited this division to further their aims. Some of them supported pro-democratic protests in 2004 in order to gain new business opportunities and establish more comfortable conditions for their companies (for example, Petr Poroshenko, Igor Kolomojskiy, Sergey Taruta).

Unlike the events of 2004, Maidan 2014 was not just about power, but also about the physical survival of adherents of the Yanukowich regime. In 2014, the scale of violence used by the opposition, especially anonymously, was unprecedented for Ukraine. According to *BBC* reports, snipers affiliated with nationalistic MP Andrey Parubiy during Maidan shot at policemen and provoked them to respond (*BBC* 2015). Having come to power on a wave of violence, the new authorities never stopped their violent policies against opponents. In February 2014, in Kyiv, the Party of Regions office was burnt down with several of its staff members burnt alive, and 'Berkut' unit militants and Anti-Maidan movement participants from the south-west of Ukraine as well as members of their families were prosecuted (Sakwa 2015, 87). In addition, there were attacks on buses carrying Anti-Maidan participants from Crimea; the burning of Anti-Maidan activists in Odessa 2 May 2014; a series of murders and mysterious suicides of opposition politicians and journalists (widely known writer Oles' Buzina, former MPs Michail Chechetov, Oleg Kalashnikov, Alexander Peklushenko, Stanislav Mel'nik); and the launch of the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in Donbass in April 2014, which was perceived by the locals as a punitive operation for holding a referendum on joining Russia. This was ample proof that the new Ukrainian leaders were ready to eliminate the opposition physically.

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Today's situation presumably is not the final stage. The current Ukrainian leadership is trying to emerge from the internal crisis that took place with the fragmentation of the 'orange coalition' of 2004–2006; they feel that a similar scenario is possible today. There are a number of systemic political conflicts to which the central government, regional groups of interest, big oligarchs and militia groups are parties. Social dissatisfaction with the results of government policies is massive and growing. It manifests itself in the extremely low ratings of leaders and episodic protest movements as for now. To make matters worse, public debate in Ukraine follows three main streams or identity narratives (Sushentsov 2015), two of which are radical. They represent the certain level of macropolitical identification, one of the most dominant parts of political identity at large.

Ukraine's three ideological streams: nationalists, Russians and statists

Proponents of the mainstream ideology, who make up the majority that is best organized and represented in the media, advocate a nationalist program of 'Ukraine for the Ukrainians' and see their country in the avant-garde of the west's confrontation with Russia. They promote the idea of Ukrainian identity that is based on Ukrainian language civic nationalism, although this group includes a number of Russian-speaking figures who do not speak Ukrainian (for instance, Anton Geraschenko, Adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs). There is no ethnic or religious basis for this ideology; the group is united under a common political identity (Wilson 2014, 149).

This group's main aim is to create a Ukrainian national state for people of Ukrainian identity. The results of public opinion polls provide circumstantial evidence of the popularity of this ideology: in the spring 2015 47% of 1501 adult citizens interviewed expressed their support for the ATO in Donbass and 24% believed the conflict in the east of the country should be settled by the use of force (R&B Group 2015). Aggressive nation-building is one of the core elements in the Ukrainian nationalist identity, especially in the western Ukraine. One of the reasons for that is historical misperception: many in the western Ukraine believe that the people of Donbass are mostly not Ukrainians, but Russians who replaced 'real' residents of the region after massive starvation deaths in the 1930 (Sakwa 2015, 152).

Nationalists are ready to take radical measures, namely forcing the disloyal population out of the country and even the exclusion of 'alien' territories (first and foremost, Donetsk and Luhansk) from Ukraine. Thus, they are willing to sacrifice the territorial integrity of their country in order to consolidate a homogeneous community in the remaining territories. In other words, nationalists would allow Donbass to remain part of Ukraine only if its population stayed loyal to the nationalist discourse.

The second stream (or identity community) is the Russian Diaspora. These people – ethnic Ukrainians, Russians and other communities – share a common Russian identity, reject the goals and values of Maidan and consider Russia a vital power in Ukrainian politics. Many of them have lost hope of securing protection of their rights with Ukrainian politicians and are puzzled that Moscow is not defending their interests, the way it did in Crimea, and that Moscow allowed the Maidan to overthrow Yankowich. This group is smaller than the first; at least it appears so as its representation in the media is much poorer. That is not surprising, for its proponents are under political pressure, or even in some cases prosecution (Sushentsov 2015). Its size may be circumstantially presumed from the answers to polling questions about Ukrainian foreign political identity – 12.3% of 2013 adult citizens interviewed openly

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support joining the Eurasian Customs Union, while 27.3% advocate abstaining from both the EU and the Customs Union (KIIS 2015). There are also results of the poll on support for the ATO, with 39% of those questioned opposing it (R&B Group 2015).

The Russians in Ukraine were the first to suffer from limitations on freedom of speech and assembly. Many of them have started to develop an underground mode of thinking, and the movement may in time radicalize. People of Russian identity used to be loyal to the Ukrainian project, but that has changed. Nowadays they tend to be against it, and no longer associate themselves with Ukraine.

The third group of Ukrainian elites consists of those who support inclusive statehood as a precondition for the territorial integrity of Ukraine – the statists. The latter believe that the key priority is preserving the huge Soviet legacy of the country starting with the territory and ending with east–west geoeconomic ties and the diversity of the population. They realize that Ukraine should preserve its neutral status and ensure its sovereignty in order to preserve the state's unity. Representatives of this group have voiced the necessity of abstaining from radicalization after the victory of Maidan to prevent Crimea from separation. Apart from that, statists advocate concessions on the national issue reject radicalism and propose an ideology of national interests. One of the most thought-provoking researchers of Ukrainian identity problems Hikolay Riabchuk (2015, 145–146) stresses that there is a very strong component of localism and regionalism in this stream or identity narrative. The majority of statists are in the Opposition bloc, and they are also represented in the Petro Poroshenko bloc. Unfortunately, they are an absolute minority. Paradoxically they are quite frequently considered to be Russians by the mainstream proponents. The authorities prosecute the staff of the newspaper Vesti, which advocates the statist ideology. Another indicative example is the dismissal of Yuriy Shukhevich, founder of Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA), for his participation in a letter from the Lviv intelligentsia that demanded 'that the Galician way of life not be imposed on the populations of Donetsk and Crimea'; and 'balanced policies on culture and language should be implemented' (*UNIAN* 2014b).

Explaining the Russian diaspora in Ukraine

After the sudden fall of the Soviet Union, major Russian diasporas materialized in almost all of the ex-Soviet republics. While some of the newly independent states resorted to nationalism from the early years of their statehood (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia), others maintained inclusive statist approach (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan). Even though the Russian diaspora experienced political marginalization (Baltic states) and in some cases oppression (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) only in Ukraine did the situation get to the point of mass radicalization and ultimately a rebellion of Russians. Unlike Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which formed systems of strong central authorities with efficient consolidation and distribution of resources, a developed administrative apparatus and, most importantly, consensus within the establishment about national interests, Ukraine took a different path of development and ended up with a different result.

Brubaker (2009, 461–469) claims that there is a type of diasporas which is emerging from the disintegration of multinational states. According to this approach, diasporas of this type appeared suddenly and even unexpectedly: these communities were brought to life due to radical shifts within the political order. These 'accidental' diasporas (such as ethnic Germans

across the eastern Europe after 1918) were forged by changes in states' borders rather than migration of individuals. These diasporas are expected to be exogenously consolidated by the newly established state that treats an ethnic minority much as migrant community.

But the case of the Russians in Ukraine shows us that some clarifications to Brubaker's approach should be made. As a diaspora (even an 'accidental' one) the Russians in Ukraine should fit the mould of the term. This implies a certain 'myth of return' (Safran 1991): the Russian are supposed to feel the necessity of reunification with Russia or moving to live in Russia. Surprisingly, the idea of joining Russia (or, lately, the Customs Union) was not ethnically driven in Ukraine during two decades of its independence, it was largely underpinned by economic considerations and the search for better life conditions (van Zon 2001, 226–227). Moreover, in the eastern part of Ukraine polls showed that a considerable part of the Russians shared the post-Soviet multinational or even a nationally neutral identity (Kolstø 1996, 615–617; Liber 1998, 198–204). That is why the Russians in Ukraine had a dormant identity, which was clearly unfocused on the issues of group solidarity, common origin or cultural differences. To put it shortly, in the 1990s the Russians tried to adjust to new political conditions in independent Ukraine, while those conditions were emerging. Laitin (1998, 395–399) even argued that the post-Soviet Russians were newly born 'Russian-speaking nationality' that tried to avoid assimilation.

The first trigger that galvanized the politicization of the Russian diaspora was political institutions that left the Russians and their interests unrepresented. Political representation of ethnic groups implies that their participation is embodied by law or by political practices. Therefore, ethnic minorities proclaim their agenda and search for a political consensus within the institutional framework within the state. But institutes of representation severely ignored minorities in Ukraine: there were no quotas in a state agencies, no ethnic parties or even informal instruments of influence (Ruiz-Rufino 2013, 112–116). The idea of representation for the Russians in Ukraine was introduced very lately by the concepts of federalization in Ukraine, equal status of the Russian and the Ukrainian languages, preserving friendly and cordial relations with Russia. Although those concepts were largely rejected within political institutional framework, the Russians were likely to seek compromises due to their dormant and, consequently, flexible identity.

Diasporas' interests were reiterated and proclaimed by certain formal and informal institutions including non-government and political organizations. This is a stage of diaspora formation where strategies and goals of diasporants are more or less established (Sheffer 2003, 131–136). The Russian diaspora in Ukraine went through a hybrid form of the stage, because even advanced political and social choices of diasporants lacked institutional support. Although some commentators label major political organizations in Ukraine (such as the Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), the Party of Regions or the Communist Party) as representatives of the Russian minority's concerns, it is mainly incorrect. Ukrainian political culture is deformed to some extent due to the great impact of big business and the low level of civil activism (Kuzio 2011, 95–97). In simplistic terms, some leading parties claimed to be representatives of the Russian minority, but none of them were. This statement indirectly was underpinned by the study of George, Moser, and Papic (2010) that showed that there was only a loosely coupled connection of the Russian minority's candidates' victories and location of the minority's districts.

Moreover, many pro-Russian politicians were unconsciously deluded by uncertainty of the Ukrainian political system. The short-run political balances spurred expectations of

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reassurance for the rights of the Russian minority. As D'Anieri (2007, 26) puts it, political institutions in Ukraine gave

> leading ethnic Russian politicians in Ukraine an incentive to support the Ukrainian state rather than establish a new state in which they might have little to no role, or to join Russia, where the Donbas or Crimea would become one of nearly 90 regions.

To conclude, heavy dependence on business interests in Ukrainian politics and the confounding nature of political institutions provided the Russian minority with little opportunity to elect preferable candidates even in districts where it constituted a majority.

Some organizations that had no connection with the big business promoted a pro-Russian agenda, but they were effectively marginalized within the political institutional framework. For example, the movement 'Donetskaya Respublica' (Donetsk Republic) was founded in 2005. It tried to establish federalism in Ukraine and advocated the right of the Russian minority to be politically autonomous, but was legally forbidden in 2007. Another case, the left-handed Progressives Socialist Party was replaced in media space by populist political projects that were sponsored or headed by businessmen (such as 'Bloc Litwina' or the Socialist party). All in all, neither legal regulation nor political practices entailed a representation of the Russian diaspora's interests in Ukraine.

It is highly possible that there is no linear correlation between minority representation and its electoral profile. Frankly speaking, the representation itself cannot include all interests of people involved and interests of all citizens. Moreover, political theorist Friedrich Kratochwil suggests that a state as a mechanism doesn't represent the exact proportion of average or mixed amount of interests: its decisions are based rather on the logic of symbols that are somehow connected with the notions of interests (Kratochwil 2011, 247–252). This point of view leads us to the level of identity and cultural narratives.

The second trigger of the politicization of diaspora was the core essence of Ukrainian state. Brubaker claims that newly independent states nationalize their own social space after the disintegration of multinational state (Brubaker 2009, 466–468). This is supposed to strengthen the sovereignty and the support for independence in such states. The objective of Ukrainian authorities was the building of an Ukrainian nation, which intimates limiting regional and cultural differences, formulating certain historical myths (Kuzio 2011, 98–99; Liber 1998, 188; Osipian and Osipian 2012, 627–636; van Zon 2001, 225). In practice, this utilizing role of the state became harmful to the Russians in the country. For instance, the Russian language was insistently being replaced by the Ukrainian one in the public domain. Prior to this it was largely implemented in the educational system, television and documentation process in the state agencies (Pavlenko 2013, 267). Moreover, government officials and institutions started to marginalize the role of eastern regions and the Russians themselves in a state historical narrative. Ukrainian ethnic component in the state formation became exaggerated thus translating historical perspective of the Ukrainian emigrational historiography (Osipian and Osipian 2012, 632; Tokarev 2015, 219–223). That implied that several centuries of common history of the Ukrainians and the Russians was interpreted as a period of Ukraine's occupation and oppression (Janmaat 2007, 313–316).

According to Safran (1991, 2007), the kin state and the host state are both responsible for developing and maintaining a diaspora's identity. The kin state establishes various kinds of contacts with its compatriots – these measures help members of the diaspora to cultivate their traditions and collective memory. As for Ukraine, by excluding Russian symbols and collective memory from Ukrainian identity formation it alienated the Russian diaspora.

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There is no room for doubt that such a negative consolidation worked. The most outstanding examples were consultative referendums in Donetsk and Lugansk regions in 1994. The key idea of those referendums was to challenge Kiev policies in the spheres of foreign, memory and language policy (Flynn 1996, 344–347). Given the results of voting and turnout, almost two-thirds of residents in two regions supported the equal status of Russian and Ukrainian languages and the necessity of joining the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Consequently, the trend can be traced for long-term perspective. According to Razumkov Center polls, 38,2% of Ukrainian citizens supported military and security cooperation with Russia and CIS in 2009 (RC 2009), almost 50% were in favour of granting the Russian language a more beneficial status in 2005 and 2012 (RC 2012), 33,2% were against the reconciliation between veterans of the Ukrainian Resurgent Army and the Soviet Army in 2010 (RC 2010), 55–60% residents of southern–eastern regions shared the belief of common history with Russia and Belarus in 2005 (RC 2005a). The data illustrates a considerable degree of disapproval of state identity policies. However, a diaspora needs to adopt a positive agenda. While opportunity to achieve political change through electoral mechanism in Ukraine was waning, the Russians turned to Russia in search for a support of their rights.

The third trigger of the Russian diaspora radicalization in Ukraine was the lack of political and cultural support from Russia. Moscow's set of policies and political practices was aimed at creating friendly conditions for the Russians in Ukraine in terms of religious, linguistic, cultural rights through sustaining friendly ties with central government authorities. Russian policy towards diasporas in post-Soviet countries was overt and public after the collapse of the USSR. After 1991, Moscow expected the Russians in Ukraine to have the same level of involvement in state affairs as Russians in Belarus or Moldova. In its relations with Ukraine on Russian diaspora affairs Moscow relied on the concept of ethnic minorities which was solidified in the 1997 'Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the Russian Federation and Ukraine'. Article 12 stipulated:

> Each of the High Contracting Parties shall guarantee that people, who belong to national minorities, individually or with those, who belong to national minorities, freely express, preserve and advance their ethnic, cultural, language and religious identity and support and develop their culture without any attempts of assimilation against their will. […]
>
> The High Contracting Parties shall facilitate the creation of equal opportunities and conditions for studying the Ukrainian language in the Russian Federation and the Russian language in Ukraine […] (UL 1998)

Therefore, the Agreement clearly established that the Russians constitute a minority in Ukraine as well as the Ukrainians in Russia. In addition, the right for freedom from assimilation was extended to the Russian minority. These legal developments complied with the normative shift in the international law, but in a moderate way (Preece 1997, 357–360). However, the definition of national minority was not specified by the Agreement. That implied that Kiev continued to understand national minorities in accordance with the National Minorities Law adopted in 1992. According to the Law, national minorities are consisted of citizens 'feeling national self-consciousness and unity with one another' (UL 1992). As we mentioned before, the identity of the Russian diaspora was dormant and more or less culture-oriented. Thus, based on the principle 'no feeling-no minority', the rights of the Russians in the sphere of preserving and advancing their identity were often denied by the Ukrainian authorities until 2012. Under Janukowich presidency, the Ukrainian parliament

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adopted the Language State Policy Principles Law, which downgraded the Russian minority from national to regional level. At the same time, regional and district administrations were authorized to decide whether the use of the minority language should be expanded (UL 2012). Some of eastern and southern regions approved the use of Russian in cultural activities, education, judiciary system, media, recording process in state and local agencies. Noteworthy, those political decisions were not underpinned by proper financial support. For example, in Kherson region funds for national minorities amounted to 2700 gryvnia's (almost 340 dollars) in 2012 (Taran 2013). All in all, legal regulation and international obligations proved to be unconvincing to political institutions in the country.

The problem with this approach was that neither did the Ukrainian state uphold its obligation to involve Russian ethnic minority nor was Moscow consistent enough to frequently raise this issue. Russia hoped that occasional political turbulence in Ukraine would not hurt the Russian minority there and stuck to non-interference approach. In the end, this did not deliver any meaningful results for Ukraine's Russians and paved a way for a future conflict between the two states on this matter.

Also, different external and internal political processes in Russia made the policy towards compatriots fluctuating and ambivalent as far as results were concerned (Brubaker 2009, 475–479). In recent years, the concept of 'the Russian world' (Rysskij mir) was considered as Moscow's new policy towards the diaspora. Some researchers claim that it is a type of neoimperialist strategy which aims to create an anti-Western and anti-democratic consolidation on the basis of the Orthodox denomination (Wawrzonek 2014, 459–466). Contrary to this, Russian policy towards post-Soviet states is heavily subjected to regional stability calculations for any major political instability in a fragile Russian neighbouring belt ultimately leads to civil wars and international conflicts (Lukin 2014, 47–49; Tokarev 2015, 76–80). As Laruelle (2001) explains, although the policy of Kremlin adopted some nationalist discourses, it was never guided by their essence. All in all, recent ideological developments seem to be as ambivalent as the previous ones. There was no real strategy of diaspora support under such conditions.

To conclude, political developments in Ukraine created little opportunities for involvement of Russian diaspora. Building Ukrainian nation state was uncomfortable for the local Russians both on practical and symbolical levels. Therefore, the possibility of ethnic conflict was significant and almost unavoidable. According to Razumkov Center poll, in 2005 the residents of eastern and southern regions lacked equal rights and rules of co-existence in the country, while in the western regions people stressed the necessity to know the Ukrainian culture and language (RC 2005b). In 2006, almost 20% of the surveyed in southern and eastern regions claimed that they would have chosen the other state as their Fatherland. It nearly doubled the national average share – 13% (RC 2006). These polls showed that disappointment at Ukraine as a state was significant in regions dominated by the Russian minority. D'Anieri (2007, 25–26) stresses that the Ukrainian state succeeded in mitigating the political consequences of this uncomfortable institutional design. He enumerates several strategies which eventually helped to limit the dissatisfaction of the Russian minority such as binding the regional elite with obligations, providing minorities with restricted local representation or refocusing state's policy from collective rights to individual ones. But this did not solve the problem in its essence, coupled with the fact that the Russian minority lacked one of the most significant factors of the diaspora formation – support of a kin state.

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Results of the slow and ambivalent exogenous influence on the given diaspora exemplify the plurality of ethnic identification in the eastern Ukraine. People of Russian origin or associated with the Russian culture often share different types of national identity (post-national Soviet, binational or even Ukrainian). Moreover, the ethnic self-categorization didn't exactly predispose them to a certain political affiliation (Kolstø 1996, 627–628; Pirie 1996, 1082–1084; Gentile 2015, 210–218). So, the Russian 'accidental' diaspora in Ukraine was dormant and incipient at least till 2014.

Explosive manner of identity formation in 2014

Protests in favour of closer ties between Ukraine and the EU broke out in Kiev and some western and central regions of the country by the end of 2013. Some researchers claim that pro-European protests were peaceful and dominated by moderate political organizations (Popova 2014). This is only partially correct, because the most active part of the protest movement consisted of far-right radicals who were the first ones to resort to violence during the attack of the presidential administration in December 2013. Leadership of parliamentary opposition claimed that it had no control over the radicals in order to avoid the legal consequences of their deeds during the Euromaidan. At the same time, radicals were the ramming tool of Euromaidan: they were brave enough to do some things that the 'peaceful' part of protesters refused to do. The most dramatic episode of the political violence of Euromaidan happened on 19 January 2014 when more than 100 policemen were severely wounded and several were killed after being attacked by radicals at Grushevskogo street in Kiev.

As della Porta (1995, 158–194) suggests, political violence generally escalates political tensions. Consequently, the protesters violence partially delegitimized the whole protest movement and boosted organizations and structures with an alternative agenda. Moreover, Kalyvas (2006, 389) explains that violence itself has a transformative power that reshapes collective and individual preferences and choices. In Ukraine after the first clashes between law enforcement units and Euromaidan's radicals, many Russian organizations (even of insignificant numerical strength) insistently tried to externalize their point of view in eastern Ukraine. Noteworthy, their coordination strengthened significantly with the help of regional elites. For example, the governor of Kharkov oblast Michail Dobkin was well known as benefactor of the movement 'Oplot' (i.e. Stronghold) and a strong opponent of the Euromaidan. In January 2014 he stated: 'Dregs of society are crashing the public property all over the country, they have never build anything in their lives … So, wanna burn and crash – go back there to Banderstadt (i.e. Lvov or Lutsk)' (*UNN* 2014).

Although counter-balancing essence of Russian protests in eastern Ukraine was exploited by the political regime of Victor Janukowich, the Russian protest movement definitely acquired its own dynamic. The Euromaidan attributed itself as either a project of restoration or revitalization of Ukrainian nationalist view of a state or reclaiming of association and trade partnership policy towards the EU. Both perspectives had implicit or explicit anti-Russian agendas (against the minority itself or its kin state). On the one hand, under political conditions at the end of 2013, European integration alluded that Ukraine needed to freeze economic relations with Russia within the framework of the Customs Union and the free trade area of CIS. On the other hand, the revitalization of the Ukrainian nationalist state-building project required to ensure the primacy (or even exceptionalism) of the Ukrainians, their historical developments and culture. Therefore, the Euromaidan posed a

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serious challenge only for the Russian minority in Ukraine. To the contrary, pro-European protests received some support from several minorities with European homeland state such as the Poles, the Hungarians or the Romanians.

Political violence itself and social response to it were only parts of the problem. To some extent, pro-European and allegedly peaceful protests in Kiev expressed legitimate concern of citizens, but this concern and the whole protest were largely associated with radical organizations by people in eastern Ukraine. The radicals among protesters extended to football fans, Ukrainian nationalists and so-called self-defence groups. Lately, most of radicals united under two umbrella interdependent structures which were 'Samooborona Maidana' (i.e. Maidan's self-defence) and 'Pravyj Sector' (i.e. The Right sector). Those organizations were not the only decisive political force of Euromaidan, but clearly the most spectacular in the public domain (Wilson 2014, 71). Consequently, these radical groups and structures became symbols of pro-European protests for residents of eastern Ukraine. Moreover, even those protesters who did not share either the overt and jingoistic Ukrainian nationalism of those structures or their violent methods, considered the radical part of Euromaidan as more or less acceptable phenomenon (Ryabchuk 2014, 131–133). Therefore, the presence of all parts of the Euromaidan was utterly unbalanced and the image of protests relayed by the media was profoundly misleading. Briefly, Euromaidan was largely perceived by its visible radical part.

The radical organizations of the Euromaidan proposed a political agenda that was incompatible with the mindset of the Russian minority both symbolically and practically. On the level of identity and cultural preferences, the Euromaidan's radicals widely resorted to symbols and attributes of the UIA. It is the Army that established almost cooperative relations with the Nazis during the Second World War and some of its commanders climbed the ranks of the German military service. UIA is considered to be a criminal formation from the point of view of Russian and Polish historiography. Radicals and, lately, the majority of protesters displayed devotion to the UIA memory publicly. For example, pro-European protesters (especially, 'Samooborona Maidana') marched in a procession next to the President's administration singing UIA songs in December 2013 (*Cenzor.net* 2013). Consequently, Euromaidan and the deeds of the radicals clearly demonstrated the nationalizing character of its political agenda, which ran contrary even to dormant and developing identity of many Russians in the country.

In the same vein, radicals' political intentions challenged even the limited progress of the Russian minority's involvement in Ukrainian politics including the restricted local representation and the downgraded status of the Russian language authorized by President Janukovich in 2012. For example, after ousting the ruling regime, the head of 'Pravyj Sector' Dmitrij Jarosh expressed the desire to control national security, defence and law enforcement agencies in order to ensure all the demands of the Euromaidan (*Korrespondent.net* 2014).

After pro-European protests movement seized power in the capital city of Kiev and ousted president Janukowich at the end of February 2014, new political distribution of power provoked the relative deprivation situation. According to Gurr's (1970) theory, there was a widening gap between maximalist and moderate demands of the Russian minority. On the one hand, the Russian minority constituted at least 20% in 10 south-eastern and eastern regions (oblasti). Moreover, if the Russian-speaking people had been added to the minority, the Russians as a group could be estimated from 60 to 90% in certain regions, especially in urbanized Donetsk and Lugansk regions (Liber 1998, 190–198; Resler 1997,

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97–100). At least, their collective rights should have been recognized. On the other hand, the Euromaidan's leadership adopted a different approach that the only legitimate power belonged to the Euromaidan and its activists. After ousting Janukowich, activists released a statement which proclaimed the following:

> Maidan became de-facto a safeguard to the Constitution. And Maidan has to be retained as the body that monitors state agencies. To achieve that goal, Maidan has to deploy necessary structures and be able to summon the Vieche (i.e. Assembly) as the body of a government by the people. (*UNIAN* 2014a)

Furthermore, the whole composition of the government was handpicked and approved in Euromaidan on 26 February 2014. Patterns of political practices which had derived from preeminent legitimacy of the Euromaidan almost excluded the Russian minority out of the Ukrainian politics. Consequently, the scale of relative deprivation achieved the highest degree because the Russian minority expected to be politically represented, but had no opportunity to interact with excluding policy patterns of the newly established regime. Even on the level of political symbols, after ousting president Janukovich the Russian minority observed the meaningful media campaign to discredit those politicians who supposed to be adherents or at least sympathizers of Russian minority's agenda (such as 'Silnaya Ukraina' or the Communist Party).

As a result of violent events in Kiev, alienation from the Euromaidan's radical part and the feeling of relative deprivation forged identity of the Russian minority and focused it on anti-Maidan ideology at the beginning of 2014. This identity shift resulted in an increasing number of protest actions and deepening coordination between different organizations with Anti-Maidanian agenda. By 1 March 2014, Russian demonstrations took place in many cities of eastern Ukraine including Kharkov, Donetsk, Odessa or Lugansk. Generally, diaspora's identity formation process advanced rapidly within the period of four to three months.

Weak state capacities and spiral of violence

Della Porta (1995, 188–192) claims that exclusion from politics increases the demands of protesters both symbolically and practically. Increasing political demands intimate new levels of relative deprivation. We suppose that two factors could have mitigated the Russian protest movement in Ukraine. Firstly, della Porta puts a great emphasis on national practices of conflict resolution or protest policing that imply an institutional set of opportunities and constraints for both conflicting parties including state agencies. Secondly, we follow Gurr's (1970) argument that the relative deprivation turns into large-scale violence if coercive balance of conflicting parties comes close and state capacities have diminished enough. We argue that the Ukrainian authorities failed to come to terms with the Russian protesters and, lately, with secessionist movements on every stage of protests' development. In other words, there was no particular protest policing. At the same time, the Ukrainian government had limited capacity to suppress the Russian protesters by force because in several instances police joined protesters – like in Donetsk and Lugansk. So, Ukrainian post-Euromaidan authorities succeeded in regions where their orders on use of violence were executed by local authorities and local 'big' business (Zaporozhe, Kharkov or Odessa oblast) (Wilson 2014, 128).

The Russian protests movement experienced three stages of development. The first one was an evolvement of collective interest of the Russian minority (or diaspora). After

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president Janukovich was ousted the Russian minority insisted on political representation and preserving its cultural heritage. Co-chair of Donetsk self-proclaimed government Denis Pushilin expressed this point of view in terms of collective rights:

> We all know we are Russians. 'Russians' is a very profound notion. Our forefathers experienced the war next to one another. I don't see any difference between a Russian and a Ukrainian, this approach was thrust on us by politicians… Why are you calling us criminals and terrorists for the same actions that took place in Kiev? Why are you heroes and we are criminals? (KP 2014)

In order to make their position clear, pro-Russian protesters made efforts in order to restore Russian TV and radio broadcasting in their regions that was cut by new government in March. Moreover, they encouraged long-term protest actions in the central squares of several towns and cities, established checkpoints to protect anti-governmental protests. Many of them denied the legitimacy of authorities in Kiev (Sakwa 2015, 150).

The second stage opened due to government repressions and prosecutions in April 2014. Ukrainian officials insisted that only way to deal with those anti-revolutionary groups was to oppress them or force them to give their protests up. That led to a process of organizational crystallization of protests in eastern regions of Ukraine. The pressure from Kiev strengthened protest activist motivations and loyalty to protest movement. It also galvanized intra-regional and sub-regional coordination of protest organizations. For example, the main organizing forces of protest in Lugansk were the movements 'Molodaya Gvardija' and 'Luganskaja Gvardija', as well as the political party 'The Russian Unity'. Lately, many key figures of these organizations united in a militarized entity entitled 'the South-East Army' and proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic at the beginning of April 2014. The same pattern was described by one of the leading protester politicians in Donetsk Pavel Gubarev:

> At first my wife was responsible for Internet networks, my friend executed my assignments and was my bodyguard, and another friend executed financial duties. […] I tossed out those who were hired by oligarchs and choose some people who had uncompromising attitude towards authorities (in Kiev). We established 'Narodnoje Opolchenie Donbassa' (People's militia of Donbass) and its council elected me as the commander. (*Lenta* 2014)

The third stage started after presidential campaign in Ukraine with Petr Poroshenko being elected in May 2014. The newly elected president decided to launch a full-scale military operation, which eventually alienated unrecognized republic of Donbass and its residents from Ukraine. Previously, unrecognized republics took control of some key buildings in regional and district capitals, got some support from residents and posed only a political umbrella structure for most of protesters involved. But in June 2014 unrecognized republics had to face state building problems. In other words, Ukrainian military operation forced unrecognized republic to establish proper governing institutions, deal with issues of economic development and restructure self-organized militia units.

It is significant to note that the formation of self-proclaimed republics became reality due to political alliance or mutually beneficial relations between local law enforcement officers and political leaders of pro-Russian protests. It was law enforcement units (for example, 'Alfa' special operations group of Ukraine Security Service in Donetsk) that took control of key buildings in cities of Donbass. However, law enforcement units and ad hoc troops lacked clear political perspective and leadership of 'people's republic' provided it. It was political goals such as government without big business or preserving multi-ethnic 'brotherhood of nations' as a state-building principle that allowed law enforcement or military officers to overcome their traditions of loyalty oath.

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The Ukrainian government denied the Russians right to protest in order to regain political representation and retain certain identity. Government officials claimed that protests were financed by political allies of Janukovich and organized by the Russian special services (Sakwa 2015, 151). Kiev offered no alternative solution to protesters and constantly insisted that they should leave the captured building and forget about their inclinations. Political demands of the Russian minority such as federalization or providing regional authorities with additional powers were rejected instead of negotiating possible concessions. But demands of Kiev authorities were often not underpinned by any loyal military or law enforcement unit. In Donetsk and Lugansk regions almost all law enforcement troops remained neutral or joined protesters. Moreover, many officers of Security Service of Ukraine joined battalion 'Vostok', which lately took control of northern part of Donetsk and its suburbs. By that time it made no sense to take deputy chief of president's administration Andrej Senchenko statement seriously:

> The only advice I have is: go home, leave your bats and start working. […] If arms are not laid down, special services will not fool around with shields and extendable batons. Fire arms will be used against terrorists. If they don't leave state agencies' buildings, fire arms will be used. (Svoboda slova 2014)

This repressive approach further radicalized protesters. Moreover, inability of Ukrainian government to embody its threats increased the demands. The leadership of protesters began to express its intentions in terms of a regional autonomy instead of collective rights protection. Moreover, danger from Ukrainian authorities forced pro-Russian protest movements and organizations to increase its recruitment.

On the second stage, the Ukrainian government tried to decapitate the protest movement and carried targeted attacks on key buildings in major cities of eastern Ukraine without trying to negotiate with opponents. Moreover, Ukrainian political establishment adopted a strategy of promoting Euromaidan movement in order to counterbalance the Russian 'uprising'. It was partially successful in Kharkov and Odessa, where the Russians were weakly organized and constituted only at least 20–25% of population (even in ethnic terms). But it failed in Donetsk and Lugansk regions where organizational strength of the Russian protest gained momentum and the proportion of ethnic Russians in the population was almost 40%.

As a result of Ukrainian law enforcement operations several key figures of protests were imprisoned: Pavel Gubarev (people's governor of Donetsk region), his deputy Robert Donya, Aleksandr Kharitonov (people's governor of Lugansk region), Dmitry Kuzmenko (people's major of Mariupol). However, consequences of these operations turned to be partially negative, because functions of arrested protest leaders were transferred to more radical politicians. For example, after Gubarev Denis Pushilin came to power in Donetsk and promoted the idea of the referendum on independence. Furthermore, decapitation operations increased intolerance of Kiev policy in Donbass.

The same logic explains the increasing number of arms within protest movement. The Ukrainian authorities planned to disarm uncoordinated troops that rarely possessed fire weapons. To achieve that goal, the Ukrainian interim president Aleksandr Turchinov ordered to launch ATO in Donetsk, Lugansk and Izuim district of Kharkov region on 15 April. It helped the Ukrainian government to reestablish its control over some key towns such as Mariupol, Kirowsk and Yampol (Sakwa 2015, 151). However, official military units that were in charge of this operations often had no desire to launch a real war with protesters. Moreover, some units defected to militia in order to avoid such assignments. In Slaviansk,

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the airborne detachment joined militia with 6 tanks. Moreover, militia shortly seized control over military storage in the town of Artemowsk that helped to ensure adequate supply of arms. In the end, targeted attacks of Ukrainian military and law enforcement forces gave an impetus to militarization of the protest movement in Donbass.

During the third stage, the conflict transformed into civil war. This occurred because of dual sovereignty of 'people's republics' and Ukraine over particular territory of Donbass and through increasing escalation of violence between militia and pro-Ukrainian troops. Political networks of pro-Russian (or anti-Maidan) protesters took control of key buildings and established contacts with local administrations that provided a certain level of legitimacy in comparison with Kiev authorities. Ukrainian government was losing its control over economic and social issues in Donbass that forced anti-Maidan protesters and local elites to fill the gap. Escalation of military confrontation led to the situation where 'people's republics' were charged with all responsibility for issues of governing that Kiev was not able to ensure.

Prior to August 2014, many Russians from different post-Soviet countries (especially, Russia) joined the protest movement and its paramilitary structures. Although Ukrainian officials are trying to make some calculations, there is no empirical data that allows to project numbers of the Russian volunteers. We suggest that the share of non-Ukrainians (mainly Russian citizens) in military or paramilitary units does not exceed the share of non-Ukrainian within the leadership of unrecognized republics. According to our estimations (Loshkariov 2014), non-Ukrainian citizens constituted 28% of the highest leadership in two unrecognized republics in summer of 2014. Consequently, almost one-third of rebel military could have originated from different countries. However, this share is expected to diminish during ceasefire period. All in all, volunteers added international dimension to exogenous dynamic of protest.

Sources and consequences of Russia's support for Russian rebellion in Donbass

In the summer of 2014, the rebellion in Donbass became subject to serious international pressure that altered original preferences and political strategies of the leadership in 'people's republics'. The organizational strength and military capacity of DNR and LNR was enough to stop the Ukrainian troops, but the political involvement of Russia inevitably changed coercive balance.

Unlike Crimea, where direct Russian involvement was visible from the very first stages, in Donbass the rebel movement was not supported by Moscow until at least late summer 2014. In addition, after Crimea there was a strong desire within the Russian leadership to stop escalated confrontation (Sakwa 2015, 206). On the contrary, Kyiv did not use force in Crimea because this would have meant direct military confrontation with Russia. However, this was not the case in Donbass, and Kiev opted for a military solution there as the first and only choice. Significantly, the US praised the Ukrainian government for its 'restraint' in Crimea (US Department of State 2014), but supported its course on 'restoring sovereignty' and 'defending against Russian aggression' in Donbass (White House 2014). Moscow repeatedly warned Kyiv not to use force against protesters, who at first tried to stop Ukraine's army military vehicles with their bare hands (YouTube 2014). So, three months of hostilities passed before Moscow decided to provide limited support to the rebels.

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Despite the US leadership's claims that Russia's actions in Crimea and Donbass caught them by surprise, this is actually not true. In fact, Russia had listed its interests in Crimea and Ukraine a number of times to American and European elites. And it is not groundless to say that these signals were correctly perceived in the US government. The notes of the US Embassy in Moscow of February 2008, published by Wikileaks, present a thorough analysis on the Russian stance towards Ukraine:

> Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face. (Burns 2008)

The Minsk agreements that ended major fighting in Donbass imply reinstating Kyiv's sovereignty over these territories by means of peaceful reintegration and inclusion of their representatives in the Ukrainian elites with assistance of elections. Despite its suspicions, Russia is in fact interested in a settlement in Donbass in accordance with an unchanging set of conditions. For, despite the Ukrainian forces' continuous lack of success over the last year, Moscow and the rebels have not set any new conditions. Russia's goal is neither Ukraine's defeat, nor the victory of Donbass, but an equal political settlement between them. As Sakwa puts it, the objective of Russia is to temper nationalistic monism in Ukraine for strategic purposes (Sakwa 2015, 209).

Russia insists on inclusive conflict resolution, and therefore wants the rights of Donbass and other potentially unstable parts of Ukraine to be guaranteed by the amended Ukrainian Constitution. The West is suspicious about these initiatives because it reads into them Moscow's attempts to interfere in the domestic affairs of Ukraine (Sakwa 2015, 254). However, in the West they are not particularly interested in the internal splits in Ukraine until they have an effect. As for Russia, its objectives include overcoming of differences in Ukraine in order to maintain country's potential of cooperation with both Russia and the West.

The domination of nationalists in the Ukrainian mainstream is an obstacle for preserving the territorial integrity of the country. It is highly possible that the Ukrainian government is ready to sacrifice the 'pro-Russian' Donbass with the aim of consolidating the remaining parts of the country. The recent proposals of President Poroshenko suggest economic blockade and encircling the territories that are under the rebels' control with fortifications (President of Ukraine 2015). The plan, if implemented, will make political settlement in Donbass impossible. In time Donetsk and Lugansk will become autonomous entities and de facto states. However, the very existence of a long-term strategy within the Ukrainian elite seems doubtful (2015, 246–247).

Ukrainian politicians and experts raise the question of renouncing Donetsk and Lugansk and excluding them from Ukraine. Kyiv is indignant over their demands to allot them a special status, including the right to choose their own economic development path. This condition seems so unacceptable for Kyiv that it is comfortable with postponing resolution of the Donbass region question. The notion is gaining its popularity that Ukraine first has to implement successful reforms and become attractive to Donbass in order to reinstate it under its sovereignty with no preconditions. This course is similar to what Georgian elites were promoting towards Abkhazia in 1990s, but it never showed any positive results.

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The main problem is that the given postpone-the-conflict approach hinders economic and political development of post-Soviet countries (Tokarev 2015, 286).

Russia's political involvement forces unrecognized republics to recede from its core source of legitimacy, which is the Russian diaspora in Ukraine and its interests. It is a difficult task to predict how the conflict in Ukraine can evolve, but international involvement clearly complexifies political dynamic for decision-makers and people. Moreover, superpower mediation of conflict or ethnic grievances of foreign militants in conflict often contributes to alienation and rise of violence (Bercovitch and DeRouen 2005, 113–114). Eroding legitimacy, over-complicated political design and involvement of international actors can radically alter the situation in Donbass. The formation of the Russian minority political project can become less exogenous.

Conclusion

Political design in Ukraine was uncomfortable for the Russian diaspora, but it took them two decades to realize this fact. The Russians in the country shared several types (or levels) of identity which were in many ways unframed and dormant. Protests of Euromaidan and illegitimate ousting of president Janukovich, the feeling of relative deprivation and in some cases threats to the very existence of individuals shaped the new identity narrative. The new Ukrainian government-led wave of violence radicalized this identity and contributed to the formation of unrecognized republics. At the same time, the Russian diasporants within the new republics faced prudent policy of Moscow in Ukrainian issues. Contrary to their expectations, Russia promotes Ukrainian territorial integrity instead of support for the diaspora. Combined with involvement of superpowers and foreign volunteers, dominating nationalist discourse of the Ukrainian government, this development makes conflict in Donbass more complex and less predictable. To add, the Russians in Donbass and over the whole country are forced to reimagine and reflect their legacy and their attitude towards their diasporal homeland.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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