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Ethnic heterogeneity as a potential target of active measures of Russia: Identification of vulnerabilities of Polish-Ukrainian relations

Różnorodność etniczna jako potencjalny cel oddziaływania środków aktywnych Rosji. Identyfikacja podatności relacji polsko-ukraińskich

Abstract: This article raises the issue of how the Russian Federation could benefit from the instrumental use of ethnic heterogeneity to pursue its geopolitical interests. The paper focuses on the recent case of a Polish-Ukrainian historical memory dispute which affected relations between Warsaw and Kyiv. The research focus is on how vulnerable Poland and Ukraine are to Russian active measures which potentially target not only national minorities but also groups of people who are only temporarily present in these states, such as economic migrants and tourists. An analysis is conducted of Russia's geopolitical objectives and its strategy toward Polish-Ukrainian relations in the broader context of the rivalry between Russia and the West. The analysis is conducted within the framework of the neorealist theory of international relations. The case study of specific events discloses how Russia could exacerbate tensions between nations and the role of ethnic heterogeneity in this regard. Against this backdrop, the author shows how Russia may challenge other states of the Euro-Atlantic community with similar active measures.

Keywords: geopolitics, active measures, Russia's foreign policy, Polish-Ukrainian relations, international security

Streszczenie: W artykule poruszono zagadnienie instrumentalnego wykorzystywania przez Rosję różnorodności etnicznej celem realizacji interesów geopolitycznych. Analiza została oparta na przykładzie polsko-ukraińskiego sporu o pamięć, który wpłynął na relacje pomiędzy oboma państwami. Celem badania stała się identyfikacja podatności Polski i Ukrainy na środki aktywne Rosji,

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które za cel mogą obrać zarówno mniejszości narodowe, jak i grupy obywateli obu tych państw, które jedynie czasowo przebywają w jednym z nich (np. migrantów ekonomicznych, turystów). W ramach analizy zidentyfikowano geopolityczne interesy Rosji i jej strategię wobec relacji Polski i Ukrainy, podkreślając przy tym szerszy kontekst rywalizacji zachodnio-rosyjskiej. Studium przypadku konkretnych wydarzeń ukazuje, w jaki sposób Rosja może stać się beneficjentem sporu polsko-ukraińskiego i w jaki sposób może go zaostrzać, wykorzystując środki aktywne i różnorodność etniczną. Na tym tle ukazane zostało, jak środki aktywne Rosji mogą zagrażać innym państwom wspólnoty euroatlantyckiej. Analiza została poczyniona w oparciu o założenia teoretyczne neorealistycznej szkoły stosunków międzynarodowych.

Słowa kluczowe: geopolityka, środki aktywne, polityka zagraniczna Rosji, relacje polsko-ukraińskie, bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe

Introduction

Russia has been actively engaged within East-Central Europe for centuries, trying to achieve its geopolitical objectives. However, regardless of its ambitions Russia nowadays is mostly unwelcome by a vast majority of states in the region and is perceived as a threat to the security of some of them. Consequently, Russia which is lacking attractiveness must use various tools and methods to put pressure on some states in line with its strategy. This article raises the issue of how the Russian Federation could benefit from the instrumental use of ethnic heterogeneity in the region in order to pursue its geopolitical interests. Against this backdrop, this paper analyses the vulnerability of Poland and Ukraine to these external aggressive and provocative acts as well as Russian geopolitical interests in such acts. It argues that Polish-Ukrainian relations are vulnerable to Russian active measures which may potentially target ethnic heterogeneity in line with a “divide and rule” approach. Because of the very unique character of active measures as well as the lack of methodological tools the author has refrained from disclosing perpetrators of concrete operations. An intelligence or investigative journalism approach seems to be more relevant in this matter. Thus by analyzing several case studies the author focuses instead on identifying vulnerabilities of Poland and Ukraine to potential Russian activities. Both the objectives of the analysis as well as current interna-

tional relations¹ make neorealism and its assumptions² valuable in the context of this research.

1 The concept of active measures

The concept of active measures (*aktivnyye meropriyatiya*) was developed by the Bolsheviks and the Soviet secret services. After the dissolution of the KGB, the concept was incorporated into the modus operandi of the secret services in modern Russia.³ Generally speaking, this term includes the entire array of intelligence activities, instruments, methods, and assets which are to be used to influence the politics of targeted states in line with Russia's interests. "The concept of 'active measures' covers offensive undertakings aimed at disinformation, deception, sabotage, destabilization, and espionage"⁴ by using various tools and methods such as inspiring the rebellious masses, support for excluded social groups or people loyal to Moscow, producing fake news, spreading Russian narration of current or historical events, intensifying national or ethnic conflicts, kinetic attacks, as well as any other provocative actions. All of the above are coherent components of a larger strategy which is to target societies within specific states as well as to reshape that state's policies.⁵ "Some of these assets are controlled by Russian intelligence [...], while others

- 1 I.e. Russia's willingness to demonstrate its assertiveness by military means, or regional military conflicts.
- 2 These, among others, are anarchic world systems and the primary role of the state within this system, eternal rivalry between the states, the willingness of the state to use force and the necessity of being prepared for such a scenario as well as unique influence of outer factors (structural-level in the neorealist approach) on the states' behaviours.
- 3 J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, 'Active measures. Russia's key export', *CES Point of view*, no. 64, June 2017, www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_64_ang_active-measures_net_o.pdf [2020-01-05]; I. Juurvee, 'The resurrection of "active measures": Intelligence services as a part of Russia's influencing toolbox', *Hybrid CoE Strategic Analysis*, April 2018, www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Strategic-Analysis-2018-4-Juurvee.pdf [2020-01-07]; M. Strokán, B. Taylor, 'Intelligence', in: *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. A.P. Tsygankov, Routledge, 2018, p. 162.
- 4 J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, 'Active measures...', pp. 13-14.
- 5 See more on "active measures" in: J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, 'Active measures...'; I. Juurvee, 'The resurrection of "active measures"...'; M. Strokán, B. Taylor, 'Intelligence...'; M. Galeotti, 'Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe', *European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief*, no. 228, 2017.

share values or sympathize with Russia.”⁶ Noteworthy, the nature of active measures “reflects the relative weakness of Russia, which lacks the economic, political, and soft power strength to directly challenge a much stronger West.”⁷

2. Geopolitical background

The fall of the Soviet Union entailed critical changes in the geopolitics of East-Central Europe as well as on a global scale. For the Russian Federation (RF) the collapse of the USSR was “a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama,”⁸ as expressed by Vladimir Putin. The widespread acceptance of the 2014 Crimea annexation among Russians and a simultaneous increase of public support for Vladimir Putin⁹ strongly suggest that Russians long for their “lost empire.”

The politics of some of the ex-Soviet Republics which have been gaining independence shrank the Russian zone of influence. In claiming the exclusive right of influence over the region, Russia described it as “near abroad.” The progressive enlargements eastward by NATO and the EU posed a great challenge to the RF and were interpreted as a direct threat to its national security. Economically weak and mostly unwelcome (due to its imperial heritage) Russia lacked the means to keep control over the former Eastern Bloc and ex-Soviet states.

However, Russia possessed an entire scope of “hard power” assets. They were not limited to conventional warfare. From the perspective of the raised research problem the active measures which could potentially influence ethnic heterogeneity¹⁰ are crucial. One of the most evident examples is the Russian diaspora which remained outside the RF borders, on the ex-Soviet territory, not to mention the consid-

6 G.H. Karlsen, ‘Divide and rule: ten lessons about Russian political influence activities in Europe’, *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 5, 2019.

7 M. Galeotti, ‘Controlling Chaos...’, p. 2.

8 V. Putin, ‘Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation’, kremlin.ru, April 2005, www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931 [2019-10-15].

9 H. Balzer, ‘The Ukraine Invasion and Public Opinion’, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2015, pp. 82-85.

10 The term ethnic heterogeneity for the purpose of this article refers not only to those who permanently inhabit a single state but is understood also in a broader sense and includes also temporary economic migrants and tourists.

erably larger group of Russian speakers. This was obviously noticed by the Russian highest authorities, who use this argument to contest post-Cold War reality or to justify their actions.¹¹ The large Russian diaspora in the territory of the “near abroad” became a useful instrument of pressure which allows Russia to assert its interests. The need for protection of Russian citizens with military means has even been sanctioned by law¹² and included in strategic documents.¹³ This social group becomes an advantageous and prospective foundation for mass revolt. The concept of “russkiy mir” may also be perceived as a way to win the support of international public opinion or at least their tacit consent in order to legitimize Russia’s actions. In this context minorities as an active measure have a broad influence that extends beyond just regional.

Russia’s policy of minorities management was not limited merely to the Russian diaspora. In general, the heterogeneity of ex-Soviet space allowed Russia to instrumentalise conflicts in the whole ‘near abroad’ by interfering in de facto states which served as a means to inhibit the Euro-Atlantic path of development of ex-Soviet states. However, Russia has not limited its activities towards the states which remained in the grey zone of security. Russian minorities in the Baltic States also became a significant instrument of pressure on their governments.¹⁴ Russia has managed conflicts also between some non-Russian ethnic groups. It should be noted that not only heterogeneity but also historical experience within East-Central Europe (both supplementary to each other) enables Russia to use conflicts between nations in order to achieve its strategic objectives. Due to the unique character of the Polish-Ukrainian relations, they also seem to be a potential field of interest for Russian active measures.

11 See e.g. V. Putin, ‘Annual Address...’

12 See 2009 amendment to the Law on Defence, Art. 10: 2_1: 3, Law on Defence, *FEDERAL’NYY ZAKON Ob oborone*, 1996.

13 President of the Russian Federation, *Voyennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 25 December 2014.

14 See e.g. G.H. Karlsen, ‘Divide and rule...’; F.S. Larrabee et al., *Russia and the West After the Ukrainian Crisis. European Vulnerabilities to Russian Pressures*, RAND 2017, www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1305.html [2020-01-10].

3. Poland – Ukraine – Russia Triangle

When Ukraine gained independence, its elites faced decision-making dilemmas concerning the character and direction of both internal and foreign policy of the newly established state. While the former Soviet satellite states and even some ex-Soviet republics became members of the Euro-Atlantic integration structures, Ukraine remained in the grey zone of security. For more than two decades Ukraine has been alternately following Western and Eastern paths of development or has been trying to balance between them. It seems that the Ukrainian crisis was the only real game-changer in this matter. Keeping Ukraine out of the Euro-Atlantic integration lies in the interests of Russia, and has many origins.

On the other hand, Poland, which incorporated the so-called “Giedroyc doctrine” into its eastern foreign policy, has been supporting the sovereignty of the ex-Soviet republics and their independence from Russia.¹⁵ The primary goal of such a strategy was to withstand Russia’s imperial policy by pushing Russia into the Eurasian depth and creating a buffer zone which would separate Poland from Russia. When Poland joined NATO and the EU respectively, the essential objective of its eastern foreign policy became to bring Ukraine closer to the West.

Geopolitics determines the unique character of the Polish-Ukrainian partnership. Bilateral relations, however, are burdened by a troubled past. Historic animosities, including those between Poland and Ukraine, seem to be at the heart of the most important divisive tactics that Russia uses against Poland.¹⁶ Historical conflicts and different perceptions of past events hinder effective cooperation and reduce public support of such cooperation.¹⁷ Public support toward specific political activities seems to be extraordinarily important, due to the fact that in a democratic system it is almost impossible to exclude foreign policy from public debate. This implies that decision-makers have to take public opinion into account. Simultaneously, public opinion is influ-

15 P. Kowal, *Testament Prometeusza. Źródła polityki wschodniej III Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa–Wojnowice 2018.

16 P. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin’s Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe*, Political Capital Institute, 4 August 2016, pp. 50, 53, www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf [2019-10-15].

17 Indeed, the Polish-Ukrainian relations after 1991 were variable and often tense with historical issues being the main bone of contention.

enced not only by internal actors but also by external ones. Thus, social acceptance or disapproval of specific actions becomes a potential means which may be used by external actors. In this context, Polish-Ukrainian conflicts which emerged due to a difficult past is a potential target for Russia's active measures. Apart from the historical legacy, the presence of national minorities in both states¹⁸ and the large-scale migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland¹⁹ also strengthen the Russian capability to interfere.

Russia's strategic interest in Ukraine is to keep it in between Western structures and Russia itself. The Russian annexation of Crimea and further escalation of warfare in Donbas were, however, merely ad hoc means. The long-term strategy towards Ukraine aims to reduce Western support for Ukraine and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The main objective of active measures is to discredit Ukraine and portray it as an unstable, untrustworthy state, ruled by an irrational or fascist regime.

4. Polish and Ukrainian perception of Russian interference

It is a common belief among Polish and Ukrainian experts and politicians that Russia pursues wide-ranging efforts to drive a wedge between Poland and Ukraine. The strategic objectives of such operations are to decrease Poland's support for the post-Maidan Ukraine, to reduce the credibility of new Ukrainian elites, and to suspend Ukraine's cooperation with the West. It should be noted, however, that politicians might use such interpretations as a way to appease public opinion and bilateral relations, to seek a common enemy, or to explain the lack of resolution of a case.

18 Around 144,000 Poles lived in Ukraine in 2001. Meanwhile, around 51,000 Polish citizens declared Ukrainian nationality, including dual nationality in 2011. In: State Statistic Committee of Ukraine, *All-Ukrainian population census 2001*, www.2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality [2019-10-15]; Statistics Poland, *National Census of Population and Housing 2011*, www.stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/ [2019-10-15].

19 Most of the sources state that the number of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland is currently around 1 million (see e.g. M. Jaroszewicz, 'Migration from Ukraine to Poland. The trend stabilises', *CES Report*, October 2018, www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/Report_Migration%20from%20Ukraine_net.pdf [2019-10-15]).

Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma – then presidents of Poland and Ukraine – had already in 1997 emphasized that the causes of some of the Polish-Ukrainian historical conflicts originated outside both countries.²⁰ In 2014, the Internal Security Agency of Poland (ABW) published a report on its activity. The authors state that:

“Activities of Russia’s intelligence services towards Poland [...] were subordinated to the Kremlin’s propaganda strategy. [...] The objectives were, among others, to discredit Poland and other NATO members’ standpoint towards the Ukrainian crisis as well as to emphasise complicated Polish-Ukrainian historical experience in order to provoke antagonisms between the citizens of both states.”²¹

It should be noted, however, that this report should be interpreted as a counterintelligence measure as well. Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski, member of the National Development Council of Poland, stated that:

“The primary [...] task for the Polish and Ukrainian states is to prevent a successful provocation based on the conflict over historical memory and which could result in new casualties. [...] Russia is able to carry out terrorist attacks and is able to do it in Lviv or Przemyśl. However, in order for them to be reliable, an appropriate atmosphere would have to be created first.”²²

A number of other Polish sources also emphasize that Russia interferes with Polish-Ukrainian relations or at least benefits from their poor state.²³ The issue is similarly perceived by Ukrainian experts,²⁴ OSINT analysts,²⁵ and politicians. President Petro Poroshenko stat-

20 President of the Republic of Poland, President of Ukraine, *Wspólne oświadczenie prezydentów Polski i Ukrainy o porozumieniu i pojednaniu obu narodów*, Kyiv, 21 May 1997, www.pwin.pl/Publikacje/biu3_151.pdf [2019-10-15].

21 ABW, *Raport z działalności ABW w 2014 r.*, Warszawa 2015, p. 15, www.infolupki.pgi.gov.pl/sites/default/files/czytelnia_pliki/1/raport_2015_int.pdf [2019-10-15].

22 Fundacja Batorego, Dyskusja „Wołyń 1943 – granice kompromisu” – całość, 24 October 2016, <https://youtu.be/IBpRwWoZuuM> [2019-10-15].

23 See e.g. M.L. Rey, 'Na wojnie z kłamstwem', *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, vol. 6, 2017; P. Kost, 'Zamach w Łucku: Dlaczego Rosja skutecznie psuje relacje polsko-ukraińskie?', *Defence24*, 30 March 2017, www.defence24.pl/zamach-w-lucku-dlaczego-rosja-skutecznie-psuje-relacje-polsko-ukraińskie-3-czynniki [2019-10-15].

24 See e.g. B. Osadchuk, *Ukraina, Polska, świat*, Sejny 2010, p. 330.

25 'Kremlin financing Polish radicals: tasks, payments, and reporting to Moscow', informnapalm.org, 18 March 2017, www.informnapalm.org/en/kremlin-financing-polish-radicals-tasks-payments-reporting-moscow/ [2019-10-15].

ed in 2018 that “We – current generations of Ukrainians and Poles – have no right to make the present dependent on the past. Finally, as always, a third-party benefits from our conflict. [...] the one who attacked our state from the East.”²⁶

The current president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, also pointed out that the “tensions between Ukraine and Poland could be profitable for [...] enemies.”²⁷ Shortly after the attack on the Polish consulate in Lutsk, Ukraine’s ambassador to Poland Andrii Deshchytsia explained that “We are facing a new challenge. [...] We are so keen on developing bilateral cooperation and someone does not like it. I suspect people who do not like it are those who fight against Ukraine in the East.”²⁸ A group of Polish and Ukrainian experts who published a special bilingual report on bilateral relations were of the same opinion.²⁹ The issue did not remain unnoticed by international experts either.³⁰

One should bear in mind, however, that the specific character of such actions makes it extremely hard to identify Russia as the perpetrator. This is particularly due to the fact that the actions are of an unofficial character and are undertaken by intelligence. At times, the inspiration is revealed but no direct responsibility can be identified. Nevertheless, by analyzing the specific events, one may identify vulnerable sectors of Polish-Ukrainian relations that could challenge their own as well as regional security.

26 ‘Poroshenko: Vid superechky pol’s’koho ta ukrayins’koho narodiv vyhraye lyshe tretiy’, *Ukrayins’ka Pravda*, 8 July 2018, www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/07/8/7185669/ [2019-10-15].

27 Konferencja prasowa Prezydentów Polski i Ukrainy, [prezydent.pl](https://youtu.be/T6cvUCvrR2o), 31 August 2019, <https://youtu.be/T6cvUCvrR2o> [2019-10-15].

28 ‘Ambasador Ukrainy: to atak na stosunki polsko-ukraińskie’, *TVPIInfo*, 29 March 2017, www.tvp.info/29706800/ambasador-ukrainy-to-atak-na-stosunki-polskoukraińskie [2019-10-15].

29 Group of Polish-Ukrainian Dialogue, *Priorytetowe Partnerstwo. Wspólna wizja stosunków polsko-ukraińskich*, Kyiv–Warsaw 2017, www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/pdf/Priorytetowe_Partnersstwo.pdf, pp. 6-7 [2019-10-15].

30 P. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture...*, pp. 50-60; G. Woidelko, ‘The Polish-Ukrainian Battle for the Past’, *Carnegie Europe*, 15 December 2017, www.carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/75029 [2019-10-15].

5. Main events

The poor state of the relations between Poland and Ukraine dates back to 2015 and is related to the significant shift in the historical policy performed by the Ukrainian elites shortly after the Euro-maidan revolution, and a more assertive attitude toward this policy which was expressed by the Polish government after the parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland in 2015.³¹ The conflict was caused by varying perceptions of the historical events by the Polish and Ukrainian political elites. The problem intensified when the Polish government objected to the process of building a Ukrainian national identity based on the fascist movements from the 20th century and to cases of their glorification.³² It seems that varying perceptions of the mass crimes committed by the Ukrainian Nationalists against civilians in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in the 1940s were the most conflictual. The Ukrainian side would often describe these events in the most neutral way possible,³³ while the Polish Sejm recognized these crimes as genocide.³⁴ Ukrainian historical revisionism and Poland's harsh reaction to it intensified the bilateral dispute. Thus, aware of the current geopolitical situation, both states are partly responsible for exposing themselves to potential Russian active measures. Conflict over historical memory is a possible asset in order to reduce Poland's supportive actions for the rapprochement of Ukraine with the West on both social and political levels. The following sections unveil Poland's and Ukraine's vulnerabilities and potential objects of Russian active measures.

5.1. Conflict over cemeteries and monuments

In the years following the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, a conflict over monuments erupted between Poland and Ukraine. Between

31 It should be noted, however, that the tensions over the history are nothing new for the Polish-Ukrainian relations. They emerged already in 2010 when president Viktor Yushchenko awarded Stepan Bandera the title of the Hero of Ukraine.

32 See more on glorification in e.g. G. Motyka, 'Nieustający polsko-ukraiński spór o historię', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 1, 2018, pp. 31-40; G. Woidelko, 'The Polish-Ukrainian Battle...'

33 G. Motyka, 'Nieustający polsko-ukraiński...', pp. 32-33, 36.

34 Sejm RP, Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943-1945, M.P. 2016, poz. 726.

2014 and 2016, fifteen Ukrainian monuments or graves were destroyed or desecrated in Poland, while in 2017 four Polish monuments or graves were destroyed in the territory of Ukraine.³⁵ The perpetrators of most of these activities were never arrested or identified.³⁶ However, the sequence of events and the same *modus operandi* suggest that some of the actions were coordinated.³⁷ Most of the monuments destroyed on the territory of Poland commemorated soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). At the same time, the monuments destroyed in Ukraine mostly commemorated victims of the Ukrainian Nationalists and the Waffen SS Division 'Galizien' (in Huta Pieniacka) or even NKVD (in Bikivnya).

In January 2017, in Huta Pieniacka in the Lviv Oblast, unknown perpetrators blew up and marked with Ukrainian national colors as well as with black and red (colors referring to the Ukrainian nationalism) a monument commemorating Polish civilians murdered in 1944. One week after local Ukrainian activists rebuilt the monument, it was vandalized once again. In March 2017, two more cases of vandalism occurred almost simultaneously. First, unknown perpetrators splashed red paint on monuments in Lviv dedicated to the victims of the 1941 massacre of Lviv professors by German troops and a few days later, monuments in the Bykivnia cemetery were vandalized.³⁸ The following inscriptions appeared: "Death to *Lachs*" and "SS-Galizien" respectively, as well as a swastika. In April 2017, groups of Polish activists from the National Movement, with the approval of local

35 Group of Polish-Ukrainian Dialogue, *Priorytetowe Partnerstwo...*, p. 9.

36 *Report: Ukrainian minority and migrants from Ukraine in Poland. Discourse analysis*, ed. P. Tyma, Ukrainians' Union in Poland, Warszawa 2018, p. 14, www.prostir.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ukrainian_minority_and_migrants_from_Ukraine_in_Poland_Discourse_analysis.pdf [2019-10-15].

37 Analysts emphasise that the actions were most probably carried out by far-right extremists. What is more, pro-Russian media were often well-informed and were the first to share the news about the provocations (see: P. Kost, 'Zamach w Łucku...'). It is very suggestive that "Videos of graves and commemorative sites being damaged [...] along with the Camp of Great Poland logo, were available on the YouTube channel of Dawid Hudziec, editor of the 'Novorossia Today' portal" (see: *Report: Ukrainian minority and migrants...*, p. 29). What is more, "some other graves and monuments [...] were marked [...] with Polish national colours. That Polish national symbols were used purposefully is supported by the fact that similar means to convey and intensify the intended message were used in similar acts against Polish monuments in Ukraine" (see: *Report: Ukrainian minority and migrants...*, p. 12).

38 'More attacks on Polish WWII memorials in Ukraine', *Polish Press Agency*, 13 March 2017, www.archiwum.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/297575 [2019-10-15].

authorities, brazenly demolished an illegal pantheon of the soldiers of the UPA³⁹ located in the cemetery in Hruszowice in South-Eastern Poland. As a result of this act, the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance suspended all exhumations of Polish victims who are buried in Ukraine.

5.2. Attack on the consulate in Lutsk

On the night of March 29, 2017, the Polish consulate in Lutsk (Volhynia Oblast) was attacked. The explosion was caused by an RPG-26 grenade launcher, but there were no casualties. Not only Andrii Deshchystia, but also the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavlo Klimkin, suggested the provocative, and externally inspired character of the attack.⁴⁰ In October 2017, the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov, stated that the perpetrators of the attack had been identified and taken into custody. Members of the organized crime group called “Torpedoes” were also accused of several other acts, including an attack against the US Embassy in Kyiv and acts of anti-Semitism. Security services captured a group leader who, allegedly, was close to the former deputies from the Party of Region.⁴¹ It is also worth noting that in February 2017 the Polish consulate in Lviv was covered with splashes of red paint and that someone wrote “our land”⁴² on the fence.⁴³

5.3. Bombing attack

In December 2017, a bomb exploded under a Polish tourist bus near Lviv. The explosion happened late at night in the parking lot of the hotel and again there were no casualties.⁴⁴ The bombing took place just

39 G. Motyka, ‘Nieustający polsko-ukraiński...’, pp. 34-35.

40 P. Klimkin, Twitter post, 28 March 2017, www.twitter.com/pavloklimkin/status/846976809614934018 [2019-10-15].

41 ‘MVD razoblachilo OPG, prichastnuyu k vzryvum u posol'stv, oskverneniyu sinagogi v Umami i drugim rezonansnym prestupleniyam’, 112.ua, 2 October 2017, www.112.ua/glavnye-novosti/oskvernenie-sinagog-i-vzryvy-u-posolstv-razoblachena-gruppirovka-torpedy-prichastnaya-k-razzhiganiyu-ksenofobii-i-mezhdunarodnym-konfliktam-413995.html [2019-10-15].

42 The inscription was most probably not finished and should state “our land – our heroes”.

43 ‘Napisy na polskim konsulacie we Lwowie...Kolejna prowokacja’, TVPInfo, 8 February 2017, www.tvp.info/28985710/napisy-na-polskim-konsulacie-we-lwowie-kolejna-prowokacja [2019-10-15].

44 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, *Komunikat MSZ w sprawie incydentu z udziałem polskiego autokaru pod Lwowem*, 10 December 2017, www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/komunikat_msz_w_sprawie_incydentu_z_udzialem_polskiego_autokaru_pod_lwowem [2019-10-15].

four days before the official visit of the Polish President to Ukraine. This fact did not go unnoticed by the Ukrainian authorities. Klimkin condemned the attack, stating that “Someone is trying hard to drive a wedge between us and Poland as well as to disrupt the visit of president Duda. [...] And I’m telling the provocateurs, it is not going to work.”⁴⁵

5.4. Fake manifestations of Poles

On March 12, 2017, Ukrainian police officers accidentally withheld a blockade of the road near Mostyska (Polish-Ukrainian border crossing). Police officers stopped a bus that was being driven with the headlights off. The officers who searched the bus found posters written in Polish with errors. The next day, the Head of the State Police in the Lviv Oblast, Valery Sereda, explained that there were 35 people on the bus who had been paid to join a protest. None of them were Polish. What is more, the contributors were initially told that the protest was being held against the Shakhtar football club. When they got on the bus they were told to go to Mostyska and were offered 50-100 UAH to take part in the protest. Sereda associated this provocation with other anti-Polish incidents in Lviv and Podkamin which had happened only two days before.⁴⁶

Finally, on March 29, 2017 (the same day that the consulate in Lutsk was attacked) a protest by Ukraine citizens masquerading as Poles took place in Gryada in the Lviv Oblast. Around 150-200 people blocked the highway to the border crossing in Rava-Ruska. Protesters were holding banners with slogans in Polish and Ukrainian such as “Stop the genocide of Poles”, “Hands off the monuments”, “This is also our land.”⁴⁷ Sereda stated that the protest was “another phase of our enemy’s activity [...] The objective was to create a good picture for the media”, which could be used for the PSYOPS. He also claimed that

45 P. Klimkin, Twitter post, 10 December 2017, www.twitter.com/PavloKlimkin/status/939838129896349696 [2019-10-15].

46 I. Revunova, ‘U l’vivs’kiy politsiyi rozpovili podrobitsi zatrymannya avtobusa z antyukrayins’kymy plakatamy’, zaxid.net, 13 March 2017, www.zaxid.net/u_lvivskiy_politsiyi_rozpovili_podrobitsi_zatrimannya_avtobusa_z_antiukrayinskimi_plakatami_n1420388 [2019-10-15].

47 I. Panchyhyn, ‘Aktsiyu u Hryadi orhanizували prychetni do obstrilu pol’s’koho konsul’stva u Luts’ku’, zaxid.net, 29 March 2017, www.zaxid.net/aktsiyu_u_gryadi_organizували_prichetni_do_obstrilu_polskogo_konsulstva_u_lutsku_n1421965 [2019-10-15].

there were no Poles among the participants.⁴⁸ Viktor Andreychuk, Head of SBU in the Lviv Oblast, stated (immediately after the events) that Russian special forces were responsible for these events.⁴⁹ The organizer of the protest was sentenced to three years and six months in prison.⁵⁰ In May 2017 the SBU accused Nikolay Dulsky, the leader of the group “Nazhdak” of being responsible for this and other provocative actions.⁵¹

5.5. Burning of the Hungarian House

In the early morning hours of December 4, 2018, three men threw Molotov cocktails into the building of the Hungarian Association of Culture in Uzhgorod and spray-painted Nazi symbols on the walls. In February 2019, the ABW arrested three Polish citizens suspected of having committed this attack. Two of them were associated with the far-right organization “Falanga.” During the interrogation, one of the defendants, who pleaded guilty, confessed that he had received 1500 euro to undertake these actions from Manuel Ochsenreiter, former assistant to Markus Frohnaier, member of the Bundestag and pro-Russian politician from the “Alternative für Deutschland” party.⁵² He had met Ochsenreiter in Warsaw at a meeting organized by the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis, which was founded by Mateusz Piskorski, leader of a pro-Russian party “Zmiana,” who is imprisoned for espionage in Poland. The European Center for Geopolitical Analysis is considered to be one of the main channels of Russian

48 J. Lavryshyn, ‘Perekryttya dorohy L’viv – Rava-Rus’ka rozsliduyut’ yak rozpalyuvannya mizhnatsional’noyi vorozhnechi’, *zaxid.net*, 29 March 2017, www.zaxid.net/perekryttya_dorohy_lviv_ravaruska_rozsliduyut_yak_rozpalyuvannya_mizhnatsionalnoyi_vorozhnechi_n1421918 [2019-10-15].

49 ‘Za provokatsiyeyu na L’vivshchyni stoyat’ rosiys’ki spetssluzhby – SBU’, *galinfo.com.ua*, 29 March 2017, www.galinfo.com.ua/news/za_provokatsiyeyu_na_lvivshchyni_stoyat_rosiyski_spetssluzhby_andreychuk_256139.html [2019-10-15].

50 The Prosecutor’s Office, ‘Na L’vivshchyni na 3 roky i 6 misyatsiv pozbavlennya voli zasudyly ostann’oho iz orhanizatoriv perekryttya trasy “L’viv-Rava-Rus’ka”’, 9 January 2019, www.lviv.gov.ua/ua/news.html?_m=publications&_c=view&_t=rec&id=243226 [2019-10-15].

51 ‘Initsiatorom protestiv na terytoriyi Ukrayiny ye lider orhanizatsiyi “Nazhdak” Dul’s’kyy – SBU’, *sensor.net*, 15 May 2017, www.sensor.net.ua/ua/video_news/439844/initsiatorom_protestiv_na_terytoriyi_ukrayiny_je_lider_organizatsiyi_najdak_dulskyyi_sbu_video [2019-10-15].

52 B. Knight, ‘AfD worker accused of ordering arson attack in Ukraine’, *Deutsche Welle*, 15 January 2019, www.dw.com/en/afd-worker-accused-of-ordering-arson-attack-in-ukraine/a-47093618 [2019-10-15].

influence in Poland.⁵³ In 2016 Frohnmaier, Piskorski and Ochsenreiter founded the German Center for Eurasian Studies in Berlin.⁵⁴ The provocation was most probably organised to shift responsibility to “Ukrainian radicals” and to deteriorate Hungarian-Ukrainian relations, which are very tense anyway.

6. Identification of vulnerabilities

Galeotti contends that active measures are the product of geography and culture (one should add history as well) and therefore every region and country is vulnerable to different approaches.⁵⁵ Tensions over the interpretation of historical events together with heterogeneity make Poland and Ukraine vulnerable to Russian meddling. Most of the aforementioned cases remain unsolved, while all of them disclose which sectors are vulnerable to potential external interference. Mass devastation of places of national remembrance poses a challenge to both Ukraine and Poland. The divergent historical memory of the nations, the unclear legal status of monuments, as well as the lack of will to rebuild some of them, do not alleviate the situation either. Tendentious media coverage of such events and specific exploitation of social media⁵⁶ may encourage a mutual negative perception of both nations or even public unrest as well as inducing social tensions between dominant ethnos and minorities,⁵⁷ particularly due to the fact that the monuments were often destroyed in such a way so as to suggest that the perpetrators were Ukrainian or Polish nationalists.⁵⁸ One should bear in mind that history plays a key role in the Russian *modus operandi* in general. Rewriting and whitewashing history as part of the narrative allows Russia to med-

53 P. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture...*, pp. 50, 55.

54 B. Knight, 'AfD worker...'

55 M. Galeotti, 'Controlling Chaos...', p. 6; The same is noted by F.S. Larrabee et al., *Russia and the West...*, p. 51; K. Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge*, Chatham House, 2015, pp. 46-48.

56 G.H. Karlsen, 'Divide and rule...', pp. 6-7; P. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture...*, pp. 51-53.

57 See the attack on the church procession in Przemyśl in June 2016.

58 Due to the fact that on a general basis Poles do not trust media with a direct Russian background, Russia's influence spread via media which propagate Moscow's statements (see e.g. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture...*, pp. 51-53).

dle in the affairs of some nations but also to legitimize or justify its actions.⁵⁹

As shown above, consulates and embassies as well as centers of national culture remain potentially vulnerable to provocative actions. Bearing in mind that “the receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission,”⁶⁰ any event of this kind may harm bilateral relations between Poland and Ukraine as well as discrediting the host country internationally. It refers mostly to Ukraine due to the state’s internal instability.

Special attention must be paid also to the risk of a direct attack on people. This risk is caused by the large-scale immigration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland but also a great number of Polish tourists visiting Ukraine⁶¹ and the presence of autochthonic minorities in both countries, as shown by the bombing of the Polish tourist bus.

Finally, special attention ought to be paid to the minorities themselves, as their general feelings of exclusion, oppression or dissatisfaction could be fuelled and used for political purposes by external actors, including Russia according to its “divide and rule” approach.⁶² The last two cases clearly disclose the possibility of such a scenario. Additionally, the burning of the Hungarian house shows that some actions do not necessarily need to be conducted by intelligence officers but can be performed by proxies. This enables all external actors to deny any links with a given issue.

It is important to point out that tensions among ordinary people might occur as an indirect impact of active measures. The spread of media reports about conflictual events and their perfunctory interpretation can cause negative perception among both national groups. All of the above may potentially deteriorate bilateral relations by diminishing public support for cooperation, which has an obvious impact on the political elites. It does not go unnoticed by the external powers who may take advantage of it and use such circumstances for

59 G.H. Karlsen, ‘Divide and rule...’, p. 10.

60 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, art. 22.2.

61 Around 1,2 million Poles visited Ukraine in 2017. In: State Statistic Service of Ukraine, *Foreign citizens who visited Ukraine in 2017*, www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2013/tyr/tyr_e/vig2017_e.htm [2020-01-12].

62 G.H. Karlsen, ‘Divide and rule...’, p. 2.

their own purposes. Due to its unique geopolitical interests, assets, and the tradition of active measures, Russia is particularly interested in such actions. In the context of minorities, it aims to create as many intrastate division lines as possible.⁶³ As noted by Keir Giles, keeping disputes alive is a distinctive element of the Russian approach to leverage against its neighbors.⁶⁴

On the other hand, the fact that most of the cases remain unsolved undermines the credibility of both Polish and Ukrainian authorities. It needs to be emphasized once again that the direct responsibility of Russia for the above-mentioned events cannot be easily proven. Furthermore, responsibility for all of them can be easily transferred to far-right movements. Additionally, the role of Russia could be also indirect, for example inspirational. Russia's activities in Poland and other countries where pro-Russian opinions are rather marginal are mainly indirect.⁶⁵ The possibility should not be excluded that some of the actions were performed by radicals who merely sympathize with Russian views – even unwillingly. Thus, such cases could intentionally remain unsolved by Polish or Ukrainian authorities in order to ease tensions or to not fuel propaganda.

Conclusions

Due to the geopolitical circumstances, Ukraine is a pivot area which became a zone of struggles for influence. Russia is trying to prevent the development of cooperation between Ukraine and the West by various means. The heterogeneity of East-Central Europe as well as its complicated historical experiences entail various international tensions and conflicts which could be potentially catalyzed and instrumentalized by a scope of actors. As demonstrated in this article, the risk of such conflictual events occurring is not only a possibility but has become a reality. It is not as simple, however, as attributing direct responsibility for such actions to Russia, although Russia has the geopolitical interest and experience in using active measures. It

63 Ibidem, p. 6.

64 K. Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge...*, p. 41.

65 P. Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture...*, pp. 8, 50.

is noteworthy that Russia's assets go beyond those presented here. As explained, such a strategy has more than one target group. Thus, it presents a challenge to the whole region and does not include Polish-Ukrainian relations only. One should bear in mind, however, that not all of the events are necessarily influenced by Russia. Therefore, both Poland and Ukraine should be aware of the geopolitical significance of the bilateral tensions and make an effort to resolve conflictual issues.

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