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Surviving in a Forgotten, but Not So Frozen Conflict

A perspective from the Luhansk People's Republic

CWS Policy Papers

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1. Introduction

Four years ago, pro-Russian armed groups seized public buildings in Luhansk and Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine and declared the regions for independent Peoples Republics. Since then, over 10,000 people have died, including 3,000 civilians. Almost four million people are currently in need urgent assistance and more than 1.7 million people have been displaced.¹ Most of them live in areas beyond control of Ukrainian government.²

Although heavy fighting between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army has decreased and the so-called 'Contact Line' has not moved much since February 2015, the conflict is still developing and is – in spite what some argue – far from being frozen.³ In 2016 and 2017, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine reported more than 300,000 ceasefire violations per year.⁴ According to the observers, heavy weapons and mines are the main cause of civilian casualties, with more than 400 killed and injured in 2017, an increase of between three to five percent from the previous year.⁵

In winter 2014/2015, the delivery of basic services to the civilian population was often interrupted by direct armed hostilities and a shifting front line, causing a humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ukraine. With the stabilization of the military positions on each side of the 'Contact Line,' the humanitarian situation has improved during the last couple of years.

Nevertheless, this policy paper argues that the conscious political decisions and inaction of both the Ukrainian government and the leadership of the 'Luhansk People's Republic' (LPR) has increased the hardship for the population in non-government controlled areas (NGCAs). These policies, additionally, will have a negative long-term impact on any reintegration efforts by Ukraine or state building efforts by the LPR.

Focusing on the Luhansk region, this paper first analyzes how specific policies of the LPR regarding the provision of humanitarian aid and the nationalization of companies have exacerbated economic decline and contributed to the deterioration of living standards. The second part outlines how the suspension of government services and social payments by Ukraine, as well as the introduction of anti-terror legislation, affects ordinary life in NGCAs. Thirdly, this paper demonstrates how the inaction and lack of coordination between conflict parties further deteriorates the situation, contributing to their lack of agreement over new crossing points. This hinders the improvement of the humanitarian situation in the so-called 'grey zones' – particularly in Novooleksandivka. Finally, looking at possible scenarios for conflict management, this paper outlines how these policies will directly affect future developments.

¹ OCHA, "Humanitarian Response Plan. Ukraine 2017", 2017. From: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2017-humanitarian-response-plan-january-december-2017-enuk>

² Ibid.

³ Deutsche Welle, "OSCE monitor: Conflict in Ukraine is "far from frozen", November 7, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://www.dw.com/en/osce-monitor-conflict-in-ukraine-is-far-from-frozen/av-41278891>.

⁴ Interfax, "Donbas casualty rate higher in 2017, compared to 2016", November 10, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/460896.html>.

⁵ Deutsche Welle, "OSCE monitor: Conflict in Ukraine is "far from frozen", 2017.

2. A Republic in the Making: the honeymoon is over

Although very much in focus, the human cost of conflict depends not only on the shelling and shooting, but also very strongly on direct policies and decisions taken by the conflicting parties. In the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Ukraine lost control over parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions to pro-Russian armed groups. The Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) were self-proclaimed in April 2014 and, in May, they declared their sovereignty from Ukraine following a "status referendum." The outbreak of violent conflict and the establishment of the Contact Line has isolated and divided communities, disrupted provision of basic services and trade, and forced people to relocate.

In September 2014, in light of continued hostilities, the Minsk Protocol and the Minsk Memorandum were signed in order to re-establish peace, stability and security in Ukraine. Following the so-called elections in the LPR and DPR in November 2014, which were not foreseen by the Minsk Protocol or Memorandum, Ukraine suspended most social, administrative and healthcare services leaving almost 1.5 million people without a safety net in the areas controlled by the LPR.⁶

Heavy fighting in winter 2014/2015 led to the adoption of the so-called Minsk II Agreement in February 2015, which was further approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2202. The Minsk II Agreement provided for a comprehensive ceasefire, the withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the Contact Line, the initiation of a dialog on reconstruction of social and economic ties between Kiev, and the adoption of permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

In the following years, the LPR began to develop its own legislation, administrative structures, and provide services and social benefits. A constitution adopted by the 'LPR Supreme Council' during its first plenary session in May 2014 provided the legal basis. Since then, the rule of law system in the LPR has gone through different stages of development and the process of adopting the necessary pieces of legislation is not yet finished. According to the LPR sources, the People's Council have enacted over 140 laws and amendments and have passed over 620 resolutions since May 2014.⁷

However, the lack of implementation mechanisms has led to the abuse of power by public institutions at all levels and has created a legal vacuum in the rule of law system. Without a clear plan for international recognition or joining Russia, as they initially believed, the LPR develops its frameworks without a clear direction, which affects respect for human rights and the provision of basic services. Consequently, the Deputy Minister for Occupied Territories and IDPs, Mr. Tuka described the local population in the NGCA as "hostages to terrorists."⁸

Although big part of the population of the LPR was in dire need of humanitarian assistance, the LPR chose to restrict the operations of international humanitarian actors. In July 2015, for example, the LPR Council of Ministers approved the accreditation "Procedure for Humanitarian Mission in LPR,"

⁶ LNR News, "In the Self-Proclaimed LNR Announced Data On Population", October 5, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://inrtopnews.com/2017/10/in-the-self-proclaimed-lnr-announced-data-on-population/>

⁷ The website of the People's Council of the Luhansk People's Republic contains a database of the regulatory and legal framework applied in LPR-controlled areas. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://nslnr.su/zakonodatelstvo/normativno-pravovaya-baza/>

⁸ Julian Coman, "On the frontline of Europe's forgotten war in Ukraine", *The Guardian*, November 12, 2017. Last modified May 5, 2018. From: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/ukraine-on-the-front-line-of-europes-forgotten-war>.

which required any organization to obtain permission before operating in areas under LPR control. In September 2015, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was refused permission to continue work in Lugansk. This in spite the fact that the MSF, since June 2014, had supported 109 health and social facilities in Lugansk with essential medicine, medical supplies, equipment, hygiene materials, and relief items.⁹

Moreover, in 2016 the LPR detained director of the Mercy Corps in LPR, who was accused of espionage.¹⁰ Consequently, by the end of 2017, the LPR allowed only ICRC, PIN, and some UN agencies to operate under its close supervision, even though humanitarian needs and the willingness of international actors would have allowed wider support.

The LPR does receive humanitarian aid from Russia. Between August 2014 and end of October 2017, altogether 70 convoys arrived and Russia, allegedly delivering more than 71,000 tons of relief supplies to LPR and DPR residents.¹¹ However, the so-called ‘Russian humanitarian convoys’ have received harsh criticism from the Ukrainian government, which accuses Russia of using them to channel weapons into the breakaway region and transport back the bodies of Russian soldiers.¹²

Furthermore, the overall economic situation in the LPR and standard of living has deteriorated since 2014. A number of key enterprises in LPR have stopped or reduced their operations since 2014, when the banking system stopped functioning and the transportation of goods became difficult. The situation was further exacerbated by a ‘trade war.’ In response to the so-called economic blockade, the LPR announced the introduction of ‘temporary external management’ in most of the more than 40 companies belonging to the richest Ukrainian oligarch, Renat Akhmetov. Until 2017, Akhmetov found ways to pay LPR and DPR for not touching his business and his enterprises employed people who received a salary transferred to an Ukrainian bank. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), after introduction of the temporary external management several of the coal mines and enterprises in Donbas closed, leading some miners to join armed groups to secure their livelihood.¹³

The exact impact of the policies is not well known yet. On September 30, however, the LPR Council of Ministers stated that the LPR government is concerned about economic situation at the Alchevsk metallurgical mill and Alchevsk coke plant – the largest enterprises in the LPR.¹⁴ This statement

⁹ MSF, “Ukraine: MSF refused permission to work in Lugansk, leaving vulnerable people deprived of essential healthcare and medicines”, September 25, 2015. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://www.msf.org/en/article/ukraine-msf-refused-permission-work-lugansk-leaving-vulnerable-people-deprived-essential>.

¹⁰ Lug Info, “LPR thwarts 130 foreign secret service agents in 2 years”, December 26, 2016. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/lpr-thwarts-130-foreign-secret-service-agents-in-2-years-17717>.

¹¹ Lug Info, “70th Russian humanitarian aid convoy unloading at Lugansk warehouses”, October 26, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/70th-russian-humanitarian-aid-convoy-unloading-at-lugansk-warehouses-18548>.

¹² UNIAN, “Russian 'convoy' took away 40 bodies of Russian soldiers - Ukrainian intelligence”, December 28, 2016. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://www.unian.info/war/1702002-russian-convoy-took-away-40-bodies-of-russian-soldiers-ukrainian-intelligence.html>.

¹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights / OHCHR, “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2017”, 2017.

¹⁴ LNR Council of Ministers, “Info”, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://sovminlnr.ru/novosti/10828-obraschenie-soveta-ministrov-luganskoy-narodnoy-respubliki.html>.

acknowledges the deteriorating living standard in the LPR as it includes reassurance that the LPR “will not allow further the deterioration of living standards of the population.”¹⁵

3. Ukrainian Policies Towards NGCA: Discussing re-integration while breaking the links

In response to losing control of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukraine firstly launched a so-called ‘Anti-Terrorist Operation’ (ATO), a military operation aimed at safeguarding Ukraine’s territorial integrity. As Russia could not directly be named as an opponent and, in the beginning, strongly denied any involvement, and since Ukraine depends on financial support from the IMF, which does not provide funds to countries being at war, another legal term was needed.

However, by using the term ‘terrorist,’ Ukraine massively antagonized large parts of the remaining population in the NGCA, who experienced this as discrimination from the official Ukraine and refused to be called terrorists.¹⁶ Many citizens in the breakaway regions, who were initially neutral towards Ukraine, began to reject any possibility of re-integration. Although his problem has long been acknowledged in Kiev, only in January 2018 did the Ukrainian parliament adopt a new “Law on Reintegration of Donbas.” As a part of diminishing the stigmatization of neutral inhabitant in the regions, the Anti-Terrorist Operation was rebranded to a military operation under the leadership of the military-led Joint Forces.¹⁷

Secondly, in order to address national security threats related to the crisis, Ukrainian authorities adopted a series of measures intended to regulate travel in the Donbas. The January 2015 “Temporary Order,” for example, aimed to improve the control of the movement of people and vehicles along the Contact Line in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This require all movement into and out of the ATO zone to be conducted through seven designated government controlled checkpoints located along seven main corridors. In 2016, more than six million journeys were registered through all seven crossing points.¹⁸

The restriction of freedom of movement particularly affects the population in the Luhansk region, where Stanytsia Luhanska remains the only crossing route, accessible only by pedestrians, with unsafe wooden ramps connecting the pieces of a destroyed bridge. According to Ukrainian State Border Guard Service approximately 150,000 people cross the bridge every month.¹⁹ The risks connected with crossing the Conflict Line in general, waiting times at checkpoints of up to eight hours, and the requirement to obtain a permit in advance, place additional burdens on the population.²⁰

¹⁵ LNR News, “‘The Government of LNR’ confessed to the deterioration of living standards of the population”, October 1, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://lnrtopnews.com/2017/10/the-government-of-lnr-confessed-to-the-deterioration-of-living-standards-of-the-population/>

¹⁶ Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

¹⁷ UNIAN, “No more ATO: What Donbas Operation format change means for troops and civilians”, February 23, 2018. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://www.unian.info/war/10019417-no-more-ato-what-donbas-operation-format-change-means-for-troops-and-civilians.html>

¹⁸ Julian Coman, “On the frontline of Europe’s forgotten war in Ukraine”, *The Guardian*, November 12, 2017. Last modified May 5, 2018. From: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/ukraine-on-the-front-line-of-europes-forgotten-war>

¹⁹ OSCE, “Hardship for conflict-affected civilians in eastern Ukraine”, Thematic report published in February 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/300276>

²⁰ OSCE, “Protection of Civilians and their Freedom of Movement in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”, Thematic report published on 6 May 2015. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/156791>

As reported by the OHCHR, “civilians, in particularly the elderly ...were exposed for protracted periods to very high summer temperatures, degrading physical conditions, inadequate sanitary conditions, and serious security risks due to the ongoing shelling and presence of mines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance near the checkpoints.”²¹ Furthermore, a number of legislative changes restricting the transfer of goods and the cancellation of public transportation across the Contact Line has affected movement across the Contact Line.²² Besides having an effect on individual civilians, the OSCE observed in 2015 that travel restrictions have contributed to delays in the delivery of humanitarian aid, including medicines and medical equipment.²³

Thirdly, under the Minsk Protocol from September 2014, the Ukrainian government is supposed to pay for social benefits/payments. However, following elections in the DPR and LPR in November 2014, Ukraine ordered the temporary relocation of all state institutions (hospitals, schools, prisons and residential care facilities, as well as banking and judicial institutions) and enterprises, as well as their personnel, away from all areas not under their control. On December 1, 2014, Ukraine halted funding to these institutions. Individuals who did not relocate and are employed in LPR structures, including teachers, nurses, and other institutional staff, face possible criminal prosecution for supporting separatism if they cross into government-controlled areas. Furthermore, all social benefit payments, including pensions and disability benefits to beneficiaries, which were to be paid out in areas not under government control, were initially discontinued. The Ukrainian government justified these steps as necessary steps to curtail the possibility of state funds falling into the hands of armed groups.²⁴

In aftermath of the Minsk II Agreement, adopted in February 2015, which specifically foresees the “[d]efinition of modalities of full resumption of socio-economic ties, including social transfers, such as pension, payments and other payments (incomes and revenues, timely payments of all utility bills, reinstating taxation within the legal framework of Ukraine),” Ukraine announced that persons from non-government controlled areas should register as internally displaced persons in government controlled areas to receive their pensions and social benefit payments. Out of 1.28 million pensioners registered in NGCA in August 2014, by 2017 more than 1.11 million applied for a pension. Consequently, more than 160,000 people do not receive a pension, though they have a legal right to obtain one. Furthermore, this regulation forces elderly people to cross Contact Line through one of the crossing points on the regular basis in order to obtain the pension (with the average retirement pension being only about \$2 US per day).

In addition, in February 2016 the Ukrainian government suspended the payment of social assistance and pensions if the verification of the residential addresses did not prove their residence in government-controlled areas.²⁵ In order to respond to the humanitarian crisis, the LPR began to pay

²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights / OHCHR, “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2017”, 2017. From: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/UAReport19th_EN.pdf

²² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights / OHCHR, “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 February to 15 May 2017”, 2017. From: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/UAReport19th_EN.pdf

²³ OSCE, “Protection of Civilians and their Freedom of Movement in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”, Thematic report published on 6 May 2015. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/156791>

²⁴ OSCE, “Findings on Formerly State-Financed Institutions in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”, Thematic report published on 30 March 2015. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/148326>

²⁵ OSCE, “Hardship for conflict-affected civilians in eastern Ukraine”, Thematic report published in February 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/300276>

‘social benefits’ for more than 439,000 pensioners; however, these funds are not sufficient to cover even basic living costs in the LPR.²⁶ Consequently, as pensions remain main source of income for up to 60 percent of households in the LPR, many struggle to survive.²⁷

Fourthly, in January 2017, some veterans of Ukraine’s volunteer battalions began a blockade of several rail and roads links to the DPR and LPR, which gained increasing public support in Ukraine.²⁸ In February 2017, the DPR and LPR seized control over strategically important steel and coal businesses and introduced so called ‘external management’ to several companies.²⁹ After unsuccessful attempts to disperse the blockade and facing escalation on the DPR and LPR side, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, initially opposing the blockade, finally gave in and transformed a rogue operation into official Ukrainian government policy.³⁰ Accordingly, on March 15, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine decided to immediately suspend freight traffic across Contact Line, further cutting the links between breakaway region and Ukraine.³¹

To sum up, the ATO regulation, the Temporary Order, and the suspension of services, together with the economic blockade of Donbas, have cut economic and social links and contribute strongly to destruction of social cohesion, exacerbate mistrust towards Ukraine among people living in NGCA and, eventually, threaten any future chances for successful re-integration of Donbas.³² By isolating the DPR and LPR, Kiev puts greater distance between itself and breakaway territories and pushes them even closer into Moscow’s hands. These policies contradict official Kiev’s position that allegedly intends to re-integrate Donbas.

4. No Coordination, No Improvements in Sight

Since introduction of the Temporary Order in January 2015 by Ukraine, which required civilians to use one of seven crossing points, little progress has been made to open new crossing points. Insufficient coordination and willingness to find a solution between the opposing parties exacerbates the suffering of the civilians. The situation is particularly dire in the Luhansk region, where, as was previously mentioned, the Stanytsia Luhanska pedestrian crossing over a wooden ramp remains the only possibility to cross from NGCA to GCA and back. Long queues and waiting times at checkpoint exposes civilians to shelling and small arms crossfire.³³

²⁶ Lug Info, “LPR civilian employee pension averages RUR 4,265, military pension RUR 4,845”, October 19, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/lpr-civilian-employee-pension-averages-rur-4265-military-pension-rur-4845-18529>

²⁷ OCHA, “Humanitarian Response Plan. Ukraine 2017”, 2017. From: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2017-humanitarian-response-plan-january-december-2017-enuk>

²⁸ Roman Olearchyk, “Ukraine imposes cargo blockade on breakaway east”, *Financial Times*, March 15, 2017. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://www.ft.com/content/276f3fd8-098c-11e7-ac5a-903b21361b43>

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Hrant Kostanyan and Artem Remizov, “The Donbas Blockade: Another blow to the Minsk peace process”, CEPS No 2017/08, June 2017.

³¹ Tadeusz Olszanski, “Poroshenko authorises a blockade of the Donbas”, OSW, 2017. From: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2017-03-22/poroshenko-authorises-a-blockade-donbas>.

³² Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

³³ OSCE, “Civilian casualties in eastern Ukraine 2016”, Thematic report published in September 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/342121>

The situation deteriorated even further in June 2016, when both sides erected and reinforced forward positions as close as 400 meters from one another.³⁴ Consequently, civilians using this crossing point find themselves in a 1,300-meter line without escape route or shelter to hide in should the situation become kinetic.³⁵ The grassy areas on either side are full of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), as little progress has been made to de-mine the area.³⁶ Attempts to disengage the forces, agreed during Minsk negotiations in September 2016, have already failed 70 times. Furthermore, even though it has been on the agenda during Minsk negotiations for more than two years, Ukraine and LPR cannot agree on opening additional crossing points.

The most likely border crossing to become operational, a road between Zolote and Pervomaisk, was initially opened on March 31, 2016. However, the authorities in the LPR did not allow civilians to proceed further into NGCA and the representative of the LPR in Minsk, Vladislav Deinego, declared that the opening of the Zolote checkpoint was not coordinated with LPR properly.³⁷ The LPR proposed Schastya as an alternative crossing point, which is not an alternative for Ukraine due to its strategic location next to the biggest power plant in the region and possible risk of military action by the LPR to seize it.

Currently the Zolote-Pervomaisk crossing point, a 3-kilometer narrow road, and a security risk to the civilians due to mines and UXOs, remains the only alternative on the table. On October 20, 2017, one and a half years since the initial opening, Ukraine and LPR agreed to launch buses connecting Ukraine and LPR.³⁸ Still, seemingly technical aspects such as schedules and modes of operations need to be agreed on and experience suggests that political will declared at the higher level will not necessary be translated into constructive and pragmatic discussions when it comes to their realization.

Last but not least, after three years of conflict, the population's living conditions are the direst for those living along the Contact Line. The primarily elderly population has been left behind, with their personal savings depleted and the infrastructure worn down or destroyed. As pointed out by the OSCE, civilians living in areas not fully controlled by either side face the harshest conditions.³⁹ One of the direst examples is Novooleksandrivka, where around 80 people have been caught between both sides' positions and affected by shelling, shootings, and UXOs in the village. Alone on June 15, 2016, the OSCE recorded more than 100 explosions in Novooleksandrivka.⁴⁰ The area of Novooleksandrivka village remains a hotspot, with a total of seven casualties in 2016.⁴¹

In addition to the armed hostilities, policies set by both conflict sides place a heavy burden on the living conditions of those in this area. Freedom of movement for civilians has been very restricted by

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

³⁶ OSCE, "Civilian casualties in eastern Ukraine 2016", Thematic report published in September 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/342121>

³⁷ Reliefweb, "Ukraine crisis - Flash update: Zolote checkpoint situation – 1 April 2016", Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-crisis-flash-update-zolote-checkpoint-situation-1-april-2016>

³⁸ Lug Info, "LPR and Kiev agree to launch buses to connect crossing points in Zolotoye area", October 20, 2018. Last modified: May 5, 2018. From: <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/lpr-and-kiev-agree-to-launch-buses-to-connect-crossing-points-in-zolotoye-area-18533>

³⁹ OSCE, "Hardship for conflict-affected civilians in eastern Ukraine", Thematic report published in February 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/300276>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ OSCE, "Civilian casualties in eastern Ukraine 2016", Thematic report published in September 2017. From: <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/342121>

both sides, so people can only go on foot and bike to Popasna (5 kilometers away in Ukraine) or to Pervomaïsk (11 kilometers away in LPR) to buy products or receive medical assistance. When residents use forest paths as a 'shortcut' to access basic goods and services, they are exposed to areas contaminated by mines and booby traps.

Although the situation in the village is well known to both sides, little was done to improve the situation or to coordinate access for humanitarian aid. For almost two years, until July 2016, the population did not receive any humanitarian aid, as different actors were not allowed to enter the village.⁴² Consequently, people from Novooleksandrivka had to cross to Popasna by foot in order to receive humanitarian assistance. Moreover, due to destruction of power lines and water pipes, Novooleksandrivka has had no electricity and has relied on private wells since 2014. The efforts to conduct repair works on local utilities in the autumn 2016 were not successful, as both sides could not coordinate the necessary steps to ensure that repair works were conducted without threatening the lives of the workers.

5. Conclusion

There are several scenarios being regularly discussed concerning the future of Donbas. They vary from 1) a return of Donbas to Ukraine (so called Croatian scenario), 2) keeping current status quo with low intensity conflict (status quo scenario), 3) freezing the conflict (Transnistria scenario), 4) putting Donbas under the administration of the United Nations (Kosovo scenario), to the 5) complete takeover of Donbas by Russia (Crimea scenario).

With every additional month of separation, a potential re-integration of Donbas will face more and more challenges. The policies described above, particularly the ATO regulations and suspension of social payments, have massively antagonized the local population in the LPR against Ukraine.⁴³ The economic blockade also cut many of the still existing economic ties between both territories. Should Ukraine manage to take over control about Donbas and pro-Russian foreign armed groups leave the region, many local pro-Russian groups might still engage in a low level insurgency against Kiev's rule, and this not only in Donbas, but possibly in the whole Ukraine. The recent explosions and attacks on military officials in central Ukraine demonstrate this risk. The successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) will remain crucial for the long-term stability. Similarly, the antagonized population in Donbas might not necessarily accept the rule from Kiev and, in the long-term, could destabilize the whole Ukraine through democratic means. To sum up, even if Ukraine re-established control over Donbas, it would only be the very first step in the difficult path to the re-integration and stability.

Similarly, in the most likely scenarios of a low intensity conflict (status quo) or frozen conflict (Transnistria scenario) the current policies, if unchanged, only add additional burdens on the population in Donbas. Many people in the region remain indifferent as to who is ruling them, so long as they can have a normal life. Many, mostly elderly, who were born in the Soviet Union, lived for 25 years in Ukraine, and now have lived for almost 4 years in the LPR, have no strong national identity. Neither Kiev's nor the separatists' rule brought them democracy or economic development that everyone was hoping for. Recession, in the best-case stagnation, create nostalgia for the Soviet

⁴² Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

⁴³ Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

Union or a feeling of hopelessness.⁴⁴ Almost no one believes that Donbas will become a part of Russia anymore, as initially hoped by many in April 2014.

The on-going fighting and the unpredictability of the situation in Eastern Ukraine affects the lives of millions. As demonstrated above, their situation is even further deteriorated by conscious policies of both conflict sides. So far, the international negotiations among the Normandy Four or in Minsk have not been able to improve the situation sufficiently. Besides the immediate suffering from the policies, these will have also a significant impact on the future scenarios in Donbas. Independent of these scenarios, the future of Donbas does not look particularly rosy.

⁴⁴ Discussion of the author with population living in the LPR.

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