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The DNA of the DNR:

Legitimation strategies of the unrecognized 'Donetsk People's Republic'

Master Thesis

26 November 2018

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36,209 words

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to the 'Donetsk People's Republic'

The contemporary world is made up out of sovereign states. The most commonly used definition of a state comes from the Montevideo convention of 1933. It specifies that a state should have the following qualifications: 1) a permanent population 2) a defined territory 3) a government and 4) the capacity to enter into relations with the other states (Montevideo convention 1933). The convention has one additional specification that is vital to our modern understanding of what makes a state: statehood is dependent on the recognition by other states. However, reality does not always correspond to theory. Throughout history entities have existed that have all the qualifications of a state but are not recognized as such by the international community. Well known examples include Taiwan in East Asia, Somaliland in the horn of Africa, and Transnistria in Europe. The concept of legitimacy is central to the scholarly and non-scholarly discussion of unrecognized states. Legitimacy is often understood as 'the right to rule' and has an internal (domestic) and external (international) element. In 2014, two new unrecognized states were proclaimed with Russian support in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the South-East of Ukraine: the 'Donetsk People's Republic' and the 'Luhansk People's Republic'.[1] They were widely denounced as illegitimate entities. This thesis will examine legitimacy in the context of one of the newly formed unrecognized states: the DNR. An understanding of the DNR must be informed by the wider context of the conflict in Ukraine, what sparked that conflict, and what it meant for Ukraine-Russia relations. Therefore, before going into the theoretical aspects of legitimacy and outlining the research strategy, the following section provides a short history of the conflict in Ukraine.

The Maidan revolution or the 'Revolution of Dignity' as it is called in Ukraine, started on November 21, 2013 when a group of protesters gathered in Kyiv's central square. The square, known as 'Maidan Nezalezhnosti' ('independence square' in Ukrainian) gave its name to the protests who were quickly dubbed the 'Maidan' protests. The decision by president Viktor Yanukovych to refrain from signing an association agreement with the European Union, and to sign an agreement with Russia instead was the trigger. Social media was used to gather protesters on the square, with estimates of up to 200.000 people attending. The 30th

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[1] In Russian: Донецкая Народная Республика, '*Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika*'. Луганская Народная Республика. '*Luhanskaya Narodnaya Respublika*'. In this thesis I will use 'DNR' and 'LNR' respectively for sake of brevity. This does not constitute *any* recognition of their statehood on my part. Moreover, in writing about any attributes of 'statehood' I will avoid from using mitigating terms ('parliament' instead of 'so-called parliament' for example). Again, this will be for sake of brevity and does not constitute *any* form of recognition from my part.

of November stands out as a turning point in the protests. That night, *berkut* anti-riot police were ordered to dismantle the camp that protesters had built, and protestors were pushed into other parts of the city. Arguably, this gave new momentum to the protests, and the in the following days more and more people came to gather at 'Maidan Nezalezhnosti' with many people from outside of Kyiv attending. There was a noticeable difference in support for the movement geographically. Support was highest in Western and Central regions of the country, and lowest in the Eastern and Southern regions. Particularly in Western Ukraine, there were Maidan protests that attracted tens of thousands of people, with the protests in L'viv attracting the largest crowds (Ishchenko 2016, 458). This stands in stark contrast to the Maidan protests organized in cities in Southern or Eastern Ukraine such as Donetsk, Lugansk, or Simferopol, where attendance was minimal. Indeed, polls seem to show that people in the Eastern and Southern regions were predominantly opposed to the Maidan revolution and subsequent power change (Lyubashenko 2014, 76). This environment set the stage for Russian intervention.

Throughout the protests, delegations from countries that supported the protestors came to visit Maidan to express their solidarity with the protesters. Meanwhile, Russia was heavily involved in providing shelter to Yanukovych. When it became clear Yanukovych was out of power, the EU was quick to accept the new government. On the other hand, Russia spoke of an unlawful violent exchange of power and at first backed Yanukovych' claim that he was still the legitimate president (which he was according to the constitution) (Lyubashenko 2014, 82). Some scholars saw the quick acceptance of the new status quo by the EU and the U.S. as an indicator that the crisis in Ukraine signified a larger crisis in EU-Russia relations (Haukkala 2015, 34; Sakwa 2045). Others shared this point of view but argued that the crisis in Ukraine was the EU's fault because it had not respected that Ukraine was in Russias privileged zone of influence (Mearsheimer 2014). The EU, which did not think in terms of zones of influence, had underestimated the importance Russia attached to Ukraine. Great power rivalry and zones of influence, concepts people associated with the Cold War, returned to European discourse. The Maidan revolution resulted in a deterioration of relations between Russia and the EU that continues to this day. This crisis was exacerbated by the Russian annexation of Crimea.

After the change of power in Kyiv, soldiers without insignia started appearing on the Crimean Peninsula. On February 27, 2014, armed men occupied the parliament and an

emergency session was held to disband the government. On March 6, the council of Crimea voted to become part of Russia, and on March 16, a referendum was held for that purpose. Recognized by Russia as legitimate but not by the rest of the world, Russian officials spoke of a 95.5% majority of acceding to Russia (Morris 2014). This figure was widely discredited by Western governments. The EU issued a statement that it was 'illegal and illegitimate and its outcome will not be recognized.' (Barroso and van Rompuy 2014). Crimea was a turning point in Russian relations with Ukraine, the EU, and the West in general. The takeover of Crimea was coupled with an 'information war' offensive in the media that has continued ever since. The annexation emboldened separatists in the Donbas and Southern Ukraine repeated Crimea's call for annexation. As it became clear that in Kyiv power had changed hands, pro-Russia demonstrations grew bigger in the East and South of the country. On March 4, protesters occupied the Regional Administration building in Donetsk, and their leader, Pavel Gubarev, declared himself 'people's governor'. Separatists took over local headquarters of the intelligence service (SBU) and administrative buildings in Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts in April. In reaction to this the government in Kyiv started the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operations) on April 15. This marked the start of armed conflict in the Donbas.

The separatists organized a referendum on the May 11 in the parts of Donetsk and Lugansk under their control, with the question: '"Do you support the declaration of state independence of the Donetsk People's Republic?'' to which voters could answer 'yes' or 'no'. According to the separatists, there was a large turnout and the overwhelming majority voted 'yes'. Ukraine and Western states did not recognize the results (Vernon 2014). This marked the beginning of the DNR and the LNR. Soon after ATO was announced, peace talks were held in Geneva to stop the conflict from escalating (Davies 2016). The Geneva agreement was quickly broken with each side accusing each other of breaking it. In the first phase of the war, the Ukrainian army performed badly, as it was not prepared to fight a war in its own country both materially and morally (Rauta 2016; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016). The armed forces of Ukraine were in a bad state due to years of neglect and underfunding (Katchanovski 2016). They relied heavily on conscripts, who are usually not motivated soldiers. In the first stages of the conflict, the separatists domestically procured most weapons: either bought on the black market, raided from army depots, or brought in by defecting Ukrainian soldiers (Ferguson and Jenzen 2014). Nationalist volunteer battalions helped the Ukrainian army and played a decisive role in the defense of large cities such as Dnipro and Mariupol.

After Petro Poroshenko was elected as president of Ukraine on May 25 in an election in which residents of occupied Crimea and the occupied parts of the Donbas did not participate, ATO operations increased with new vigor. By July, the separatists had lost most of their gains when there came another turning point in the war: the tragic downing of flight MH17 above Hrabove in separatist controlled Donetsk Oblast. This made the already international conflict even more a case of global concern as citizens from multiple countries perished in the attack. The majority of the passengers were from the Netherlands. MH17 came to be the symbol of the international 'information war' Russia and the West. Immediately after the crash, it was unclear what had happened, and Russian media quickly established a counter narrative to shift blame away from the rebels, accusing the Ukrainian government (Toal and O'Loughlin 2017). This process of blame attribution has continued ever since, with the consequence that there are two distinct 'media spheres', in which people blame different groups for the disaster, despite the conclusions of the Joint Investigation Team that confirmed the rebels shot down the plane with a Russian BUK missile. Aside from a temporary ceasefire around the crash site, fighting continued and the rebels were pushed back.

At the end of August, the Ukrainians were pushed back by a new separatist offensive. The battle of Ilovaisk which cost the lives and capture of hundreds of Ukrainian servicemen, was a turning point (Grytsenko 2014; Cohen 2016). The battle at Ilovaisk highlights 1) the relation between the battalions and the central government/army and 2) Russia's intervention into the war when the rebels were losing. Some of the battalions consisted mostly of locals, such as the Donbas battalion, while others were made up of members from all over Ukraine. Yet others were more problematic, for example the right-wing Azov battalion, which reportedly has neo-Nazi elements in its ranks (Cohen 2016). These battalions were motivated to fight, but often not properly equipped with heavy armaments such as tanks and artillery. The battalion forces in the beginning were swiftly 'incorporated' into the Ukrainian army making them legal parts of the army. However, this did not mean that they were well integrated: the parliamentary commission on Ilovaisk concluded that the communication between battalion commanders and the regular army was poor (Matios 2015). Secondly, at Ilovaisk it became clear Russian units were directly involved in the war (Grytsenko 2014; Cohen 2016; Clem 2018). Evidence for Russian involvement already existed but this incursion into Ukraine provided crucial evidence as local sources on the ground relayed irrefutable evidence of Russian army having entered Ukraine (Clem 2018). The defeat at Ilovaisk proved to be a painful one, and soon after Petro Poroshenko started negotiations for a

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ceasefire (Judah 2014). An agreement was reached in Minsk on September 5, but the ceasefire was broken only hours after it was signed

On November 2, elections were held in separatist controlled territories but neither Ukraine nor its Western partners recognized them. With Russia actively involved in the conflict, there were no guarantees that the elections would proceed in a free and fair manner. These elections saw Aleksandr Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitskij elected in the DNR and LNR respectively. The elections did not stop the fighting, as the rebels were on the offensive with the help of Russian troops, and fighting continued until February 2015. A similar situation to that at Ilovaisk occurred as Ukrainian troops became trapped in the strategic town of Debal'tseve in early February 2015 (Kramer 2015). Just as the heavy defeat in September may have prompted the first Minsk agreements, the situation in early February necessitated another ceasefire dubbed Minsk II.[2] On February 15, Angela Merkel, François Hollande, Petro Poroshenko, Vladimir Putin, Aleksandr Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky drew up a new peace plan after long negotiations. The document was signed by the latter two leaders of the separatists and additionally by Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, former president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, and the ambassador of Russia to Ukraine Mikhail Zubarov (OSCE 2015). The Minsk agreements called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, exchange of prisoners, change in the constitution of Ukraine towards a more decentralized state, and local elections in the Donbas. Officially the agreements are still in place, but many of the agreements have not been reached. There is mutual distrust preventing both sides from taking steps to implement the agreements (Davies 2016). Nevertheless, since the Minsk II agreements the situation on the ground has stabilized with fewer civilian casualties, mainly due to the withdrawal of large pieces of artillery 15 km from the line of contact. Violations of the ceasefire occur until this day, particularly in Avdiivka and on the outskirts of Mariupol.

The most important consequence of the Minsk agreements for the separatist entities was that the current status quo was recognized and frozen. For the 'domestic' situation in the separatist republics the agreements brought relative peace, which allowed the people in power to focus on state building projects. Some commentators argue that the agreements were 'doomed to fail' from the beginning, pointing to the inability of Ukraine and the separatists and their Russian sponsors to implement parts of the agreements such as constitutional

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[2] From this point onwards, I will refer to the agreements reached in Minsk February 2015 as 'the Minsk agreements'.

changes and local elections (Dempsey 2017). Nevertheless, it is the only peace agreement currently in place. Monitors from the OSCE observe the ceasefire through a 'Special Monitoring Mission'(SMM). There have been no major alterations to the agreements. So far, the result has been a partly frozen conflict and two unrecognized states. The current situation gives the people in charge of the unrecognized republics the opportunity to engage in nation building and state building, and the longer the present situation continues, the harder it will be to eventually reintegrate these parts of the Donbas into Ukraine.

Any government dealing with a war on its territory must decide how to interact with the leaders of the enemy forces. The default mode of dealing with a secessionist entity during a war of secession is to describe them as illegal or terrorists. As the name of the campaign against the separatists suggests, this is exactly what the Ukrainian government did. On September 16, 2014 the government in Kyiv adopted the law "On the special order of local self-governance in separate Raions of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts",[3] designating the area as temporarily occupied territories. Besides the animosity and the designation of the DNR/LNR leadership as terrorists, there are still intricate connections between the government and the separatist controlled areas. Many of the coal mines and metallurgy plants that are vital to Ukraine's economy are in the zone of conflict. As the Donbas was the heartland of Ukrainian industry, powerful oligarch-businessmen had ties to the region, the most important of them being Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest citizen. Indeed, Akhmetov still employed thousands of people in the Donbas, and trade between government controlled and separatist territory continued throughout the war until February 2017 (Ash 2017; The Economist 2017). Besides business connections, human connections span across the front line: many Ukrainians have family still living in the occupied territories as they could not or did not want to move. For reintegration to be feasible, Kyiv needs to have ties to the population in occupied territories.

On the 20th of February 2018 a new law was adopted in the Ukrainian parliament that labels Russia as an 'aggressor state' in the Donbas. As such, the ATO is no more; with operations now called "taking measures to ensure national security and defense, and repulsing and deterring the armed aggression of Russia in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts."

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[3] 'Raion' is both the Ukrainian and Russian word for an administrative unit smaller than an 'Oblast' which is more similar to province.

(Ponomarenko 2018). However, the situation on the ground has remained the same since Minsk and is characterized by a lack of large offensives. Ceasefire violations still happen every day, as such, the conflict is far from 'frozen'. The situation is best described as a 'low intensity conflict'. Even the assassination of Zakharchenko in September did not alter the status quo. Russian backed separatist entities have been stuck in the same situation for the past four years. The conflict has split communities along the contact line and has taken a considerable toll. People stranded in territories not controlled by Kyiv have been in limbo for the past four years living in unrecognized states. Moreover, people living close to the front line on both sides have had to deal with regular shelling and the danger of mines.

The DNR has been widely denounced as illegitimate, first by the authorities in Kyiv, who launched an 'Anti-Terrorist Operation' (or ATO), against them. Russia supports these so-called people's republics and provides them with military assistance and controls the leadership of these states to a significant extent. They have been the de-facto authorities in parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts for almost five years. In these years, they have tried to present themselves as the rightful rulers of the territories they control to the local population as well as to an international audience. Meanwhile, these areas have become somewhat of an 'information black hole'. Therefore, it is not known how the DNR has tried to legitimize itself in the past four years. Moreover, it is difficult to assess how successful they have been. Nevertheless, they have a significant online presence through their 'state media'. Particularly the DNR has been prolific in presenting an image of itself. Hence, this thesis focuses on the DNR. Due to the repressive nature of the regimes and the ongoing conflict, practical research in the Donbas has become impossible. Particularly if that research is concerned with political legitimacy. Even online surveys of attitudes of the residents of the DNR are problematic, as there is no guarantee the answers will not be heavily biased. Therefore, I will examine the DNR 'state' media as it is published online. This allows me to examine the reasoning of the DNR regime from within. The research in this thesis will be guided by the following research question:

How does the DNR try to legitimize itself domestically and internationally?

More precisely, I will examine what legitimation strategies the DNR employs, and what their contents are. In order to capture both the domestic[4] and international side, I will examine a

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[4] When talking about 'domestic' I refer to actions inside the DNR. Again, this does not constitute recognition.

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sample of articles from two types of DNR state media in Russian and English: directed at a domestic and an international audience respectively. The structure of this thesis will be as follows: first, a review of the scholarly literature on legitimacy in general and legitimacy in unrecognized states will provide the tools to assess the success of a legitimation strategy and a theoretical framework to analyze the DNR state media. The literature review will finish with a methodology section based on the legitimation strategies identified by scholars of unrecognized states. Furthermore, the corpus of primary sources drawn from the DNR 'state' media will be presented. The analytical chapters are focused on getting a deeper understanding of *how* a certain legitimation strategy is employed. They are organized according to the main domestic and international legitimation strategies of unrecognized states discussed in the literature review: conflict and security; state building and regime performance; democratization; culture, history and identity; patron state engagement; and international engagement. Finally, I will make a two-point conclusion. First, I will assess which legitimation strategies have been most prominent in the time sample and how they are used in the context of the DNR. Second, I will assess whether the legitimation strategies of the DNR were successful by comparing the results of my research with scholarship on legitimacy and with the small amount of survey data available.

This thesis covers two separate but related fields of research. It will draw from international relations and political science theory to understand the domestic and international elements of legitimacy and legitimation. Additionally, it will draw from literature on the history, politics and international relations of Ukraine, Russia, and the post-Soviet space to understand the local context of the DNR. Finally, these two fields come together in the literature on post-Soviet unrecognized states. The research in this thesis aims to contribute to multiple types of research. First, I will add to the literature on unrecognized states with a study of the newest unrecognized state in Europe. Second, I will add to the literature about the conflict in Ukraine by providing an in-depth study of the reasoning of the DNR from the perspective of unrecognized states. Outside of academia a study of the legitimation strategies of the DNR has practical relevance: an understanding of the internal dynamics in the DNR is vital for Ukraine if reintegration is to be successful. If the DNR is seen as legitimate by the local population, reintegration will be difficult. A study of *how* the DNR tries to legitimize can help estimate whether they are seen as such by the local population. As the conflict in the Donbas has not yet been resolved, research on one of the actors in the conflict is of urgent relevance.

Chapter 2: Defining and Operationalizing Legitimacy

In trying to explain the continued existence of unrecognized states, legitimacy as a concept is of fundamental help. Both 'inside' (domestic) and 'outside' (international) legitimacy need to be examined. This literature review has two main aims: first, to engage with the multifaceted nature of legitimacy by considering the academic debate. The aim of this section is to understand what empirical factors are important for internal and external legitimacy in states. Second, I will outline a theoretical framework that can be used to study unrecognized states. Therefore, the structure will be as follows: first, I will deal with definitional issues, describing and defining the domestic and international aspects of legitimacy. Second, I will look specifically at legitimacy in unrecognized states and construct a theoretical framework based on the most prevalent legitimation strategies according to scholars. This chapter concludes with a section on methodology that illustrates how the legitimation strategies described by scholars will be utilized in understanding the DNR.

2.1: Towards a definition of legitimacy

A first necessary step in defining legitimacy is drawing the line between normative and descriptive accounts of legitimacy. Roughly speaking, the normative accounts fit the field of political philosophy, while the descriptive accounts are more at home in sociology: the former deals with legitimacy mainly as the justification of (coercive) power, while the latter deals with people's belief in the system (Fabienne 2017). This literature review, and by extension, this thesis will focus mainly on descriptive accounts of legitimacy. Nevertheless, making an absolute distinction between normative and descriptive accounts, or for that matter between political philosophy and sociology when it comes to legitimacy, is difficult if not impossible. In this thesis I am not going to make an explicitly normative argument about legitimacy in the DNR, rather, I will examine legitimacy empirically.

One of the most influential theorist on political legitimacy is the German sociologist Max Weber. In the above-mentioned descriptive/normative framework, Weber is on the descriptive side. In his famous 1918 lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', Weber begins his discussion on legitimacy by defining the state, which according to him is 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1921,1; in Gerth and Wright Mills 1947). Defining the state

as such, the next central question that needs answering is 'why do people submit to this power of the state?' Legitimacy explains a crucial aspect of these power relations. Weber moves away from the normative philosophical account of legitimacy and holds that a system is legitimate if the people perceive it as such. His tripartite distinction of how power structures are legitimated has become so influential that it is mentioned in almost every account of political legitimacy. This distinction is by no means a perfect fit to the real world; rather, they are ideal 'pure' types or categories into which different political systems are placed. The first is legitimation through tradition. This entails a claim to a right to rule based on the argument that 'it has always been this way', or, that the ruler in question has a god given mandate to rule. An example of this is the way in which most of Europe was ruled through the Middle Ages and into the modern era. Weber defines this as 'traditional' legitimacy. Then, there is legitimation based on 'charisma' -a hard to define ability of certain people to make others believe and trust them. An example of this are the elected warlords and demagogues that people have rallied around for centuries. The final type is based on rules. This happens when power is legitimated through a rule based legal system. Examples of this are modern bureaucracies and governments. Weber calls this 'rational/legal' legitimacy.

David Beetham in his 1991 The Legitimation of Power- criticizes Weber. He claims that if legitimacy is related to the perception of people, and how people perceive things is influenced by societal structures, then how regimes are perceived is mainly in the hands of the regime itself. He takes this to its logical conclusion, saying that this view of legitimacy would 'imply that the reason for the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 lay in a deficiency of public relations, rather than anything actually wrong with the system of rule itself.' (Beetham 1991, 9). This means that, taking a Weberian view of legitimacy, it is not possible to explain anomalous political events such as revolutions. Beetham is not proposing to disregard people's beliefs about the legitimacy of a given political regime; rather, he is proposing to deduce whether a given political regime can be '*justified in terms of* their beliefs' (Beetham 1991, 11 italics in original). Beetham goes further to critique Weber's focus on legitimacy as a matter of belief by shifting our attention towards two other dimensions of the concept: legality and consent. First, the legal part of legitimacy considers whether power is exercised within the confines of the law; whether or not it follows the rules. This legal view of legitimacy is relatively easy to determine and is more straightforward than any belief-based view: power is either exercised according to the law or not. Moving on to the consent element of the concept, Beetham argues that the showing of consent, either through going to elections,

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attending rallies, etc… confers legitimacy to the political system (Beetham 1991, 12). Beetham considers legitimacy to be built up in three ways, arguing that a political system can be said to be legitimate if:

 i) it conforms to established rules ii) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and iii) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation. (Beetham 1991, 16).

These three points are Beetham's three dimensions of legitimacy. The first one corresponds to the legal definition of legitimacy, but goes beyond a strictly legal understanding in terms of scope. The rules of power may be enshrined in a legal document, but they may also be informal and unwritten. The opposite of this Beetham calls 'illegality'- when power is acquired not according to the rules (in modern regimes this would often be an unconstitutional change of power) that power will be illegal. The next dimension deals with beliefs, and more precisely, a common belief held by both dominant and subordinate about whether the rules of power can be justified (Beetham 1991, 17). The opposite of this dimension of legitimacy Beetham defines as a 'legitimacy deficit'. Such a deficit occurs when the beliefs about power change; for example, when people no longer believe in the divine right of kings to rule, there is a legitimacy deficit or (or weakness). The third dimension, that of consent, is important for two main reasons. First, it creates a 'normative commitment' for those that have participated in the show of consent towards those they have demonstrated their consent to (Beetham 1991, 18). Second, by expressing consent to be ruled you confer legitimacy to the system: it is a public show of being content with the existing power relations on part of the subordinate. Because of the legitimizing nature of a show of consent, these actions are often ceremonial: think of elections for example, or of medieval displays of loyalty to the sovereign. The opposite of the third dimension Beetham characterizes as 'delegitimization'- or the pulling back of consent. An example of this could be the protests during the Prague spring in '68: they showed a public display of a withdrawal of consent, and thus were a clear delegitimization of power. The population might have stopped perceiving the regime to be legitimate for a long time, but protests presented a clear withdrawal of consent, which provided the delegitimization. Beetham primarily focusses on defining 'inside' or domestic legitimacy. The next subchapter will deal with the empirical study of legitimacy in its domestic form.

2.2: Domestic legitimation

Bruce Gilley in his 2009 book 'the Right to Rule' tries to establish empirically what makes states legitimate. He takes Beetham's distinction between legality, justification and consent, and applies them to a study of 72 countries. He attaches measurable indicators to these aspects. For legality, he takes the responses to three world values survey questions about confidence in 'human rights performance, the police, and the civil service' to measure the law-abidingness of a state (Gilley 2009, 14). For justification, he again uses the world values survey and the incidence of violence in political protests. For consent, he uses the reliance of the state on easily avoidable taxes and voter turnout in elections (Gilley 2009, 15). Additionally, he places extra stress on the justification part. He justifies this by arguing that states nowadays are claiming to represent the interests of their citizens. Another interesting outcome of his study is about what makes a state legitimate- the explanatory variables. The three most important variables Gilley identifies are 'General Governance', Democracy/Rights' and 'Development' (Gilley 2009, 44). What this entails, among other things, is that democracy is not necessarily a prerequisite for a legitimate regime.

Moving into a more abstract level, Gilley attempts to create a general model of legitimacy (fig. 1). His basic assumption is that society is pluralist, with a range of demands by different actors who have different social identities and different powers in shaping the state. These 'demands of pluralism' are directed at the state. Additionally, the state has some power to shape the demands of society. In responding to these demands the state performs and produces outputs. As Gilley discussed and found from his analysis, development, democracy/rights, and governance are key (63). There is also a double relationship between performance and legitimacy: on the one hand, good performance creates legitimacy while on the other hand, states that enjoy legitimacy are able to perform better. Finally, legitimacy influences demands of pluralism. In this model, the state is in a double relationship with society as it not only responds to the demands of citizens but also helps shape them.
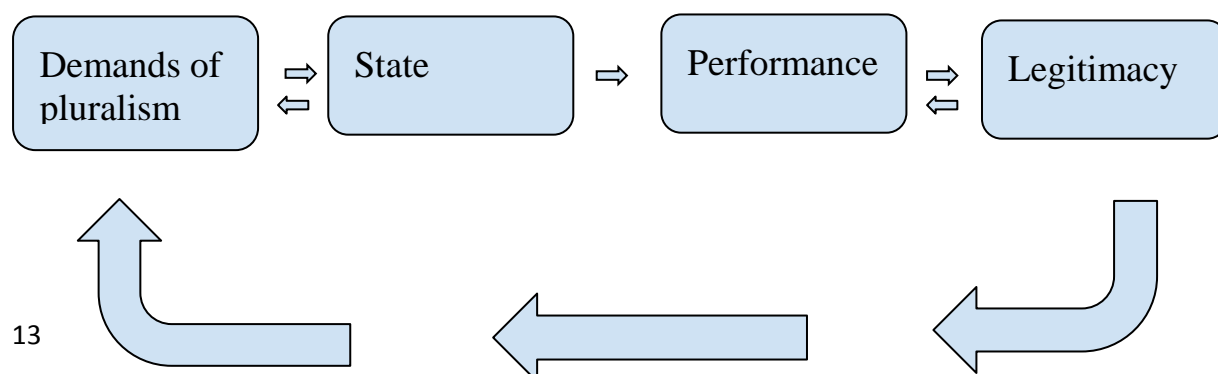
Fig. 1. The pluralist model of legitimation (after Gilley 2009, 63).

In essence, this moves away from Weberian models of legitimacy and the other models previously described. Moreover, it describes how states have to manage demands of a pluralist society. This model provides a roadmap to study legitimacy: if we want to find out how a state is trying to legitimize itself, we need to study these processes. However, what is described here relates to internal or domestic legitimacy alone. The next section will deal with international legitimacy.

2.3: International legitimation

Some authors argue that globalization has intertwined internal and external legitimacy (Clark 2007; Gilley 2009; Hurrelman et al 2007). As states are more integrated into what could be called an 'international society' of states, domestic legitimacy becomes more important for international legitimacy writes Ian Clark. He uses a tripartite distinction: legality, morality, and constitutionality. In this distinction, legality refers to the following of rules, be they national legal systems or international legal systems. Finally, Clark understands constitutionality as belonging to the 'political realm of conventions, informal understandings, and mutual expectations' (Clark 2007, 220). Legitimacy building consists of finding a consensus between these norms. Clark claims an international order works if there is consensus on the 'rightful membership' and 'rightful conduct' criteria of international society. In a shift of international order, these criteria change. Clark argues that after the cold war there was a shift in the rightful membership criterion that was now heavily based on democracy. Moreover, rightful membership and rightful conduct became even more intertwined.

In the 90's a new ideology of humanitarian intervention was propagated, knows as 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P). This was based on the idea that it was the obligation of states to ensure basic human rights, and that they were accountable to the international society if they could not or did not want to do this (Clark 2007, 160). He argues that the fact that these norms *exist* that means that there is an international society. If states did not adhere to these basic norms, the international society had the right to intervene (forcefully) to ensure that the state in question would adhere to these norms in the future. While many saw this as a challenge to sovereignty, Clark sees it as a manifestation of a revolution in legitimacy (Clark

2007, 160). States who did not want to conform to the new ideas of what a state should be were ostracized by other states as 'rogue' or 'outlaw' states. The inclusion into international society was used as a 'carrot', while the exclusion was used as a 'stick' to get states to adapt to the new demands of international society. Inclusion or exclusion into 'international society' (i.e. adhering or not adhering to global norms) can be a matter of life and death for states; particularly for unrecognized ones.

2.4: Legitimacy in unrecognized states

Scholars usually define unrecognized states as 'entities that have proclaimed independence, developed certain elements of statehood and possess partial sovereignty (i.e. maintain durable control over a certain territory and have built own governing institutions that are viewed as legitimate by the majority of local populations).' (Axyonova and Gawrich 2018, 423). There is as no scholarly consensus yet whether the DNR counts as an unrecognized state. Although the conflict has not stopped, the DNR has had control over a certain territory since March 2015. Whether the authorities are viewed as legitimate is hard to establish and will form part of the subject matter of this thesis. Unrecognized states have a state they seceded from, which is known as the 'parent state', and a state that supports their independence, known as a 'patron state' (Ó Beacháin, et al 2016, 442). Influenced by the parent states, the tendency has been to describe unrecognized states as mere 'puppet regimes' of their patron states (Broers 2013). Moreover, they have been characterized as bandits and outlaws, profiting from their unrecognized status of a lawless area (Caspersen 2015). All these conceptualizations have hindered the full understanding of the complexities of the behavior of unrecognized states.

Unrecognized states are particularly prevalent in the post-Soviet space. After perestroika, several unrecognized states appeared. The post-Soviet unrecognized states (and their parent states) are Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan, 1994–), Abkhazia (Georgia, 1993–), South Ossetia (Georgia, 1992–), Transnistria (Moldova, 1991–), and now the DNR (Ukraine, 2014-) and the LNR (Ukraine 2014-). On the post-perestroika states a wealth of research is available. Many scholars have written about the DNR/LNR in the context of the war in Ukraine (Katchanovski 2016; Robinson 2016; Mateeva 2016). As of yet none have written on the DNR from the perspective of unrecognized states.

One would expect power in an unrecognized state to be legitimate if it conforms to established rules, if the rules can be justified, and if there is evidence of people consenting to power. (Beetham 1991). What is clear from the discussion of legitimacy above is that we should not examine how these unrecognized states are perceived by their population. Rather, it is fruitful to examine legitimacy according to empirical attributes such as Gilley's conceptualization of what is most important in legitimacy: 'General Governance', 'Democracy/Rights' and 'Development'. The better an unrecognized state is able to provide these, the more internal legitimacy it will enjoy. Although in international relations legitimacy is seen as absolute, in the literature on unrecognized states it is seen in degrees (Caspersen 2011). Due to the difficulty of obtaining empirical data from unrecognized states, it is rewarding to examine legitimation strategies rather than trying to determine the absolute level of legitimacy (Caspersen 2015, 186). Unrecognized states often form after a secessionist (ethnic) conflict which may initially bolster internal legitimacy through the 'rally around the flag' phenomenon (Fabry 2016). However, unrecognized states do not automatically enjoy internal legitimacy. Due to the situation unrecognized states find themselves in (often that of an unresolved conflict) some building blocks of legitimacy weigh more heavily than in recognized ones.

Unrecognized states are denied legitimacy from their parent states and international society, which sees legitimacy as something absolute: states either are or are not (Broers 2013). In the literature on unrecognized states[5] scholars often speak of 'earning' sovereignty or 'playing' the recognition game (Berg and Mölder 2012; Broers 2013; Lynch 2002; Caspersen 2009; 2015). The goal of this game is external legitimacy in the form of recognition by international society. The benefits of recognition are considerable: with borders recognized by international society the control of the regime over the secessionist territory is cemented. As Clark has argued, internal and external legitimacy have become more closely tied than ever. For unrecognized states this rings true: they have to prove their statehood not only to a domestic audience, but also to an international audience in order to gain recognition. Recognition opens access to international aid, trade and mobility for the population. Unrecognized stress their supposed internal legitimacy as an argument for external legitimacy. External legitimacy exists in degrees; therefore, it is most fruitful to study external legitimation strategies. The following section presents six of the most prominent

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[5] I will use 'unrecognized' over 'de facto' following Ó Beacháin et al. who note that every state is a de facto state- but not every state is unrecognized.

legitimation strategies of unrecognized states according to scholars. Due to the close connection between internal and external legitimacy, domestic legitimation strategies may have international elements and vice versa.

Conflict and Security

In general accounts of legitimacy as discussed above conflict has an adverse effect on the most important sources of legitimacy. Conflict is detrimental to development, regime performance, and democracy. Frozen conflicts could have the same adverse effects. For example, the tense military situation in the region South Caucasus has not been conducive to democratization of the unrecognized states located there (Broers 2013, 2). However, a frozen conflict and the threat of reintegration can instill patriotic fervor in the population causing a 'rally around the flag' phenomenon (Fabry 2016, 27). For some unrecognized states, the external threat is the main reason for their internal legitimacy (Berg and Mölder 2012, 543). C,aspersen argues that providing security is a particularly important element of domestic legitimation in unrecognized states (Caspersen 2015, 185). Indeed, unrecognized states often have a hostile parent state for whom violence may be acceptable in the reintegration of the territories. If the war of secession was an ethnic war, the ability of the unrecognized state to protect their kin is key in ensuring internal legitimacy. Moreover, if the conflict was particularly violent the residents of the unrecognized states may harbor grievances against the parent state. The patron state is often essential in security guarantees. However, as unrecognized states have to maintain credibility that they can fend off an attack by the parent state. In an international sense, if the war of secession is seen as a last resort to protect the population against a hostile parent state, the unrecognized state will be more tolerated (Berg and Toomla 2009, 43). If the war of secession is seen as illegitimate it has an adverse effect on external legitimacy.

Regime performance & state building

Regime performance and state building are significant aspects of domestic legitimacy (Gilley 2009; Rothstein 2009). They touch on all three foundations of legitimacy described by Gilley. Some authors argue that unrecognized states come into existence when the former warlords of the conflict become state builders (King 2001). State building is a process of forming working organs of government. Regime performance is how well the government can deliver public

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goods and services, ranging from education to trash collection. Caspersen notes the importance of delivering public goods for ensuring domestic legitimacy (Caspersen 2009; 2015). Moreover, Kolstø and Blakkisrud have also focused on state building when explaining legitimacy in unrecognized states, which they see as the physical buildup of state capacity (2008). Ó Beacháin et al argue that 'legitimacy is also based on the capability to deliver basic services and to offer a degree of opportunities and mobility to their core resident population' (Ó Beacháin et al 2016, 447). The unrecognized status makes it more difficult to deliver public goods or to foster development as there is no access to international trade. The public good of security is particularly important for unrecognized states, and in this thesis, I will examine it as separate from other public goods such as healthcare or education. Some authors hold that the international legitimacy of an unrecognized state is dependent on how convincing the regime comes across as state builders (Bakke et al 2014). They also form a part of external legitimacy as unrecognized states sometimes argue their 'state' is functioning better than the parent state. For example, a key part of Somaliland's international legitimation is stressing its regime performance and state building successes compared to Somalia (Felter 2018).

Democratization

Democracy is an important aspect of unrecognized states' domestic and international legitimation strategies (Caspersen 2011). In a study on state building in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh Ó Beacháin et al argue the building of (relatively) democratic systems in all of these states except for South Ossetia has contributed to their domestic legitimacy (Ó Beacháin et al 2016). This is not surprising as Gilley finds that democracy/rights is an important component of legitimacy. This strategy fits in both the international and domestic legitimation categories. If the democratization process is genuine, the inhabitants of the unrecognized state will feel their concerns are listened to, and the state will be better able to respond to the demands of a pluralist society. Moreover, people will have a standardized way of expression consent in the form of elections. Democratization in unrecognized states often remains limited to an ethnic democracy (Caspersen 2012). Besides playing a domestic role, democratization also is used as an international legitimation strategy. In the post-Cold World democracy has become an element of rightful membership in international society, and leaders of unrecognized states have admitted being democratic might make it easier for eventual recognition by other democracies (Caspersen 2011, 342).

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Kopecek et al note that from 2005 onwards, the leadership of several unrecognized states began placing extra stress on their democratic credentials while simultaneously embarking on a democratization program as an international legitimation strategy (Kopecek et al 2016). Democratization thus has internal and external benefits for unrecognized states.

Culture, History and Identity

Kolstø and Blakkisrud deem nation building to be an important legitimation strategy of unrecognized states, which they see as the instilling into people a sense of belonging (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, 484). The importance of identity in these states is exemplified by the fact that they often build a limited 'ethnic democracy' (Caspersen 2011). A sense of national identity may be strengthened by the position of unrecognition (Fabry 2016). Moreover, it may be key to eventual recognition (Richards and Smith 2015). In some other unrecognized post-Soviet states such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, ethnic identity is a major legitimizing factor for the regimes. These states have their origin in ethnic warfare and protection of the ethnic group provides an integral source of legitimacy of the unrecognized state. Indeed, the fact that secessionist conflicts of post-Soviet state were predominantly *ethnic* wars, allowed the elite of these entities to demonize the parent state and proclaim to be the only defenders of the group (King 2001, 533-534). In others such as Transnistria there is no clear ethnic majority and the identity building project was based on other factors. Identity building may be based on a shared language, culture, or history. Internationally, some unrecognized states benefit from a diaspora that supports external legitimation strategies.

Patron state engagement

The most important international partner for an unrecognized state is its patron state. Patron state support is important because they are usually the unrecognized state's security guarantor, leading some scholars to view the unrecognized state as a mere 'puppet state' (Broers 2013, 4). However, patron state engagement is a balancing act in which too much integration into the patron state can have negative effects on both internal and external legitimacy. Internally, too much reliance on the patron state can jeopardize the claims to independence which drove the initial war of secession. Externally, unrecognized states' dependence on the patron state leads to them be seen pawns of that patron states foreign policy, which is detrimental to recognition strategies (Souleimanov et al 2018). Trust in the patron state is directly linked to

trust in the whole state building project (Bakke et al 2018). In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were recognized as states by Russia in 2008, this serves as a piece in their argument for wider recognition (Caspersen 2015). There is a spectrum of patron state engagement in which unrecognized states can fall; from almost total patron state control such as in South Ossetia, to more independence such as in Nagorno-Karabakh. Patron states who support but do not recognize can engage in an array of recognizing acts that fall short of recognition: from the visits of minor officials to organizing joint sports tournaments. Perhaps the more sensitive areas of patron state support, such as security guaranties, are not made public by unrecognized states (Ó Beacháin, et al 2016, 448). Integration with the patron state is one of the DNR's self-professed top priorities as the initial call was for outright annexation. Patron states can recognize unrecognized states and can persuade other states to do the same.

International engagement

There is a large spectrum of how much unrecognized states interact with the outside world, from isolation such as South Ossetia to a high level of interaction such as Taiwan (Berg and Vits 2018). Unrecognized states differ in the extent to which they are tolerated by the international community. Berg and Toomla argue that if secession was the last resort against serious injustice, the unrecognized state has a bigger chance of being tolerated (Berg and Toomla 2009, 43). Despite their unrecognized status, unrecognized states try to engage with the world. States and international organizations prefer to interact in an explicitly non-recognizing way (Ker-Lindsay 2018, 364-368). For example, the EU has an 'engagement without recognition' for the unrecognized states in the Caucasus (de Waal 2017). However, as reintegration into the parent state is the goal, this form of engagement is explicitly non-recognizing. Unrecognized states can use mimicry of official diplomacy to and could open 'embassies' or 'consulates' in other countries, presenting themselves as recognized states (Mcconnell et al 2012, 807). The parent state usually sanctions interaction with the unrecognized state and pursues a counter recognition strategy. Nevertheless, they cannot always stop international engagement with unrecognized state. Post-Soviet states such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria cooperate and recognize each other.

2.5: Methodology

The strategies discussed above provide a comprehensive overview of how unrecognized states try to legitimatize themselves domestically and internationally. The practical application of these strategies differs per unrecognized state. I will examine how the above-mentioned strategies are used in the DNR by analyzing information available in the in the public space: the DNR 'state' media. In order to draw conclusions from the selected primary source material this thesis uses content analysis. Content analysis is a prominent method in the social sciences that is employed to gain meaningful insights from the study of a large body of data. It can be subdivided into quantitative and qualitative analysis. The former looks at large corpora of sources and usually makes use of computer programs. The latter looks at smaller corpora and offers more depth. Classifying the data in a content analysis is done through coding. A 'code' in this case is a word or short phrase that captures the essence of the text sequence analysis (Saldana 2011). In qualitative content analysis there are multiple ways to create the categories. The first, 'conventional' method consists of immersion into the data and the construction of categories based on patterns in the data. A second one makes categories informed by theory (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1297-1281). Both are potentially valuable methods in the research of legitimation strategies.

In this thesis, I will employ the latter method. Practically, this means that I will take the articles in a time sample, and color code them for the legitimation strategies discussed above. For example, I used yellow to indicate 'conflict and security'. If a text was mostly yellow, it was grouped under the 'conflict and security' category. If a text had many different colors, it was put into the 'other' category. The majority of articles consist of a few sentences. This facilitated categorization of articles. The legitimation strategies described above are general, and in the DNR legitimation strategies may be used differently. To analyze *how* the legitimation strategies are used in the DNR, I have differentiated within the legitimation strategies. These subcategories were found by immersion into the data and color coded into the text. For example, within 'conflict and security' the focus could be on the Ukrainian army attacking the DNR. This was color coded with dark-yellow. Going back to the research question: *How does the DNR try to legitimize itself domestically and internationally?* The research will answer two parts of the research question. It will 1) establish which legitimation strategies are used most and 2) analyze *how* legitimation strategies as described by scholars are used in the DNR.

The corpus of primary sources consists of coverage from the DNR 'state' media agency '*Donetskoe Agenstvo Novostej*' or DAN news and the DNR 'state' international news agency 'Donbas News Agency' or DoNi news. DAN news functions as the main news outlet of the regime in the DNR. Besides news articles they publish official announcements. DAN publishes predominantly in Russian but translates some of its articles into English. Its intended audience seems to be people living in the DNR, as many of the events it covers are of a local character. However, this does not mean that Russian language articles are intended for a purely domestic audience as Russian is still widely spoken in the post-Soviet space. As DAN is the official state media agency of the DNR, it is an instrument of propaganda for the DNR. Janus Putkonen, a Finish citizen who moved to the Donbas in 2015 and was the first foreigner to receive a DNR passport, owns DoNi news. Through DoNi news, he controlled the accreditation of foreign journalists and made sure that only people sympathetic to the DNR were allowed in (Shandra 2016). DoNi writes in English, French, and Italian, which suggests that its target audience is those living in (Western) Europe. DoNi is both a conspiracy website on the fringes of the media spectrum and the official international news agency for the DNR. Accordingly, its audience is likely to consist of people who already support the DNR in some way.

In order to obtain a sample of articles that is both representative and manageable for qualitative analysis, I will employ Ovala and Pantti's technique, which they used for study of the geopolitical framing of Maidan in big European newspapers. They focused on particular events that have the most emotional value, for example the downing of MH17. The news coverage within these periods, they argue, has 'particular relevance in public framing' (Ovala and Pantti 2017, 44). This would arguably be the same for the DNR media: events of great emotional value would be more relevant for them to show the strategies of legitimation. Taking the strategy of Ovala and Pantti and examining crucial moments in the DNR's existence seems the most fruitful way of ensuring a sample of data that is small enough to analyze qualitatively but still representative of the whole corpus. The need to legitimize the state in the media at these moments would be the biggest in the days leading up to these events (if anticipated) and the days immediately after.

Arguably, the first crucial events were the Minsk agreements which were signed on February 11th. These agreements were the second attempt of brokering a ceasefire in the area and were signed by all parties involved. No English language media exists during this time

sample. Nevertheless, as the Minsk agreements are crucial to the existence of the DNR I have decided to include them. A second critical moment were the 'primaries' for the elections that they would have (but were ultimately postponed). The primaries were a moment in which the DNR sought to legitimize itself both domestically and internationally through democracy. These primaries took place on the 2nd of October 2016. A third critical moment is the renewal of large-scale clashes between the Ukrainian government and the separatists on January 29, 2017. On this day the armed forces of both sides clashed over the Ukrainian controlled village of Avdiivka. A fourth critical moment was the decision by Vladimir Putin to recognize identity documents as well as other certificates of residents of the separatist republics. This move was widely seen as a recognition of the separatist republics by Russia. I will study the news coverage from the day before, the day itself, and the day after each event. The following tables will illustrate the resulting data sample:

Minsk time sample	Primaries time sample	Avdiivka time sample	Identity Documents time sample
DAN news 10 feb	DAN news 1 oct	DAN news 28 jan	DAN news 17 feb
DAN news 11 feb	DAN news 2 oct	DAN news 29 jan	DAN news 18 feb
DAN news 12 feb	DAN news 3 oct	DAN news 30 jan	DAN news 19 feb
N/A	*DoNi news 1 oct*	*DoNi news 28 jan*	*DoNi news 17 feb*
N/A	*DoNi news 2 oct*	*DoNi news 29 jan*	*DoNi news 18 feb*
N/A	*DoNi news 3 oct*	*DoNi news 30 jan*	*DoNi news 19 feb*

Table 1: days of coverage.

A complete list of Russian language articles used is provided in appendix I (pp 102-120); for the English language articles in appendix II (pp 121-130). All legitimation strategies show up in some way in all samples with two exceptions: 'democratization' is only present in the Primaries sample, and 'history, culture and identity' does not show up in DoNi news articles. The following tables illustrate which legitimation strategies are present in the four time samples of DAN news and the three samples of DoNi news. I will refer to the articles using footnotes. All translations are by the author.

DAN news	Conflict and security	State building and regime performance	Democratization	History, Culture and Identity	Patron state engagement	International engagement.
Minsk sample	X	X		X	X	X
Primaries sample	X	X	X	X	X	X
Avdiivka sample	X	X		X	X	X
Identity documents Sample	x	X		X	X	X

Table 2: legitimation strategies in the DAN sample

DoNi News	Conflict and security	State building and regime performance	Democratization	History, Culture and Identity	Patron state engagement	International engagement.
Minsk sample	X	X			X	X
Primaries sample	X	X	X		X	X
Avdiivka sample	X	X			X	X
Identity documents Sample	x	X			X	X

Table 3: legitimation strategies in the DoNi sample.

The corpus of articles resulting from such a focusing strategy is still significant: 287 in Russian and 147 in English. Russian language sample contains more articles than the English language one due to the missing Minsk sample from DoNi. Additionally, DAN publishes more articles in general. Fig. 1 and fig. 2 illustrate the articles grouped according to prevalent legitimation strategies in unrecognized states.
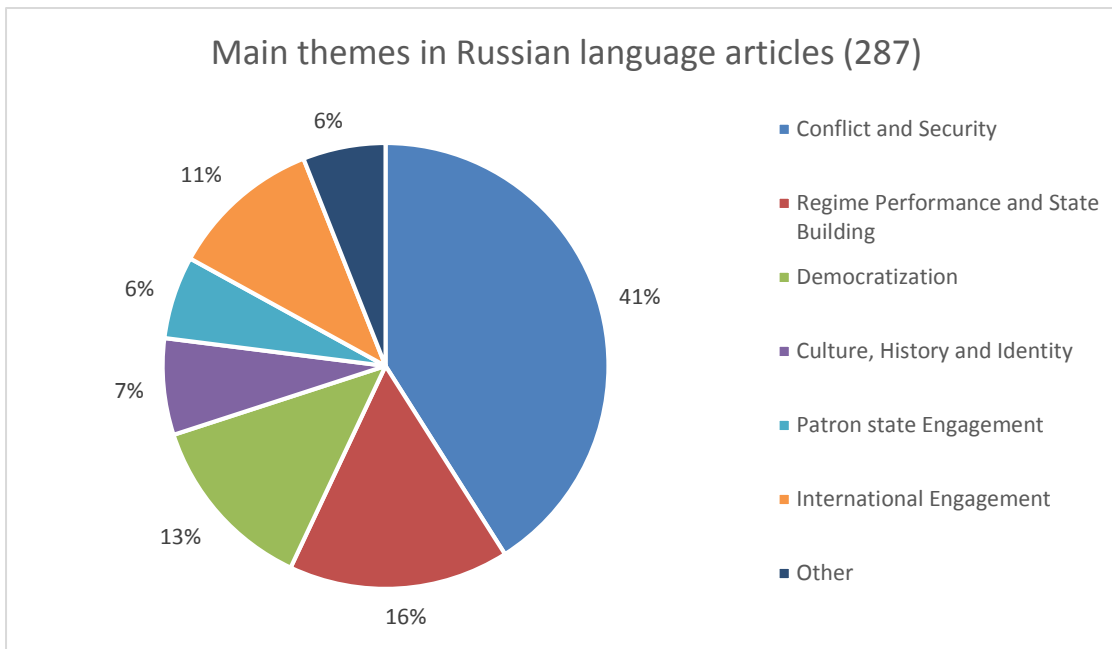
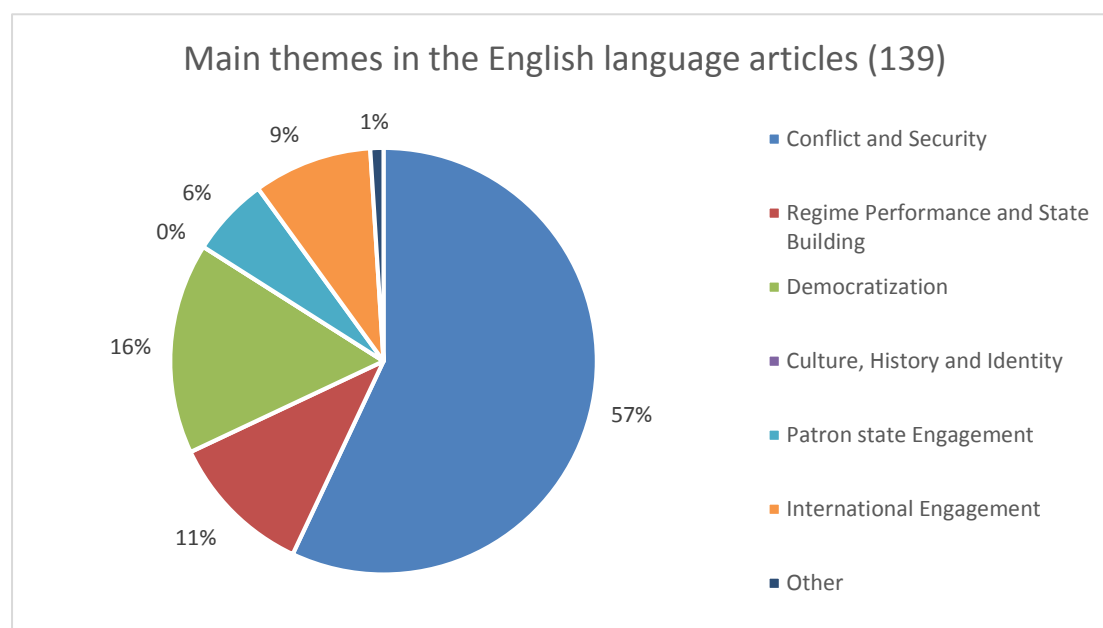*Fig. 2: breakdown of Russian language articles*

Fig. 3: breakdown of the English language articles

In some articles, multiple codes are prevalent: for example, a text may be about protecting citizens but also about international engagement. However, these graphs are a result of the texts by their main category. That there are so few in the 'other' category is mostly due to the 1) broadness of the initial categories and 2) the short length of most texts. Many articles are merely rewritten versions of earlier articles. Additionally, many articles are not diverse content wise. Particularly articles about the conflict tend to be mere statements of how many times Ukraine has shelled the DNR. The only substantial articles usually reportages and interviews which are a clear minority in the sample. Of the DoNi sample, 67 articles are translations of (parts of) articles from DAN news; almost half (48%) of the whole sample.

Chapter 3. Conflict and Security.

For unrecognized states in general, and for those engaged in an active conflict in particular, it is important to convey the message that they are able to provide security for their citizens. Unsurprisingly, articles related to providing security in the broad sense are most numerous in the time sample. As fig. four shows, in Russian language media the articles about the conflict appear most in the Avdiivka and Minsk samples. The English language sample follows the same logic, in the Avdiivka sample there are more articles about the conflict.
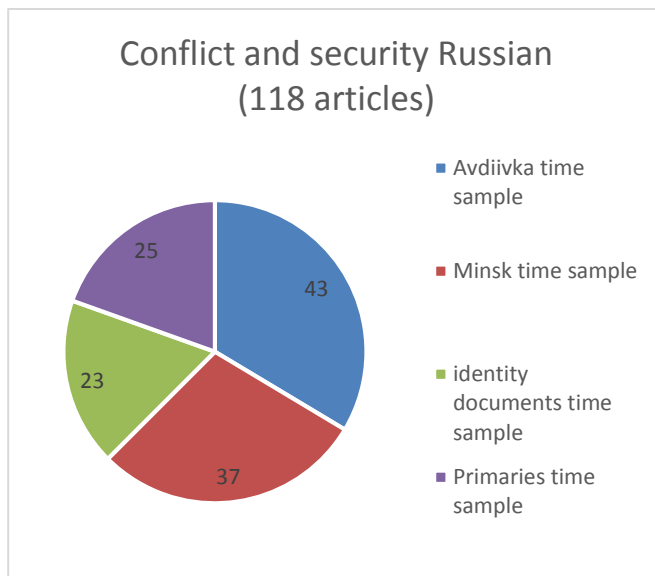

Fig 4. Russian articles by time sample

Fig 5. English articles by time sample
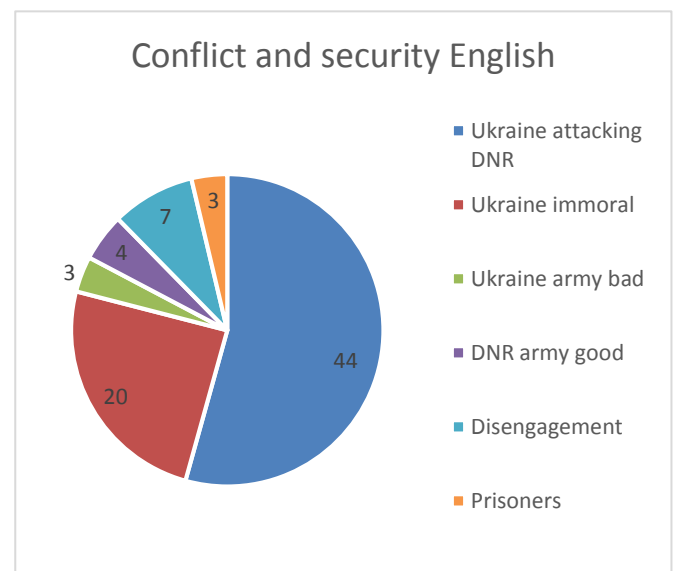

Fig 6. Subcategories Russian

Fig 7. Subcategories English

As fig. six and seven show, most articles about the conflict are simply about the DNR attacking Ukraine. These are often short articles about how many times Ukraine has shelled

the DNR. However, these articles sometimes turn into accusations that the Ukrainian army or groups fighting on the side of Kyiv in general are immoral. These have been marked as 'Ukraine immoral'. The English language sample has more of these articles. Furthermore, there are articles about how good the DNR army, and how bad the Ukrainian army is. These articles have been marked as 'DNR army good' and 'Ukraine army bad' respectively. Finally, there are issue specific articles about disengagement and prisoner exchange due to two planned actions at that time. These have been marked as disengagement and prisoners respectively.

3.1. Ukraine attacking the DNR

The largest percentage of articles in the time samples are about Ukraine attacking the DNR. Articles about Ukrainian attacks on the DNR are rarely about the DNR army being attacked. Rather, the articles talk about the Ukrainian army shelling 'settlements' or are more specific about places. For example, in the Minsk time sample there are five articles about the shelling of the bus station 'center' in the middle of Donetsk. All articles are remarkably similar, the only difference being the number of casualties mentioned. The people who die in these incidents are peaceful citizens. This is stressed in the media also in the shorter articles, where it is stressed that the Ukrainian army attacks civilians, and is thus waging a war against civilians.[6] The articles about Ukraine shelling are usually a summation of the amount of shells Ukraine has fired, or the amount of times the ceasefire has been violated.[7] No OSCE SMM reports are cited, who are usually more detailed, but also mention the ceasefire violations of the DNR. In DNR propaganda, Ukraine is always at fault. The DNR propaganda about Ukrainian attacks is seemingly quite factual to the uninformed as it regularly mentions the exact weapons used by the Ukrainian side and the caliber.[8] Thus, it may be intended as a

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[6] Such as in this article from 11 Feb. (22:47, Minsk sample): В больницу № 20 Донецка попал снаряд ВСУ. '*a shell from the VSU fell on the hospital Nr 20 in Donetsk*'. VSU is Russian language abbreviation for the armed forces of Ukraine.

[7] Such as in this article from 28 Jan. (14:33, Avdiivka sample): Число обстрелов территории ДНР со стороны украинской армии за сутки возросло до 1270 раз – Басурин. '*the number of shelling of the territory of the DNR from the side of the Ukrainian army in the past 24 hours rose to 1270 times – Basurin.*'

[8] Take this sentence from 1 Oct. (7:30 Primaries sample) as an example: Наряду с артиллерией и танками ВСУ также использовали минометы калибра 82 и 120 мм, вооружение БМП, гранатометы и стрелковое оружие. '*Next to artillery and tanks the VSU also used mortars of 82 and 120mm caliber, armed personel carriers, rocket launchers and shooting weapons.*'

mimicry of the OSCE SMM reports, or, more likely, the Ukrainian army reports on Facebook.[9] The OSCE SMM does make it into the reports occasionally. However, that is mostly when the DAN news writes that the OSCE is informed of Ukrainian[10] misdeeds by the DNR. Articles about Ukraine attacking the DNR army are the exception: there the DNR army is able to stop the Ukrainian side.[11] Perhaps the DNR is trying to put forward the image that Ukraine is waging a war against the civilian population of the Donbas.

The English language articles follow the same line as Russian ones in that the majority of articles are about the conflict. Many small articles in DoNi news are translations of those that appear on DAN news. A major difference between DoNi and DAN is that the former produces translations of the 'Donetsk Defense Reports' and 'Donetsk Defense Situation Report' which appear in the form of TV programs and press conferences by 'ministry of defense' spokesperson Eduard Basurin respectively. These are longer articles in which Basurin summarizes the Ukrainian attacks of the past days. DoNi news claims to give the 'official translation'.[12] The beginning of these reports are similar to the short articles described above. Later however, Basurin talks about possible future attacks from Kyiv. Particularly in the Avdiivka sample, Basurin's remarks are allegations that Kyiv is instigating the conflict. The articles take the same line as Russian language one. Namely, as described above, Kyiv is held responsible for the conflict. For example, in a report about Ukrainian shelling an 'official' takes it as proof that the 'Ukrainian criminal government is not planning to follow Minsk agreements and make all that is possible to disrupt them, leading fratricidal war'.[13] The civilians living in the DNR are painted as victims. In the DONI articles, Ukraine

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[9] The Joint Forces Operation centre regularly posts similar updates about the conflict, although with significantly less stress on the targeting of civilians.

[10] Such as in this article from the 29th of Jan. (12:32, Avdiivka sample): «Все факты преступлений украинского командования зафиксированы следственной группой и будут переданы в комиссию по расследованию преступлений ВСУ и представителям Миссии ОБСЕ», — подытожил Басурин. '*All facts about the crimes of the Ukrainian command will be recorded by the investigation team and will be given to the commission of the research of crimes by the VSU and the representatives of the OSCE mission – summed up Basurin.*'

[11] Such as in this 19 Feb. (14:02, Identity Documents) article: ВСУ при поддержке минометов атаковали позиции ДНР под Донецком — Басурин. '*The VSU with the help of mortars attacked the position of the DNR under Donetsk – Basurin.*'

[12] From 28 Jan. (14:54, Avdiivka DoNi sample): Vice-Commander of the DPR People's Militia Eduard Basurin, official translation by DoNi News Agency.

[13] From 17 Feb. (15:22 Identity Documents DoNi sample). Not the badly translated Russian.

is not shelling military positions, but civilian infrastructure and settlements. DONI news puts out the message that Ukraine is always at fault for ceasefire violations. It is easy to record ceasefire violations; but it is more difficult to determine who violated the ceasefire first. The OSCE SMM has cameras and monitors close to the line of contact, and most Western media get their sources about ceasefire violations from the impartial SMM (as opposed to the Ukrainian army or the DNR/LNR). DONI news is pushing a counter narrative based on DNR army sources. Articles demonizing the enemy in a conflict situation are the norm.

3.2. Ukrainian attacks as immoral

Articles stressing the immorality of the Ukrainian army or parts of that army are either about events that happened, or planned events. In DNR media, Ukrainian attacks on DNR territory are constantly referred to as attacks on 'settlements' or on 'peaceful citizens'.[14] [15] This already sets the tone of how the DNR writes about Ukraine. Nevertheless, there are regular articles that go further than stressing the target of shelling. Take for example a series of articles about the shelling of the Donetsk central bus station in 2015. The progression of those articles is noteworthy: where the first article mentions only the tragedy and the number of wounded,[16] later articles put the act in (the DNRs) perspective. A tragedy such as this is used to emphasize that Ukraine is bad and does not care about its population: in an article later that day,[17] Kyiv is accused of indifference towards the inhabitants of the DNR. In the piece itself it becomes clear how multiple themes are used when an official from the 'Ministry of Internal Affairs' calls on international society to pay attention of the 'genocide' the regime in Kyiv is perpetrating . In another article about the incident, 'sabotage and reconnaissance groups' are

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[14] Such as this article title from 17 Feb. (9:42, Identity Documents sample) suggests: ВСУ с вечера обстреляли девять населенных пунктов ДНР, выпущено порядка 365 снарядов и мин. '*The VSU since yesterday shelled nine settlements of the DNR with about 365 grenades and mines.*'

[15] Such as this article title from 29 Jan. (13:49, Avdiivka sample): Мирный житель ранен в результате обстрела Донецка со стороны ВСУ — командование. '*Peaceful civilian injured by shelling of Donetsk by the VSU – command.*'

[16] From 11 Feb. (9:17, Minsk sample): ВСУ нанесли удар по центру Донецка, снаряд попал в автостанцию «Центр», где находилось большое количество людей. '*The VSU (Ukr army) struck the center of Donetsk, a shell hit the bus station 'center' where there were a large amount of people present* '.

[17] The last 11 Feb. (14:47, Minsk sample) article about the bus incident features the title: «Киевский режим окончательно продемонстрировал свое безразличие в отношении жизней и судеб миллионов граждан Донецкой Народной Республики» '*The Kyiv regime finally showed its indifference towards the lives and fates of millions of citizens of the Donetsk People's Republic .* '

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blamed for the tragedy.[18] This example shows how a story about Ukrainian shelling evolves into an accusation of genocide. In February 2017 the DNR was busy preparing a petition for the 'world leaders'.[19] This petition was an appeal to Trump, Merkel, and Putin to get Ukraine to stop the 'genocide' in the Donbas.[20]

In the English language version of the articles, the same wording is used. This is similar to Putin's rhetoric for justifying the takeover of Crimea (Starink 2016). Moreover, it fits in the propaganda story of vilifying Ukrainian nationalist as Nazis, and seeing the Maidan revolution as a coup by Ukrainian nationalists. Other articles about the Ukrainian side attacking the DNR that are not about Debaltsevo mention the notorious Azov battalion, which is presented as a Nazi battalion.[21] The DNR militia is then credited with 'destroying' some Azov battalion soldiers. Besides the Azov battalion, the 'right sector' fighters are also features in the articles. These battalions are well known to the local population as they feature in Russian language media about Ukrainian as 'boogeymen'; symbols of a nationalist Ukraine that has become fascist. Thus, in DNR media, when these groups are mentioned it is about their (planned) immoral acts against the DNR.[22] Stories about the horrors that the Ukrainian army or battalions are supposedly perpetrating are an integral part of Russian and DNR propaganda. A notorious one is a Russian propaganda piece about the Ukrainian army supposedly having publicly crucified a little boy in Slovyansk.[23] Moreover, in the 'Direct Line'

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[18]The article from 11 Feb. (10:12, Minsk sample): Обстрел автостанции в Донецке был спланированной диверсией. '*The shelling of the bus station in Donetsk was a planned diversion*'

[19] From 18 Feb. (18:46, Identity documents sample): Обращение к трем мировым лидерам о ситуации в Донбассе поддержали свыше 164 тыс. жителей ДНР. '*appeal to three world leaders about the situation in Donbas is supported by more than 164 thousand inhabitants of the DNR*'.

[20] A copy paste sentence, used in articles about the petition (Identity Documents sample, 10:56; 10:56; 13:12; 17:07; 18:46).

[21] Such as in this article from the 12 Feb. (10:15): Нацистский батальон «Азов» мешает эвакуации мирного населения поселка Широкино. '*Nazi 'Azov' battalion disrupts the evacuation of peaceful civillians form the village of Shirokino*'

[22] such as this headline from 28 Jan. (14:10, Avdiivka sample): «Правый сектор» готовит провокационные обстрелы объектов с хлором вблизи ДФС для обвинения сил ДНР. '*'Right sector' is preparing provocative shooting of objects with chlorine in the vicinity of the Donetsk Filtration Station so that they can accuse the forces of the DNR.*' The DFS is a vital part of the drinking water infrastructure of Donbas.

[23] "Fake: Crucifixion in Slovyansk." StopFake.org. April 07, 2017. Accessed Oct.ober 17, 2018. https://www.stopfake.org/en/lies-crucifixion-on-channel-one/.

format Zakharchenko suggested that Ukrainians where preparing a nuclear disaster at a power plant in Zaporozhe.[24] While these stories seem absurd, it is important to note that Russian propaganda about Ukraine centered on the absurd. However, the absurd, when repeated long enough, becomes plausible in people's minds (Tarentieva 2018). It is clear that the DNR in its media is attributing horrible things to the Ukrainian side.

Another example in which the Ukrainian side is shown to be immoral was during the evacuation of Debal'tseve, and the exchange of prisoners.[25] [26] The first example is about the supposedly planned evacuation of citizens from the besieged city of Debal'tseve that was in the hands of the Ukrainian army at that time. The DNR complaint was that the citizens were only informed of an evacuation to Artemovsk (now Bakhmut), and not of the evacuation of into the DNR. Eventually, states the article, it was too late to evacuate them. Another article about the evacuation of Debal'tseve is about the evacuation of Ukrainian army soldiers, who, according to the DNR, should give up and sit out the rest of the war in captivity in the DNR. The DNR spokesperson for the 'ministry of defense', Eduard Basurin is quoted as saying that the DNR will guarantee a peaceful withdrawal. They promise to let the soldiers stay alive, in contrast to the Ukrainian side, where they will be shot by detachments from the army.[27]

In the English language sample the language used to describe the Ukrainian side of the conflict is more inflammatory than in Russian language sample. Furthermore, there is a clear differentiation between the Ukrainian army and the battalions fighting in the war. The English language sample has a stronger focus on the supposed immorality of the Ukrainian side. The Ukrainian army is variously described as murderers,[28] terrorists,[29] criminals,[30] and

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[24] Zakharchenko, Aleksandr. "Онлайн-конференция Александра Захарченко с жителями Запорожья (ЗАВЕРШЕНО)." Dan-news. June 08, 2016. Accessed May 07, 2018. https://dan-news.info/politics/onlajn-konferenciya-aleksandra-zaxarchenko-s-zhitelyami-zaporozhya-obnovlyaetsya.html. 'От них ВСЁ МОЖЕТ БЫТЬ, даже ядерный теракт.' '*From them EVERYTHING is possible, even a nuclear terror attack.*'

[25] From 11 Feb. (20:25, Minsk sample): Организованная эвакуация из Дебальцево в ДНР остановилась, Киев не идет навстречу Донецку – Басурин. '*The organized evacuation from Debal'tsevo into the DNR has stopped, Kyiv does not agree with Donetsk - Basurin*'

[26] Four articles (Minsk sample) in total: 10 Feb. (15:33), 11 Feb. (13:19), 12 Feb. (17:33; 17:36).

[27] From 11 Feb. (20:25, Minsk sample): « Мы гарантируем им мирный выход и жизнь». «Если они будут выходить в противоположную сторону, они будут расстреливаться заградотрядами» *We guarantee them a peaceful withdrawal and life. 'When they will exit to the side controlled by the enemy, they will be shot by detachments'*

[28] From 30 Jan. (12:08 Avdiivka DoNi sample): Mayorsk checkpoint in Gorlovka shelled by Ukrainian murderers.

punishers.[31] Ukrainian battalions are also described as terrorists. Moreover, they are deemed Nazis,[32] and nationalists.[33] This reflects Russian propaganda that holds that Ukrainian nationalism is close to Nazism in. DoNi does not make up these terms itself. Rather, it borrows them from the established Russian language narrative. Only when the article deals specifically with something immoral these terms are used. Moreover, when talking about the Ukrainian army, the 'softer' terms are used such as criminals and punishers. Interestingly, while the Ukrainian army is depicted as immoral because they too are shelling civilian infrastructure, they are also depicted as *victims* of the battalions. In the Avdiivka sample Basurin describes them as nationalist battalions (Particularly Right Sector) that are uncontrolled by Kyiv.[34] Again, Right Sector is used as a boogeyman. Just as with the normal attacks, DoNi news promoting Russian/DNR line of the war in the Donbas. This includes accusing the Ukrainian side of terrible deeds. Interestingly, in the DoNi sample there were more words used to indicate the immorality of the Ukrainian side, particularly of the Ukrainian groups fighting in the war. Due to the target audience of DoNi, these articles are not meant to bolster domestic legitimacy.

3.3 Praising the DNR army

The DNR army is described as competent in in articles about the Ukraine army attacking the DNR. Moreover, the technicians of the DNR army are painted as heroes who help keep

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[29] From 30 Jan. (16:25 Avdiivka DoNi sample): (…) Ukrainian terrorists used their usual tactics of warfare, and launched massive artillery strikes (…).

[30] From 28 Jan. (15:55 Avdiivka DoNi sample): Ukrainian criminals shell DPR territory 1,270 times over past 24 hours.

[31] From 17 Feb. (16:41 Identity Documents DoNi sample): Ukrainian punishers open fire at DPR territory over six thousand times.

[32] From 30 Jan. (17:24, Avdiivka DoNi sample): More than five Ukrainian servicemen were killed by the Ukrainian Nazis (…).

[33] From 18 Feb. (16:30, Identity Documents DoNi sample): In particular, units of nationalist battalions were given the task to conduct attacks on vital facilities and infrastructure of all localities near the frontline.

[34] From 30 Jan. (17:24, Avdiivka DoNi sample). 'More than 5 Ukrainian servicemen were killed by the Ukrainian Nazis, and nearly 10 were wounded.'

citizens safe by clearing mines.[35] Other ways the DNR is described as protecting is in the articles about the possible evacuation from Debal'tseve and articles about the exchange of prisoners with Kyiv, and in an article about mobilization. The article starts with a statement that Zakharchenko ordered mobilization in February. Then, the 'boss' of the center where people can apply to become volunteers is quoted as saying that unlike in Ukraine, where there is forced mobilization, in the DNR it is voluntary.[36] To prove this, they quote a man who has just signed up who says he cannot watch anymore as peaceful citizens are shelled.[37] In this article several elements come together: the DNR army is portrayed as good because it consists of volunteers, the Ukrainian army is bad because they use forced conscription, and the Ukrainian army predominantly attacks civilian infrastructure. In other articles a similar pattern can be observed.[38] First, the DNR army is portrayed as good since it captured strategic heights around the city of Debal'tseve, then, it is explained that despite that the Ukrainian army attacked several settlements. It finishes with a summary of the losses of the Ukrainian army. In another article, Basurin is quoted saying that the DNR army is doing everything it can to protect Ukrainian soldiers.[39] The DNR is presented as not wanting to harm ordinary soldiers. In the issue specific category of prisoner exchanges, the DNR presents itself in the articles as organized and ready to exchange prisoners. This is contrasted with the Kyiv side that is supposedly unorganized.[40] Indeed, the DNR is presented as both ready and able to participate in these exchanges, while the Kyiv side is characterized as neither.

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[35] From 10 Feb. (15:17 Minsk sample) and 11 Feb. (14:34, Minsk time sample)

[36] From 10 Feb. (no time given, Minsk sample): «В отличие от принудительной мобилизации на Украине, набор в ряды ополчения ДНР происходит на добровольной основе (…). '*Unlike the coercive mobilization in Ukraine, requitement in the ranks of the militia in the DNR is on a voluntary basis (…)*'

[37] From 10 Feb. (no time given, Minsk sample): Нет сил больше смотреть на беспрерывные обстрелы жилых кварталов, расстрелянные автобусы и троллейбусы, — рассказал доброволец Сергей Латынцев. '*I have no more strength to look at the shelling of civilian houses, the shooting of busses and trolleybuses – said volunteer Sergej Latyncev*'

[38] Such as in this one from 10 Feb. (21:04, Minsk sample). Ополчение ДНР заняло все высоты вокруг Дебальцево – Минобороны ДНР. '*The militia of the DNR capture all heights aroud Debaltsevo – Ministry of Defence of the DNR*'.

[39] Вместе с тем замкомкорпуса МО ДНР заверил, что ополчение делает все возможное, чтобы сохранить жизни солдат ВСУ. '*together with the communication department of the Min Def of the DNR, stated that the militia is doing everything it can to protect the lives of Soldiers of the VSU*'

[40] Such as this article from 11 Feb. (13:19) suggests: Обмен пленными между ДНР и ВСУ отложен из-за бюрократических трудностей с украинской стороны. '*prisoner exchange between the DNR and the VSU deferred due to bureaucratic difficulties on the Ukrainian side*'

DoNi follows the DAN line in describing the DNR army as superior in both fighting prowess and morals. Comparatively, about the same percentage of the articles about the DNR protecting citizens is praising the DNR army. An interesting article that appears in the DoNi sample is the translation of a commercial aired on DNR TV that attempts to recruit men into the army. The recruits are promised 15,000 rubles as well as clothing and food.[41] This wage is well above average in the DNR. Furthermore, the DoNi features a video in which citizens record video messages for the Ukrainian army. DoNi news translated some of these messages, thereby emphasizing the local character of the uprising. They feature classic propaganda lines such as 'We are so fed up by Ukrainians, so-called 'liberators' that our people rebelled on their own without the help of Russian military.'[42] It seems that DoNi is not so much occupied with praising the DNR as with discrediting the Ukrainian side.

3.4: Stressing the incompetence of the Ukrainian army

The Ukrainian army is described as being demoralized and/or incompetent. DAN news portrays the Ukrainian generals and politicians as the main culprits, who send their soldiers to war without a reason. Mentions of the losses of the Ukrainian army get their own article.[43] Other articles are entirely or partially devoted to the Ukrainian army being demoralized and incompetent. For example, there is an article that describes how Ukrainian officers tried to flee Debal'tseve in civilian clothing. This is presented as proof that ordinary Ukrainian soldiers are not told about their encirclement and the officers only want to save their own lives.[44] The Ukrainian army in Debal'tseve is characterized as 'disorganized' and 'depressed'

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[41] From 30 Jan. (19:18 Avdiivka DONI sample): 'The salary from 15,000 rubles is paid. Clothing, food security and subsistence support are provided.' At the time, 15000 rubles was about 230 euros; a good salary in the DNR.

[42] From 18 Feb. (15:12, Identity Documents DONI sample).

[43] Such as this one from 10 Feb. 12:19: Украинские силовики потеряли за ночь 42 человека убитыми и ранеными — Минобороны '*Ukrainian security forces lost 42 men killed and wounded in in one night – ministry of defense*'

[44] Article from 10 Feb. (21:00, Minsk sample) Офицеры ВСУ бросают свои подразделения и скрываются из Дебальцево – Минобороны ДНР. '*Officiers of the VSU leave their units and sneak out of Debal'tsevo* '

in another article, captured by the dumb decision by the 'men in Kyiv'.[45] [46] The demoralization of the Ukrainian army is still an issue later on in the conflict.[47] Moreover, in some articles about losses of the Ukrainian army, the Ukrainian side itself is blamed for the losses.[48] As we have seen in the previous section on radical groups, 'Right Sector' plays the role of boogeyman in DNR propaganda, and this articles serves an example of how different themes overlap in articles. the English language articles there are even two instances in which the Ukrainian forces are depicted as drunks. Basurin states in his defense rapport on the 1st of October 2016 that areas were shelled due to the drunken behavior of Ukrainian commanders.[49] The other articles states that a 'Drunken Ukrainian soldier shot himself'.[50]

3.5: Disengagement in Petrivske

In October 2016, both sides of the conflict agreed to a disengagement of forces in the Petrivske area. This was confirmed in talks with the OSCE in September that year (OSCE 2016). In articles about this disengagement, the DNR is presented as the side that is willing to commit to the agreed measures. Ukraine is depicted as unwilling to commit to the agreements and to pull back their troops from the disengagement area.[51] Agreements signed in September between the OSCE, the Joint Center for Control and Coordination, the Ukrainian army and

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[45] Article from 12 Feb. (19:47, Minsk sample): ВСУ в Дебальцево дезорганизованы и подавлены, все попытки прорвать окружение безуспешны – Минобороны. '*The VSU in Debal'tsevo is disorganized and depressed, every attempt to break the encirclement is unsuccessful – ministry of defense*'

[46] From 12 Feb. (19:47, Minsk sample): «Но, к сожалению, господа в Киеве приносят военнослужащих в жертву своих амбиций. '*But, at the moment, the gentlemen in Kyiv bring soldiers to their death for their ambitions*'.

[47] Such as this 17 Feb. article shows (15:06, Identity Documents sample): За неделю из украинских подразделений под Авдеевкой дезертировал 21 человек – разведка ДНР. '*In a week 21 people deserted from Ukrainian detachments around Avdeevka – intelligence service of the DNR*'.

[48] From 29 Jan. (18:21, Avdiivka sample): (…) подразделения ВСУ попали под минометный обстрел группировки «Правый сектор», в результате «дружественного огня» Киев также потерял 5 боевиков убитыми и более 10 ранеными. '*(…) Detachments of the VSU came under mortar fire by the group 'Right Sector, as a result of the 'friendly fire', Kyiv also lost 5 soldiers killed and more than 10 injured.*'

[49] From 1 Oct. (17:13, Primaries DoNi sample): (…) 'the commander of the 58th separate motor-infantry brigade Dropaty finished up the entire arsenal of forbidden arms being in an alcoholic delirium' (…).

[50] From 28 Jan. (17:40 Avdiivka DoNi sample).

[51] From 1 Oct. (13:05, Primaries sample): «Однако Украина по каким-то причинам отказалась это делать в симметричном порядке». ''*However, Ukraine for whatever reason refused to do the same in symmetrical order*''

the DNR/LNR stipulated that symmetrical withdrawal of troops should take place. These symmetrical withdrawals are coordinated jointly by Ukrainian and Russian army officers of the JCCC and observed by the SMM of the OSCE. Articles about how Ukraine is not implementing the Minsk agreements are common in DNR propaganda. The articles about the Petrivske disengagement zone fit exactly in that line. Take for example the article from the 3rd of October (16:40), which is just a small announcement that the OSCE asked Kyiv to 'take measures' after the shelling of a DNR village from a position where there should not have been any troops.[52] The eventual disengagement did not take place on 3rd of October. DAN news was quick to blame the Ukrainian side. DoNi news only published translations of DAN articles about the disengagement thus echoing the DAN news line about Ukrainian sabotage of these agreements.

3.6: Conclusion: conflict and insecurity?

The articles about 'conflict and security' do not present a celebration of the strength of the DNR army nor of the military successes of the DNR. Rather, the focus is on Ukraine attacking civilians in the DNR, and the Ukrainian army being both immoral and incompetent. On the one hand, as we saw in the previous section, the Ukrainian army seems bent to willfully destroy the civilian population and perpetrate a genocide of the Donbas with the help of extremist groups and indiscriminate shelling. On the other hand, the Ukrainian army is painted as demoralized, incompetent, and sometimes at odds with the extremist groups. This seems to be contradictory: the Ukrainian army is demoralized and incompetent but at the same time is something to be feared. Perhaps this is a consequence of the DNR having multiple goals in the strategy of providing security to their citizens. The first is emphasizing the need for protection. The second is to ensure them that the DNR is able to provide security. The third is making reintegration into Ukraine seem unthinkable, thereby positioning the DNR (with Russia's support) as the sole guarantor of the DNR people's security. The second goal seems less prevalent in the propaganda than the first and third. The articles intended for an international audience seemed to focus predominantly on discrediting Ukraine. They repeat Russian/DNR propaganda line, and are similar to other Russian news outlets aimed at a foreign audience.

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[52] From 3 Oct. (16:40, Primaries sample):

As unrecognized states often prioritize their ability to protect citizens from the parent state, the DNR media posting articles about Ukrainian shelling which they are powerless to stop seems counterintuitive (Berg and Mölder 2012; Caspersen 2015). However, seeing the articles as reminders that the DNR needs to exist to protect the people from Ukraine, they fit with what scholars write about unrecognized states. Internal legitimacy rests on the ability of the entity to protect the community against a hostile parent state (Berg and Mölder 2012). In the case of the DNR, there is exceptional effort into painting the parent state as hostile. Kemp describes the attitude of the local population of a secessionist movement towards the people in power there thus: 'they may be bastards, but they are our bastards' (Kemp 2005, 19: in Caspersen 2015). The overwhelming attention to Ukraine attacking the DNR points to the DNR trying to nurture that feeling. The population hating Ukraine is more important than them liking the DNR. In the English language media directed at an international audience, the explicit goal is to demonize Ukraine. This is reflected in the larger percentage of articles devoted to the immorality of Ukraine. DoNi news is justifying the war to an international audience, framing it as self defense by the DNR against a hostile Ukraine.

Chapter 4: State Building and Regime Performance.

Unrecognized and recognized states aim to provide public goods to their citizens, and the DNR is no exception. State building and regime performance are key components of legitimacy in general, and legitimacy in unrecognized sates in particular. State building is an endogenous process of *how* the state interacts with the population. This usually entails the building of both institutions and capacity. Regime performance on the other hand, is how well the state is able to provide for its citizens in a broad sense by delivering public goods.
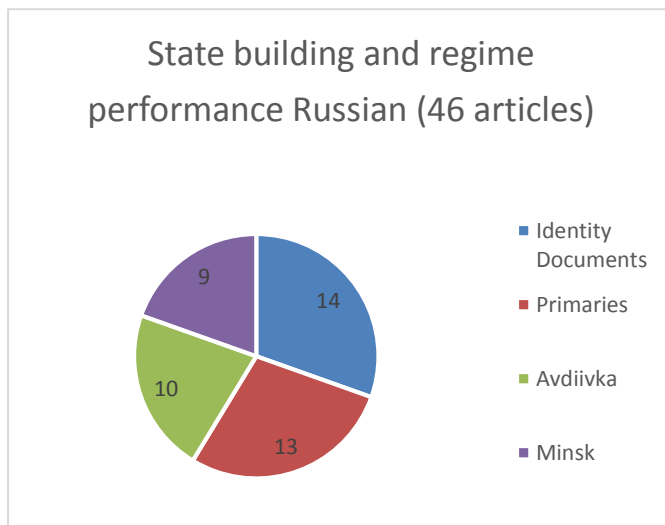

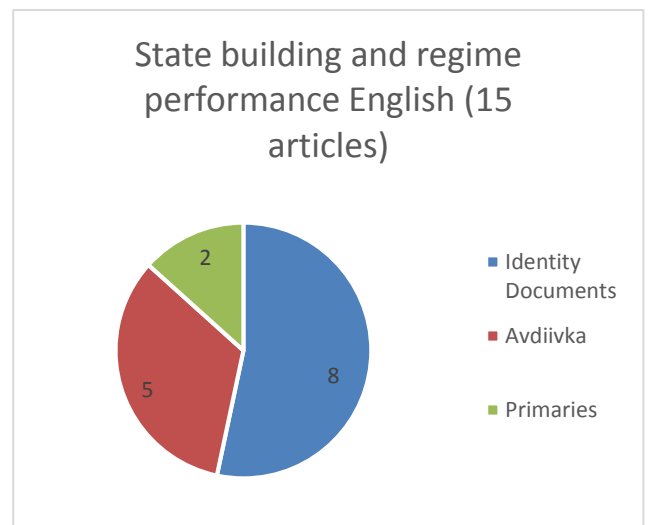*Fig 8. Russian articles by time sample*

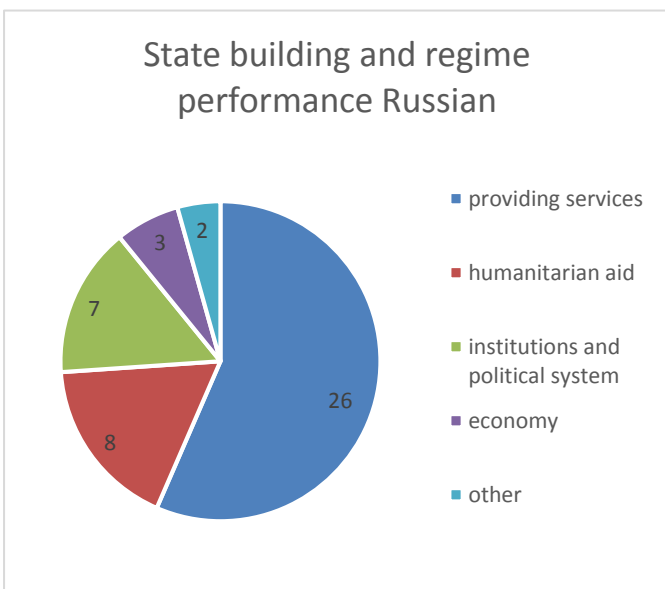*Fig 9. English articles by time sample*

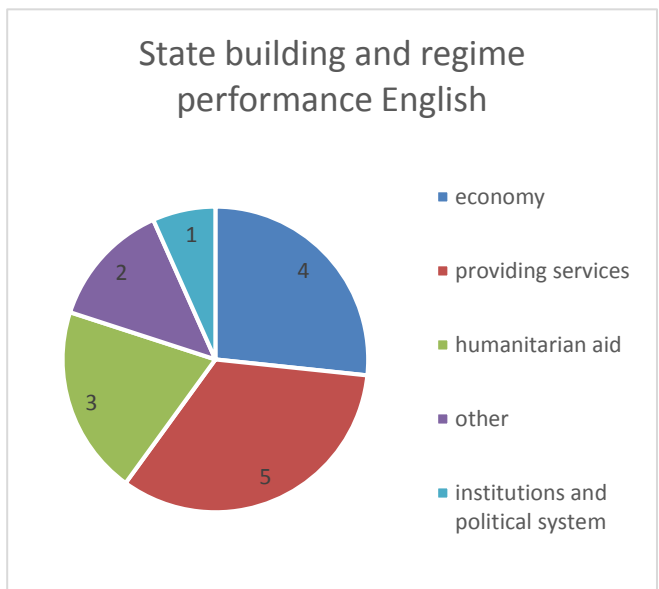*Fig 10. Subcategories Russian*

Fig 11. Subcategories English

In this thesis, I have decided to analyze the public good of 'security' separately. I have made an exception for articles about the police keeping order inside the DNR. Under regime

performance, I have also grouped articles about the economic development of the DNR. In a situation as polarized as in the DNR, the economy is also political. It must be clear that in the DNR media there are several strategies to refer to state building or regime performance. In general, these should be seen as part of the same strategy: conveying the message that, despite the war, the DNR is functioning as a state. In the DAN news sample, the majority of articles is about the DNR providing services while in the DoNi sample there is no clear majority. In Russian language sample, the articles about regime performance are divided across the time samples equally. In the DoNi sample the Identity Documents sample has the most articles although the division of articles is different from the DAN sample: there are fewer articles devoted to providing services, and only one to institutions and political system.

4.1: Providing services

As DAN news agency functions as an official outlet of the DNR, it does not only publish news articles but also official statements. These highlight the ability of the DNR to take care of its citizens by claiming that the DNR provides social services as well as free 'republican' TV channels.[53] [54] The TV channel example shows the at least rhetorical commitment to a DNR that encompasses the whole of the Donbas: Kramatorsk and Volnovakha were located in government-controlled territory at the time of publishing. DAN news writes about the DNR as if the state is rebuilding all things destroyed during the war: '*80 people received the qualification to become a trolleybus or tram driver in the time of the conflict.*'[55] The DNR is depicted as a developing state. Shortages of goods or services are explained as a consequence of the war.[56] The DNR is depicted as able to cater to the needs of its population.[57] In the

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[53] From 11 Feb. (14:53, Minsk sample): Сообщение Министерства труда и соцполитики ДНР о выплатах компенсаций пострадавшим от военных действий. '*Announcement by the ministry of labor and social affairs of the DNR about the payment of compensation of those injured by hostilities*'.

[54] Article from 12 Feb. (17:52, Minsk sample): Зона вещания цифрового телевидения ДНР охватила регион от Волновахи до Краматорска — Минсвязи. '*The broadcasting reach of DNR TV encompasses the region from Volnovakhi to Kramatorsk – Ministry of communication*'.

[55] From 28 Jan. (12:08, Avdiivka sample): Квалификацию водителей троллейбуса и трамвая в ДНР за время конфликта получили 80 человек.

[56] Such as medical workers: from 10 Feb. (11:34, Minsk sample): Центру экстренной медпомощи ДНР не хватает 700 сотрудников, пополнения ждут через несколько месяцев. '*The center for emergency medical help of the DNR lacks 700 employees, the filling up these positions will take a few months*'.

[57] From 11 Feb. (17:18 Minsk sample): ДНР обеспечена основными медикаментами на несколько месяцев вперед — Минздрав. '*The DNR is provided with basic medical supplies for the next few months ahead.*'

category of the DNR helping to build up there are also short articles about DNR restoring infrastructure damaged by Ukrainian shelling. These articles are primarily found in the samples with many articles about the conflict and shelling.[58] [59] Besides houses, DAN writes about other facilities destroyed by Ukrainian shelling which are being restored currently, such as the return of a bus line to the train station in Donetsk.[60] Rebuilding and restoring seems to be an important theme that encompasses every facet of life in the DNR: there are even articles about restoring forests.[61] Several articles in the primaries sample credit the DNR police,[62] and medical workers[63] with providing security and medical assistance respectively. In these articles the DNR provides security as a public good. The DNR also stresses its ability to provide in emergencies.[64] Thus, the 'providing services' part relies to a large extent on rebuilding that what was destroyed during the war and providing security, medical services, or other services to the population.

Slightly more than half of the articles in the broad category of regime performance and state building in Russian sample fall in this category. In the English language sample they make up less than a quarter. The English language articles are about the restoring of damage after shelling, the easing of checkpoint procedures and the increase of pensions.[65] Still, one would expect the propaganda mouthpiece of an unrecognized state to celebrate the regime performance of that state. DoNi news seems to be more focused on criticizing Ukraine than on praising the DNR. DoNi news is more focused on humanitarian aid and the economy. Another explanation could be that DoNi news does pay attention to regime performance of the DNR, but that this does not come forward in the selected time sample. I believe this is

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[58] From 28 Jan. (17:04) 29 Jan. (16:43; 18:10) 30 Jan. (17:15) all Avdiivka sample.

[59] From 19 Feb. (15:12, Identity documents sample).

[60] From 3 Oct. (15:03, Primaries sample).

[61] From 2 Oct. (7:50, Primaries sample) and 19 Feb. (8:00, Identity documents sample).

[62] 2 Oct. (11:13; 14:26; 15:27; 21:23; primaries sample). Or 18 Feb. (15:58 Identity Documents sample).

[63] 3 Oct. (13:10 Primaries sample)

[64] From 30 Jan. (17:31, Avdiivka sample): МЧС ДНР в связи с ухудшением погоды открыло в Республике 12 мобильных пунктов обогрева. *'The Ministry of emergency situations of the DNR in reaction to the worsening weather opened 12 mobile heating points.'*

[65] 29 Jan. (17:58, Avdiivka DoNi sample): about restoring power (translation). 28 Jan. (15:37 Avdiivka DoNi sample): about pensions and 17 Feb. (15:19 Identity Documents DoNi sample): about checkpoints.

doubtful seeing as the DNR providing goods and services for its citizens was a prominent feature of Russian language time samples.

4.2: Humanitarian aid

In February 2017 the DNR and LNR embarked on a 'humanitarian aid' program for the citizens of the DNR/LNR living in 'temporarily occupied territories'.[66] Note the use of language: the DNR uses exactly the same terminology Kyiv uses to talk about the Donbas. The name of the program is telling: '*Humanitarian program for the unification of the people of Donbas*'.[67] The program was supposed to provide free medicine and education, social payments for WWII veterans and aid for families separated by the conflict. Zakharchenko and Plotnitskij argue that the '*Rajons of Donbas controlled by the Ukrainian authorities are on the brink of a humanitarian and ecological disaster.*'[68] According to the DNR, the situation in Ukraine for 'their' citizens is worsening as the standard of living is declining. Moreover, the Ukrainian government is accused of indifference towards the population of the Donbas, causing the region to be on the brink of disaster. They reason that they should come to help 'their' citizens. Additionally, the program is meant to 'unify' the population living on different sides of the contact line.

The DNR can not provide for its own population without the help from Russia. It is thus likely that the program was not meant to be implemented but was meant to accomplish other goals. First, it is a way to impress the population living on the Ukrainian side of the contact line and to discredit Ukraine. Second, by proposing to provide humanitarian aid the DNR positions itself as a state that is not only able to provide for its own citizens, but also for those living in territory not controlled by them. Starting from January 25 2017, Ukrainian

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[66] The announcement of the Humanitarian program, in the article From 17 Feb. (12:20, Identity Documents sample) begins with explaining that: наши земляки, дончане и луганчане, проживающие на территории, временно подконтрольной Украине, находятся в сложном положении. '*our countrymen, residents of Donetsk and Lugansk living in territory temporarily under the control of Ukraine, are in a difficult situation.*'

[67] From 17 Feb. (16:24, Identity Documents sample): Гуманитарная программа по воссоединению народа Донбасса. The article consists of a picture of the document that signed to start the program.

[68] From 17 Feb. (12:21, Identity Documents time sample): Захарченко и Плотницкий отметили, что подконтрольные украинской власти районы Донбасса поставлены на грань гуманитарной и экологической катастрофы.

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battalions started a blockade of the Donbas. Trains carrying coal and metal were blocked, but the blockade extended to other products as well such as alcohol, wood and cigarettes (Kostanyan and Remizov 2017). It is likely that the humanitarian program was set up as a response to this blockade. In the articles, it is argued that while Ukraine puts up a blockade, the DNR is trying to unite. DoNi provides translations of the aforementioned articles about the humanitarian program.[69] An article about a UN report that claims a million children in Donbas need urgent humanitarian aid is also present in the sample.[70] This reinforces the argument that the citizens of the Donbas need a humanitarian aid program. As opposed to the DNR providing services, Russian and English samples have about the same percentage of articles about the humanitarian program. Perhaps this reflects the international propagandistic nature of the program.

4.3: Institutions and political system

In the DNR media, the institutions and political system of the DNR are described as real legitimate entities. DAN news publishes short articles about DNR 'government' decisions which mention the state organs that carried them out.[71] People working the for DNR are presented with their full official title in the media. [72] In international media the titles are always preceded by 'self declared', or 'fake' or may be put in brackets. Part of state building is the building of a political system. This does not only relate to ministries and official position, but also to the workings of a parliament and political activism. Articles about the founding of a workers union of metallurgy and mining as well as the founding of the Donetsk department of the youth wing of the leading political party also fit in this category.[73] [74] The

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[69] In 17 Feb. (12:40 Identity Document DoNi sample).

[70] From 18 Feb. (11:22 Identity Documents DoNi sample). This article shows the alarmist nature of DONI. The tilte of the article is 'One million children in Donbas need urgent humanitarian aid — UNICEF'.

[71] Such as this article from 11 Feb. (18:01): В ДНР отказались от взимания таможенных сборов на импортируемые продукты. '*The DNR refuses to collect customs fees on imported products*'.

[72] Such as Pushilin who is the официальный представитель ДНР в Контактной группе '*Official representative of the DNR in the contact group*' or Basurin who is the заместитель командующего корпусом Минобороны ДНР '*Deputy commander of the corps of the Ministry of defense of the DNR*'

[73] From 12 Feb. (14:09): В ДНР создан профсоюз металлургической и горнодобывающей промышленности. '*In the DNR the trade union of metallurgical and miners was created*'.

most important political movement is the 'Donetsk Republic' social movement and its youth party the 'Young republic'. The appearance of a trade union for this industry gives the DNR a semblance of a functioning democracy. In articles about institutions and the political system the youth wing is presented as the future leaders of the country thus conveying some sense of a future that an independent DNR can provide its citizens with.[75] The political parties in the DNR for the most part do not resemble the ideological preferences of the citizens. In this sense, they do not differ much from other post-Soviet countries in which party politics is underdeveloped. Even in Ukraine most parties are not ideological parties (Fedorenko 2016). The Donetsk Republic social movement almost the only political party that gets attention in the time samples. Articles about the social movement are propagandistic.[76] In the primaries, they won 505 out of 514 seats, which is unthinkable in a real democracy.[77] However, having political parties already gives the DNR the semblance of a working state.

The creation of a party of power is common in the post-Soviet space. Furthermore, in unrecognized states such a dominant party system tends to develop (Ishiyama and Batta 2012). The DNR has little control over its own internal political affairs. The murders of popular militia commanders and other figures in the DNR point toward Moscow exercising control over the leadership of DNR (Portnikov 2017). The DNR claims to have multiple groups who are active in politics and as such is conveying the message through DAN news that it has a working political system. DoNi news only features one article on the political system- a translation of the article about the Young Republic movement repairing houses. Again, the question here is why there is so little attention to institutions/political system in the English language media. The explanation could be that these issues are profoundly local and thus not worthy of international exposure.

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[74] From 12 Feb. (13:24, Minsk sample): В Донецке учреждено городское отделение «Молодой Республики». '*In Donetsk the city department of 'young republic' was established*'. Young republic is the youth wing of 'Donets Republic' which claims a majority in parliament.

[75] From 12 Feb. (13:24, Minsk sample): «Инициативных молодых людей хочется видеть больше и больше, чтобы строить новое успешное государство. '*we want to see more and more initiatives of young people, in order to build a successful state*'. Quote from the leader of 'Donetsk Republic' political party in the peoples Soviet Anatolij Koval'

[76] Such as this one from 30 Jan. (13:44, Avdiivka sample): Депутаты фракции «Донецкая Республика» за осеннюю сессию провели 368 приемов в отделениях ОДДР. '*Deputies from the faction 'Donetsk Republic' held 368 receptions in the offices of the ODDR.*' 'ODDR' stands for Общественное Движение «Донецкая Республика» or '*Public movement 'Donetsk Republic''*.

[77] From 3 Oct. (11:23, Primaries sample).

4.4: Economy

The economy of unrecognized states is characterized by control of whole sectors of the economy by the ruling elite and a criminalization of the economy (Kolstø 2006, 729). In the DNR the situation is the same. DAN news writes about the economy to depict the DNR as a flourishing place. An interesting article about what the DNR provides is about the founding of a register for IT companies.[78] The aim of the register is that IT companies can compete for 'state' tenders and so 'state' may support them through economic programs. It is impossible for the DNR to foster a growing IT sector in the same way Ukraine or Belarus has; it seems more likely that this article serves the purpose of portraying the DNR as a modern functioning state. To illustrate the point that articles about the economy serve this purpose, take this headline: '*All possible measures are taken to fill the market of the DNR with domestic production.*'[79] This program of import substitution has the support of the leadership of the DNR. The reality in the DNR is far from the rosy picture painted in DAN news. Prices for basic products widely fluctuate and differ from place to place, suggesting a weak economy and trouble with the allocation of resources (Mincheva 2017). The economy in DAN news is subservient to the state. Apolitical private enterprise in the DNR is impossible as the big businesses are either in the hands of Ukrainian oligarchs or the local elite. Moreover, business is political in that the focus is on self-reliance and a shift towards Russia. Take for example an article that outlines the aforementioned domestic production, which celebrates the fact that over 40 new types of household chemicals have been introduced to the DNR market in 2016.[80] This conveys the message that the economy of the DNR is doing well in production.

The articles about domestic production in the DNR acquire special importance when keeping the timing in mind: while not directly mentioning the blockade, they present the view it will not adversely affect the DNR because they are switching to local production. Thus,

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[78] Article from 10 Feb. (13:27, Minsk sample): Сообщение Минсвязи ДНР о формировании реестра ИТ-предприятий. '*announcement by the Ministry of communication of the DNR on compilation of a register for IT companies*'

[79] From 17 Feb. (9:30, Identity Documents sample): Для заполнения рынка ДНР товарами отечественного производства принимаются все возможные меры – МЭР. '*all possible measures are taken to fill the market of the DNR with domestic production.*'

[80] From 17 Feb. (10:15, Identity Documents sample): Производители бытовой химии ДНР за 2016 год выпустили на рынок Республики 40 новых продуктов. '*Producers of household chemicals in 2016 introduced 40 new products to the market of the Republic.*'

while there are comparatively few articles about the economy, they do serve a specific goal. It is thus highly likely that the DNR through articles in DAN news tries to convey the image that the DNR is doing well and developing the economy, despite the blockade. DoNi news is certainly reacting to the blockade by publishing articles about the DNR economy.[81] DoNi affiliated DNI press also posts an article by Christelle Néant[82] that argues that the blockade will actually be good for the DNR.[83] The argument is the same as with Russia: sanctions bolster domestic production. The argument is also the same as Russian language articles about domestic production, although these Russian language articles do not explicitly mention the blockade. DoNi however writes that the 'blockade risks plunging Ukraine into energy collapse'.[84] Thus, the message coming from DoNi news is clear: Ukrainian radicals blocked the railways, which will lead to a collapse in Ukraine and renewed domestic productivity in the DNR. This is exactly the message the DNR wants to send into the world and shows how DoNi is used as a mouthpiece for DNR propaganda in English.

4.5: Conclusion: State Building and Regime Performance as a Comparison

According to scholars, regime performance is one of the main ways a state can earn legitimacy (Rothstein 2009; Gilley 2009). The same goes for unrecognized states: the provision of public services is a key strategy of unrecognized states to bolster internal legitimacy (Caspersen 2015, 17). Moreover, the (perception of) material wellbeing of the inhabitants of post-Soviet unrecognized states is important for those states' legitimacy (O'Loughlin et al 2014). The DNR providing services was the main category in the regime performance and state building sample confirming Caspersen's assertion. Articles about regime performance have a double goal as they discredit the parent state while praising the DNR. Bakke et al, based on empirical research in Abkhazia, note that the internal legitimacy of unrecognized states is dependent on whether the ruling elite can convincingly portray

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[81] In articles about Zakharchenko visiting a new longwall from 17 Feb. (13:13; 13:47 Identity Documents DoNi sample).

[82] A figure similar to Janus Putkonen: foreigner living in the DNR and publishing pro-DNR/Russian news. Christelle Neant is French and writes predominantly in French for DNI press but also makes her own videos as a 'citizen journalist'.

[83] 17 Feb. (DNI press): What does not kill us makes us stronger: blockade and new internal productivity in Donbas.

[84] 19 Feb. (17:59, Identity Documents DONI sample).

themselves as state builders (Bakke et al 2014). DAN news tries to present the DNR as a normal, stable state. In the sample, they did this by articles about providing services, the economy, building a political system, and even embarking on a humanitarian help program for 'their' citizens living in 'temporarily occupied territories'.[85] Consequently, state building and regime performance are highlighted in comparison to the parent state. Furthermore, the articles show that the DNR reacted to the blockade imposed by Ukrainian battalions. The main message seems not to be that the DNR is doing better than Ukraine. Although the DNR is dependent on patron state support, it is presented as being able to provide for their citizens, even those living in parts of the Donbas controlled by Kyiv. As an international legitimation strategy, state building and regime performance are often used to compare the unrecognized state with the parent state. DoNi seems to try to do the same thing. However, many articles about regime performance and state building seem to have been too local for DoNi to report on. English language articles in particular depict the blockade as being good for the DNR but bad for Ukraine. Unrecognized states claims for recognition are often based on claims that they have successfully built institutions rather than claims based on regime performance or economy (Caspersen 2015, 19). However, I would argue that praising regime performance of the DNR to an international audience constitutes an attempt at international legitimacy seeking by presenting the DNR as a more competent 'state' than Ukraine.

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[85] What the DNR calls the areas of the Donbas under the control of Kyiv. Kyiv uses the same name to refer to the territories controlled by the LNR/DNR.

Chapter 5: Democratization

Democratization is used by unrecognized to bolster both internal and external legitimacy (Caspersen 2011). However, democratization in unrecognized states is always limited due to their unrecognized status (Caspersen 2012, 95-98). Democratization only appeared as a theme in the Primaries time sample. In the broad category of democratization, I have made the distinction between domestic and international aspects. This distinction cuts across Russian/English divide in the sample. As fig 11 and 12 show, the English language sample boasts a slightly higher percentage of articles with an international focus. Articles were marked as 'international' due to their focus on 1) the presence of international observers or 2) their discussion of the international implications of the elections.
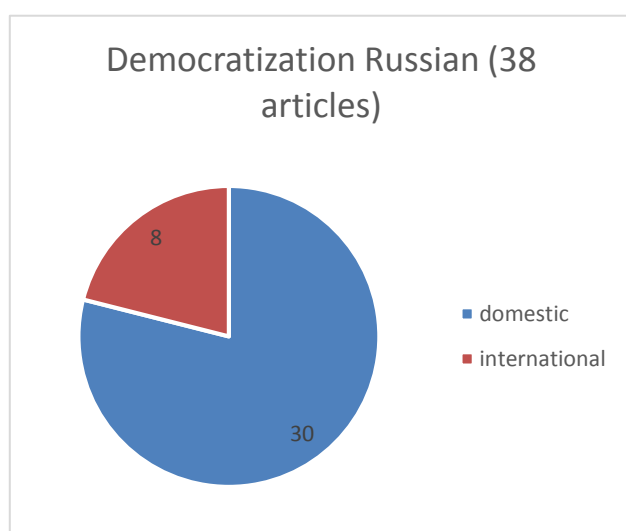
Fig 12. Subcategories Russian   *Fig 13 Subcategories English*
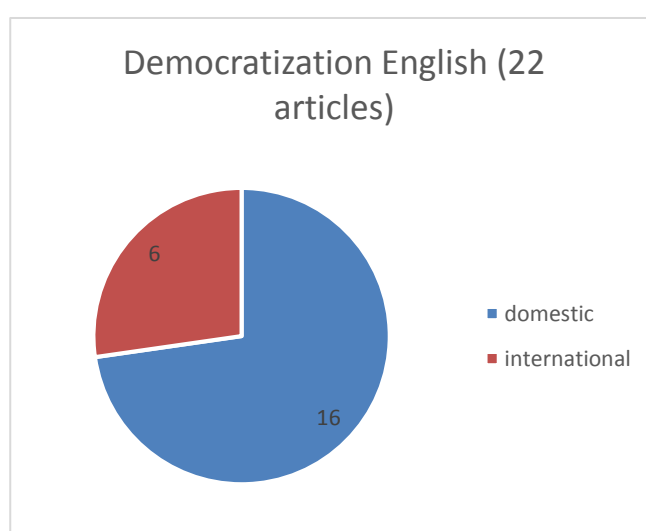
Interesting to note is that in this time sample we see the largest amount of 'copy-pasting': for example, the goal of the primaries is explained by the same sentence a total of 27 times.[86] Another shorter version is used 5 times.[87] Another curious instance of copy pasting is the remark that the primaries are in line with the Minsk agreements. This is done with a copy-

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[86] Цель праймериз – в преддверии выборов в местные органы власти в Донбассе выявить наиболее перспективных кандидатов, которые пользуются подлинным авторитетом среди населения. '*The goal of the primaries is to identify the candidates with the most perspectives for the local elections in the Donbas, those candidates who have genuine authority among the population* '.

[87] Цель — выявить тех, кто пользуются подлинным авторитетом среди населения перед местными выборами в Донбассе. '*The goal is to identify those who have genuine authority among the population before the local elections in the Donbas*'.

paste sentence that is used 17 times.[88] The editors may think the audience needs constant reminders of what the primaries are about and why they do not contradict the Minsk agreements. Another reason may be that the editors use them to make the articles look longer.

5.1 The Primaries: domestic

The first article in the sample is about how the 'day of silence' went into effect in the DNR, and tells about how all participants are obliged to remove their agitation.[89] This article points out the DNRs democratic credentials. The abovementioned 'copy paste' sentence about the Minsk agreement is present here. The article highlights the rule of law as it is dedicated to the decision of the '*Provisional Electoral Commission*' (PEC). The article refers to a decision made on September 1 by the PEC, understating that the DNR is conducting elections in an organized manner. Explaining the primaries, DAN news published an article detailing why the preliminary voting is important and how they do not violate the Minsk agreements. [90] The primaries are described by Zakharchenko as preceding the local elections proscribed by the Minsk agreements.[91] It is emphasized that the people participating in elections are ordinary people. The PEC notes that among the candidates are '*politicians, doctors, cultural figures, militiamen, mineworkers, and representatives of science and education.*'[92] These candidates are listed as independent. Furthermore, he emphasizes the elections as steps towards

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[88] Предварительное голосование в ДНР не противоречит Минским соглашениям и соответствуют стандартам ОБСЕ. '*Primaries do not contradict the Minsk agreements and are held according to OSCE standards*'

[89] from 1 Oct. (5:30): В ДНР наступил «День тишины» перед первыми в истории Донбасса праймериз. '*In the DNR the 'day of silence' went into effect before the first primaries in the history of Donbas*'.

[90] 2 Oct. (00:00) В Донбассе впервые в истории пройдет предварительное общественное голосование. '*for the first time in history, preliminary public voting will take place in the Donbas*'.

[91] Oct. 2 (00:00): ''(…) праймериз предшествуют местным выборам в Донбассе (предписаны Минскими соглашениями) и призваны выявить тех, кто «пользуются подлинным авторитетом среди населения».'' '*The primaries precede the local elections in Donbas (prescribed by the Minsk agreements), and will identify those who enjoy genuine authority among the population*'. The last sentence about identifying those with authority is used in other articles to explain why the primaries are held.

[92] 2 Oct. (00:00): Среди них известные в Донбассе и на Украине политики, врачи, деятели культуры, ополченцы, шахтеры, представители науки и системы образования. '*Among them (independent candidates) are politicians, dOct.ors, cultural figures, militiamen, mineworkers, and representatives of science and education famous in Donbas and Ukraine.*'

independence,[93] as well as a key step in the peaceful regulation of the conflict. A sociological poll is presented as saying that 56% of the population actively follows the news about the primaries, while 46% intends to vote.[94] More than 600 thousand ballots were prepared by the PEC.[95]

5.1.1: Turnout and context

The DNR tries to convey voting as a citizens' duty to strengthen the new 'republic'. Voting in the primaries is presented as voting for the future of the DNR. This is expressed in an article about a local polling station in a school in one of the zones of Donetsk closest to the line of contact. The director of the school is quoted saying it makes him happy that *'our Donetsk youth actively interest themselves in the primaries of the DNR, and consider it their responsibility to make their choice for their candidate'*.[96] In the same article the polling station tells DAN news that the turnout is higher than expected. On election day, a 'spontaneous' auto-parade drove through the center of Donetsk inciting people to *'make a choice in favor of any of the candidates'*.[97] After explaining the actions of the auto-parade, the articles uses copy-paste sentencing to explain again the goal of the primaries and that they do not contradict the Minsk agreements. The temporary electoral commission press attaché Oleg Balykin announces that already 124 thousand people voted at noon.[98]

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[93] 2 Oct. (00:00): «Это последние шаги к приобретению нашей независимости, потому что за ними последуют выборы, на которых мы должны гарантированно победить. '*These are the last steps towards the acquisition of our independence, because after them will follow elections, in which we must be guaranteed to win*'.

[94] 2 Oct. (00:00): Согласно сентябрьскому опросу общественного мнения социологического центра «Особый Статус», 56 процентов жителей ДНР следят за новостями о предварительном голосовании, 46 процентов готовы принять в нем участие. '*According to a September public opinion poll by sociological center 'special status', 56% of the inhabitants of the DNR follow the news about the preliminary voting, while 46% is ready to participate in them.*'

[95] Oct. 2 (00:00).

[96] 2 Oct. (13:39): Радует, что наша донецкая молодежь активно интересуется праймериз в ДНР, считает своим долгом сделать выбор за своего кандидата», — сказала директор школы.

[97] From Oct. 2 (16:25): (...) сделать выбор в пользу кого-либо из кандидатов. '(...) *make a choice in favor of any of the candidates*'.

[98] 2 Oct. (12:08): Более 124 тыс. избирателей проголосовало на праймериз к 12:00 – ВрИК. '*More than 124 thousand voters voted in the primaries before 12:00 – Temporary Electoral Commission*'.

Indeed, it seems that turnout is a key issue for the DNR at these elections. However, there is no article with the exact turnout as a percentage in the sample. Rather, DAN news opted to quote the PEC that the '*more than 370,5 thousand*' people turned up to vote.[99] Compared with the 600 ballots prepared, this seems to be a turnout of roughly 60%. When people are cited talking about the turnout, they are all enthusiastic and claim the turnout it is very high. Even the international observers are brought in to comment on the turnout. Czech observer Zdenek Ondrachek compares the high turnout in the DNR with the low turnout in his home country.[100] Moreover, there is a separate article about foreign observers praising the DNR for high turnout: '*Observers from Italy and South Ossetia announce that they did not expect such a high turnout for the primaries*'.[101]

It seems that the DNR wants to demonstrate citizens are actively engaged in the elections by reporting about (an expected or real) high turnout ratio. International observers add strength to these claims. A high voter turnout is usually taken as a show of consent towards the regime. The DNR is trying to create an atmosphere in which it seems that people enthusiastically participated in these elections and thus in the building of the 'republic'. This is comparable to Soviet elections. There, turnout was high, often reaching the 99% mark. Voting was considered a citizens' duty, and the whole election show was reminiscent of a theatre in which the voters where the actors. Furthermore, election day was a festive occasion (Swearer 1961; Zaslavsky and Brym 1978). Ukrainian dissident in the DNR Stanislav Aseyev[102] describes the voting process in the DNR as a 'theater' (Aseyev 2016). The elections in the DNR are reminiscent of the Soviet Union as they had food,[103] mobile voting for sick

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[99] From 3 Oct. (10:16): В предварительном голосовании приняли участие свыше 370,5 тыс. человек — окончательные данные ВрИК. '*In the preliminary voting more than 370,5 thousand people participated – final data PEC*'.

[100] 2 Oct. (22:20): «Мы-по хорошему завидуем вам, так как в нашей стране, например, явка на выборы едва достигает 30-35 процентов избирателей. '*we envy you because in our country, for example, the turnout for elections hardly ever reaches above30-35%*'

[101] 2 Oct. (15:57): Наблюдатели из Италии и Южной Осетии заявили, что не ожидали столь высокой явки на праймериз.

[102] Who is currently in prison in the DNR, reportedly on hunger strike since July 2018.

[103] From 2 Oct. (18:40) Рестораторы Донецка напоили горячим чаем избирателей центрального района столицы. '*Restaurant owners of Donetsk give voters warm tea in the central rayon of the capital*'. Moreover near to these stands a 'social fair' operated.

people,[104] and a general festive atmosphere.[105] These are all strategies to achieve a high voter turnout, and the DNR claims that they achieved a high turnout. Whether the turnout rate was real or not is hard to establish.

5.1.2: Content

Soviet Elections were a way in which the population could express local grievances (Birch 2011, 712). However, in the DNR it is surprising to note that while the elections were local, no local issues came up in the sample. That is, when officials are cited about the importance of voting they mention only general slogans for the future of the republic.[106] [107] Moreover, when voters are quoted, they share the same opinion.[108] [109] The primaries in the DNR probably did not have any major consequences. In any case, of the 514 constituencies that were up for contest, 505 were won by 'independents' who were members of the 'public movement' 'Donetsk republic', which is the 'party of power'.[110] Moreover, the acting mayor of Donetsk was reelected with 83,2% of the vote.[111]

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[104] Quote from a head doctor in an article from 2 Oct. (15:33): «Выбор на голосовании может сделать каждый – и тот, кто лежит в больнице, и тот, кто находится дома, но не может передвигаться, инвалиды I группы. '*Everyone is able to vote, those who lie in the hospital, and those who are at home, who cannot move, invalids of the 1st class.*

[105] From 2 Oct. (17:45): Между тем рядом с избирательным участком уже начался праздник. Здесь открылась полевая кухня, заработала ярмарка, местные творческие коллективы устроили небольшой концерт. '*Among those near to the polling station the holiday already started. Here they opened a field kitchen, a fair, and local artists' collectives staged a small concert*'.

[106] Such as this quote by the acting mayor of Donetsk Martynov on 2 Oct. (11:00) Я считаю, что от того, как пройдут праймериз, во многом зависит будущее государства. '*I consider that the future of the state depends a lot how these primaries go.*'.

[107] Or this quote by Zakharchenko from 2 Oct. (11:08): ''Мы голосуем все за наше будущее''. '*We all vote for our future*'.

[108] Such as this voter from an article from 2 Oct. (18:26): Надеемся, что праймериз приблизят нас к желаемой тишине и началу новой жизни – без войны. '*We hope that the primaries will bring closer to the desired silence and the beginning of a new life- without war*'.

[109] Such as this voter from an article from 2 Oct. (17:45): Мы верили и верим в то, что наша молодая республика сможет отстоять свою независимость и получит дальнейшее развитие. За это и голосовали сегодня». '*We believed in and believe now that our young republic can defend its independence and develop further. That's what we voted for today*'.

[110] From 3 Oct.ober (11:23): Члены ОД «Донецкая Республика» победили в качестве самовыдвиженцев в 505 округах из 514 на праймериз. '*Members of the Public movement 'Donetsk Republic' won as independent sin 505 out of 514 districts*'.

The English language articles adhere to the same lines: of the 16 'domestic' articles, only three were not translations of DAN news articles. Articles about the domestic implications of the primaries catered to an international audience serve the purpose of international legitimation. Of the articles that are *not* translations, one stands out in particular. An article about how supposedly a journalist from Ukraine came back to the LNR to vote. This journalist is only quoted saying bad things about Ukraine.[112] Although this article is about the LNR (DoNi writes about both), the article fits into what is a familiar pattern by now: DoNi not only praises the DNR but also discredits Ukraine. DoNi serves as the DNR's outlet to an international audience. Therefore, DoNi is the medium through which this international recognition strategy through democratization is communicated. The DoNi sample was even less focused on local issues than the DAN news sample which corroborates the assumption that the DoNi coverage of the elections only served only propagandistic purposes. In the DNR, the content of the primaries seems to have been less important than the primaries themselves. Neither Russian nor English language articles mentioned local issues in any way.

5.2 The Primaries: International

The international observers appear to feature in the DAN news articles to prove that the DNR is doing the right thing. For example, an Italian observer, Guilietto Chiesa, is quoted emphasizing the importance of the primaries: '*The primaries are a serious organization* (…) *I see, that there is no way back, you made your step forwards for the creation of a new state*.'[113] Also not the copy and paste claim that the election is observed by '(…) *1043 observers from the candidates and 22 international observers from Finland, Greece, Germany, Italy, South Ossettia, France, The Czech republic, Serbia, and other countries*'.[114] [115] The DAN news articles about the elections have a strong international component. An

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[111] From 3 Oct. (10:23): Мэр Донецка победил на праймериз с результатом 83,2%. *'the mayor of Donetsk won with a result of 83,2%.'*. The candidate that came closest had a mere 5,4% of the vote.

[112] From 2 Oct. (13:27 DoNi sample). For example he calls life in Ukraine "survival rather than living".

[113] From 1 Oct. (9:52): «Праймериз – это серьезная организация, — добавил в свою очередь Кьеза. — Я вижу, что назад дороги нет, вы сделали шаг вперед для создания нового государства.

[114] (…) 1043 наблюдателя от кандидатов и 22 международных наблюдателя из Финляндии, Греции, Германии, Италии, Южной Осетии, Франции, Чехии, Сербии и др. стран. Exact sentence is used 5 times.

[115] namely in the articles from Oct. 1 (9:52; 16:37; 16:41) and Oct. 2 (00:00).

appeal from the 'head' of the DNR Zakharchenko is posted in which he does not mention even one local issue but does mention the international impact of the primaries.[116] Zakharchenko's appeal ends with: '*The people of the DNR should show that we are building a civilized, constitutional state, capable of holding open and honest elections.*'[117] It seems from the articles the DNR primarily wants to show 'the world' and 'international society' how democratic they are.[118] Balykin explains the elections are legitimate because they rely on '*adherence to the norms of international electoral law, adherence to the standards of the OSCE and the standards of freedom and democracy*'.[119] Again, the article finishes with the same copy-paste sentences that explain what the primaries are and that they do not contradict the Minsk agreements.

One way the primaries are internationally oriented is through the Minsk agreements; the other is through the international observers. These agreements clearly stipulate that local elections should be held *after* a complete withdrawal of troops (Financial Times 2015). DAN news argues that since these elections are a preparation for the local elections stipulated by the Minsk agreements, they do not contradict them. Regardless of the question whether or not the primaries actually contradict the Minsk agreements, it is interesting to note the DAN news goes so far in assuring their readers the elections are in line with Minsk. The DNR presents itself as the party that *does* follow the agreements, as opposed to Ukraine. Indeed, as the elections are presented as '*one of the key points of a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the region*'[120], Kyiv is charged with not coming up with the necessary law to make this happen.[121]

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[116] From 2 Oct. (11:23): Обращение Главы ДНР Захарченко к жителям Республики. '*appeal of the Head of the DNR Zakharchenko to the citizens of the republic*'.

[117] From 2 Oct. (11:23): Народ ДНР должен показать – мы построили цивилизованное, правовое государство, способное на открытые и честные выборы.

[118] Oct. 2 (21:08): Праймериз пойдут на пользу политическим институтам ДНР и ее имиджу в мире — депутат. '*The primaries will benefit the political institutions of the DNR and its image in the world.*'

[119] From 2 Oct. (12:19): Он напомнил, что легитимность процесса проведения предварительного голосования «опирается на следование нормам международного избирательного права, соблюдение стандартов ОБСЕ и стандартов свободы и демократии». '*He (Balykin) reminded us that the legitimacy of the process of preliminary voting relies on adherence to the norms of international electoral law, adhere to the standards of the OSCE and the standards of freedom and democracy* ''

[120] from 2 Oct. (00:00): Напомним, что проведение местных выборов в Донбассе — однин из ключевых пунктов мирного урегулирования конфликта в регионе.

For the domestic audience, this is a familiar story as Kyiv is always blamed for not following the Minsk agreements. Thus, with respect to the elections, reference to the Minsk agreements is not so much to get international attention as it is for domestic attention.

Another way of international engagement is through international observers. One observer already introduced in this chapter is Guilietto Chiesa. He is a former chairman of the communist party in Italy. Later, he became a writer, journalist and filmmaker who regularly comments on current events for Russia Today and Sputnik. His remarks about the DNR elections shed light on the purpose of bringing in international observers and his comments about the primaries are worth quoting at length: '*popular' voting is of great importance in international politics. Because this is practiced nowhere in the West, there, the democracy has long been degraded. The creation of such a state as democratic, stable and free as the Donetsk Republic becomes a big example for us.*'[122] In another article he thus urges the people of Donetsk to '*not look towards Europe and build your own democracy'*.[123] Another Italian observer held the same opinion about the difference between democracy in Donetsk and in 'the west' claiming that the EU decides everything for Italians.[124] The message seems to be that democracy in the west should not be an example for the DNR.

The international observers present are marginal figures in their home countries. The articles they might publish will probably not appear in main stream media but rather will likely be distributed among people who are already 'pro-Russian' in any kind of way. The DNR strictly controls which foreign journalists can enter its territory. Serious foreign election observers would not go to observe the primaries anyway since that would constitute some form of recognition. The observers at the primaries were marginal figures who already supported the DNR. Although DAN undoubtedly also have an international Russian audience,

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[121] from 2 Oct. (00:00): Однако на данный момент Киевом документ не только не был принят, не существует даже законопроекта. '*at this moment Kyiv not only did not accept the document, there is not even a draft law.*'

[122] Oct. 1 (16:37): Народное голосование в международной политике имеет большое значение. Потому что нигде на Западе нет такой практики, там вообще демократия давно деградировала. Создание такого государства, как демократичная, стабильная и свободная Донецкая Республика станет большим примером для нас»,

[123] Oct. 2 (19:47): не смотрите на Европу, стройте свою демократию»

[124] Quote from Italian observer Mauricio Marone from 2 Oct. (14:14): (...) в Италии люди ничего не решают, а страной руководят из Евросоюза''. (...) *in Italy people do not decide anything and the country is governed from the European Union.*'

the intended target seems to be the people actually living in the DNR.[125] Therefore, it seems likely that international observers serve the purpose of legitimizing the elections for the locals. That these observers make these statements is perhaps more due to their own political positions: most are highly critical of the state of affairs in their own country and in the EU; otherwise they would not be in Donetsk.[126] What is more relevant is that DAN news so prominently features these international observers. If they do not serve the purpose of lifting the information blockade,[127] they serve the domestic purpose of bestowing the elections with legitimacy by their praising of the DNR. Furthermore, by their presence alone they bestow the DNR with some international legitimacy. Moreover, once they get to their home countries, they will support the DNR narrative.

The situation is different for the English language articles about foreign observers. The two main contributors to DoNi news, Janus Putkonen and Christelle Néant both participated in the elections as observers and voters. Unsurprisingly, they both think the democracy in the DNR is better than their respective Finland and France.[128] DoNi calls the vote of Janus Putkonen, who is apparently the first foreigner to have received DNR citizenship, a 'triumph of freedom'.[129] Not one of the foreign observers was critical of any aspect of the primaries, as critical observers, or even journalists, are not allowed inside the DNR. Janus Putkonen himself was responsible for keeping unwanted journalists out and giving accreditation for journalists favorable to the DNR (Shandra 2016). The DNR can count on the support of some marginal figures in the EU. Putkonen and Néant run the international media of the DNR and try to promote the DNR as a functional state and democracy in their respective home countries. Intriguing is that they overshoot their own goal when it comes to the primaries: the DNR is not merely a functioning democracy; it is an example of democracy for the rest of Europe. Furthermore, the democracy of the DNR is not compared with Ukraine, but rather with Western countries- the observers' home countries. Without exception, the home

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[125] They publish, for example, all official announcements, which apply only to the people living there.

[126] One of the observers, was Johan Bachman, a Finnish citizen who tried to open a 'representative office' for the DNR in Helsinki and who is well acquainted with Putkonen (yle 2014).

[127] Which 'people's Soviet' deputy Miroslav Rudenko claims is one of the purposes of the primaries from 2 Oct. (21:08).

[128] From 2 Oct. (21:03, DoNi sample).

[129] From 2 Oct. (16:53 (DoNi sample).

countries of the observers and their mainstream media see the DNR as Russia backed separatists and thus do not confer the elections with any legitimacy. The audience of DoNi news in these countries is thus probably limited to a group that is already sympathetic to the DNR. These people are likely very critical of their own states and thus more likely to agree with the observer's claims that democracy in the West does not work properly. This might explain DoNi's ambitious coverage of the primaries.

5.3: Conclusion: local primaries with international goals

Elections are a way in which they the population is able to express consent to being ruled. Democratization has become an important element in international society, and nearly all states at least nominally subscribe to it (Clark 2007). For unrecognized states, democratization has become an important legitimation strategy as the 'internal' attribute of democracy has become an important part of external legitimation (Caspersen 2011). Accordingly, the primaries served multiple domestic and international goals. In one way, the election was a 'test' of loyalty of the DNR people to the regime. At the same time, it was a showcase of the regime's power: high turnout rates and a high percentage of votes for ruling elite. Furthermore, DAN news is portraying the DNR as a normal functioning democracy. To what extent the primaries in the DNR were a genuine show of consent is not clear. However, the DNR authorities have tried portray the primaries as a massive show of consent by high turnout rates. This is similar to post-Soviet authoritarian regimes (Saikkonen 2017; Birch 2011, 717). However, while turnout can be fabricated, consent cannot. Whether the primaries have given citizens the idea the DNR is listening to their concerns cannot be concluded from the data. However, it seems that the DNR regime has not listened to local concerns as the news coverage did not reflect local concerns. On the other hand, as the cessation of hostilities is perhaps the most important local concern, making people believe that they are voting 'for peace' may be a working strategy.

Internationally, it seems that the DNR attach value to being perceived as democratic. This seems to corroborate what Clark wrote about democracy becoming an important internal attribute for membership of international society, and with Caspersen's argument about how democratization is also an international legitimation strategy of unrecognized states (Clark 2007; Caspersen 2011). The DNR invited a wide array of international observers that served

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to confirm to a local and international audience that the elections were democratic. Interestingly, both DAN and DoNi went further than merely stating the DNR is a functioning democracy. Instead, argue that the democracy in the DNR is better than democracies in the EU. The observers mentioned in DAN and DoNi articles are highly critical of their own countries and the EU, while being ideologically committed to the DNR or Russia. They thus likely serve to propagate an DNR/Russian narrative to Western audiences.

Chapter 6: Culture, History and Identity.

Unrecognized states are often based on an ethnic identity. This is not the case for the DNR. while some scholars argued that the specific Donbas identity caused the conflict to escalate before Russian interference (Kudelia 2014), others argued that while identity did play a role, the conflict was primarily caused by Russia (Aslund 2014; Wilson 2016). What is relatively understudied, is how the DNR have engaged on an identity building project after their break with Kyiv (Abibok 2018).[130] Identity and culture are multifaceted concepts. In this thesis I have marked text as being about culture when they were about cultural events or about the culture of the people living in the DNR. I understand identity as something that is expressed in text when DAN news writes about the characteristics of the DNR people. Identity thus comes through in texts about history and culture.

Fig 14. Articles by time sample
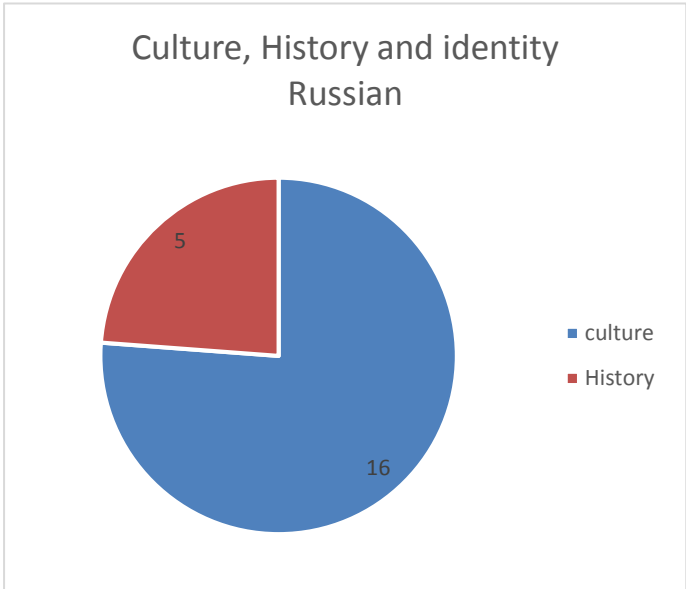
Fig 15. Subcategories

At first glance the population of the DNR seems to have most in common with (parts of) their parent state. The DNR does not cover the whole of Donetsk Oblast, at both sides of the front live 'Donbas' people. If they are to protect the DNR people from a 'genocide' that Ukraine is perpetrating, they need to define who the DNR people are. The following sections will investigate how the DNR utilizes history and culture to form a DNR identity. Compared to other articles, pieces about history and culture of the DNR are rare. In the English language

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[130] Although there are some interesting works on the concept of Novorossiya by renowned scholars such as Marlene Laruelle, Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin, this is more related to Russian imperialism/nationalism than the DNR specifically.

sample, they are not present at all. A possible explanation for this is that these articles are of deemed to be of little international importance. They range from the opening of a regional museum with a mammoth,[131] to the memorial concert of a famous Soviet singer.[132] An international audience might be less interested in this.

6.1: History

One way of defining a community is through history. Accordingly, as the DNR was founded, the leaders sought for a historical predecessor. It was unclear whether this was to be Novorossiya, which included the whole of South and Eastern Ukraine, or whether this would be something else entirely. The DNR itself does not occupy wholly any geographic or historical region. The choice was made to make the 'Donetsk Krivoj rog Republic the historical predecessor of the DNR. This DKR existed from the of February12 until the March 20, 1918. The DKR was a self-proclaimed short-lived republic in the chaos of the post-revolutionary Russian civil war. There is no data on how much the 'citizens' of the DNR know about the DKR. However, the fact that at the end of each article about the DKR there is an explanation about it indicates that people know little about it.[133] In a memorandum on the of February 6 the DNR leadership decided to declare the DNR to be the historical successor of the DKR.[134] The deputy speaker of parliament Andrej Purgin explains why having being the historical successor to the DKR is good for the DNR: '*It is like a call to remember, that we were once united in such an interesting and mighty way*'.[135] The DNR occupies part of the

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[131] From 30 Jan. (16:32, Avdiivka sample): Останки мамонта вернутся в экспозиционный зал Донецкого республиканского краеведческого музея. '*The remains of a mammoth return to the exposition hall of the Donetsk Republican museum of local history.*'

[132] From 17 Feb. (20:29, Identity Documents sample): Вечер памяти знаменитой певицы Анны Герман собрал в Макеевке более 400 зрителей. '*Evening of remembering the famous singer Anna German in Makeevka attracted more than 400 spectators.*'

[133]Similar to the articles about the Minsk agreements, there is a copy-pasted paragraph at the end of each article: Feb. 12 (5:30;16:07; 18:50)

[134] "Депутаты Народного Совета провозгласили ДНР преемником Донецко-Криворожской Республики." DAN-News. Feb.ruary 06, 2015. Accessed Oct.ober 04, 2018. https://dan-news.info/politics/deputaty-narodnogo-soveta-provozglasili-dnr-preemnikom-donecko-krivorozhskoj-respubliki.html. '*Deputies of the peoples Soviet proclaimed the DNR to be the successor of the Donetsk-Krivoy rog Republic*'.

[135] 12 Feb. (5:30, Minsk sample): '«Это как бы призыв вспомнить, что мы когда-то были едины в таком интересном и мощном образовании»'

former territory of the DKR. However, they do not claim the whole territory that the DKR covered. The DNR sees more similarities than territory with the DKR: as the DKR was a 'people's republic' their system of governance is also taken as an example for the DNR.[136] Indeed, the situation of the DNR now and the DKR then is seen as similar.[137] On the 12th of February a meeting was organized in celebration of the 97th anniversary of the DKR.[138] Again, it is highly doubtful that, as the article claims, hundreds of citizens came out in genuine support of remembering the DKR. The citizens that are quoted in the article supposedly came out to protest Kyiv's aggression and in support of their rights to speak Russian. A participant is quoted: '*I came out today to support the DNR and our region. We want to keep our rights and want to talk in Russian*'.[139] This sentence echoes normal DNR and/or Russian propaganda and is completely unrelated to the DKR. The memorandum on becoming the historical successor of the DKR is a sign of a search for a historical identity that the DNR can build on.

Another important part of DNR historical identity is WWII. This was also a major part of Soviet identity, where it was known as the 'great patriotic war'. WWII comes up once in the Minsk time sample: an official is quoted comparing the current situation of Ukraine to that of Nazi Germany. He notes that after Germany lost WWII they started compensating the victors for their losses. According to him, so should Ukraine.[140] The comparison is only part of the role WWII plays in DNR historical legitimation. In the Soviet Union, and afterwards in

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[136] From 12 Feb. (18:54, Minsk sample). «Девяносто семь лет назад в Харькове создалась Донецко-Криворожская Республика с четырьмя тысячами депутатов, избранных от своих регионов. Это та основа, та связь с нашей землей, связь с государственностью, которая позволяет нам сейчас строить наше будущее». '*Ninety years ago in Kharkov the Donetsk-Krivoy rog Republic was founded with four thousand deputies, chosen from their regions. Such a basis, such a relation with our land, our state, allows us right now to build our future*'. Quote from Purgin.

[137] 12 Feb. (18:50) Пургин обсудил историческое наследие Донецко-Криворожской Республики с внуком Артема и писателем Владимиром Корниловым. '*Purgin discussed the historical heritage of the Donetsk-Krivoy rog Republic with the grandchild of Artyom and the writer Vladimir Kornilovym*'. 'Artyom' was a revolutionary and one of the founders of the DKR.

[138] 12 Feb. (16:07, Minsk sample).

[139] From 12 Feb. (16:07, Minsk sample): «Я сегодня вышел поддержать ДНР и наш регион, — рассказал участник митинга Никита Шевченко. — Мы отстаиваем свои права, хотим говорить на русском языке».

[140] From 12 Feb. (19:39, Minsk sample): «Мы считаем, что каждый должен отвечать за свои поступки. Вот Германия проиграла Вторую мировую войну и вынуждена была компенсировать нанесенный ущерб странам-победителям. '*We consider that each must answer for their own deeds. Just like Germany lost the Second World War and had to pay compensation for the damage to the victorious countries*' Quote from Igor Bilodid.

much of post-Soviet states, a myth was created about the Soviet people beating the Nazi Germans together. Ukraine, with its rehabilitation of Stepan Bandera, is going against this myth. Ukrainian nationalists that fought against the Soviet Union such as Bandera have long been described as Nazis in the Soviet Union. As shown in the previous section, the DNR and Russian propaganda still depict Ukrainian nationalists as Nazis. The DNR argues Ukraine is rewriting history. This is particularly painful as rehabilitation of Ukrainian nationalists goes against the myth of the Great Patriotic War. For example, in an article about a meeting in Donetsk about the Minsk agreements a director of a school is quoted saying that the Ukrainians '*(...) tell in lessons in schools that we are not Slavic at all, but Arian*'.[141] The view that Ukrainians are rewriting history is further emphasized in an interview with 'People's teacher of the USSR' and WWII veteran Viktor Shatalov. He is quoted saying that the Ukrainians '*Distort history*', making heroes out of '*Nazis and traitors*'.[142]

The myth of the great patriotic war is supported by Russia. In the DNR, this is obvious by the involvement of the 'Russian center'. Russian center was formed with the goal to further the integration between the Donbas and Russia along mostly cultural lines.[143] It is this Russian center which propagated the DKR story in 2015, while in 2017 they are busy with the Soviet great patriotic war myth. They, together with local writers, wanted to make Fadeev's 'the young guard' a part of the school curriculum again. This book is about a partisan organization that existed in Krasnodon. [144] Bringing back this novel in the school curriculum, they argue, is good to instill patriotism in the youth, although they do not mention to with country.[145] The answer to this question may lie in the use of Russian and relations with Russia.

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[141] From 18 Feb. (13:03, Identity Documents sample): И теперь, не дождавшись новых учебников, на уроках в школах рассказывают, что мы вовсе не славяне, а арии,(…). '*And now, not waiting for the new school books, they tell in lessons in school that we are not Slavic at all, but Arian (…).*'

[142] From 2 Oct. (13:08, Primaries times sample): Неправильно и то, что сегодня в Украине искажают историю, делая из нацистов и предателей героев. '*It is wrong that today in Ukraine they are distorting history, making heroes out of Nazis and traitors.*'

[143] Русский центр основан с целью усиления процессов интеграции Донбасса с РФ в гуманитарных, социальных и культурных аспектах (.). '*Russian center was formed with the goal of strengthening the processes of integration of the Donbas with the RF in the Humanitarian, Social, and Cultural aspects(…). *' https://dan-news.info/category/regions

[144] In Luhansk Oblast, renamed Sorokin in 2015 under Ukraine's decommunization laws (but not implemented as it is now occupied by Russia in the LNR).

[145] From 29 Jan. (16:55, Avdiivka sample): «Необходимость воспитания у молодежи патриотизма требуют возвращения романа Александра Фадеева «Молодая гвардия» в школьный курс литературы (.). '*The*

The DKR would for many people not be something they can readily identify with. In the Donbas there is a significant amount of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, particularly among the older population. Choosing a short-lived republic that was later incorporated into the Soviet Union as a historical predecessor is odd (Kuzio 2015). Moreover, it is completely different than the older and imperial Novorossiya. Suslov argues that the switch was made because of the collapse of the Novorossiya project: the South of Ukraine was not conquered by Russian troops and the 'revolution' was contained to (parts of) the Donbas. This required a more regional identity, hence the sudden focus on the DKR (Suslov 2017, 209). As a concept of regional identity the DKR reference works. However, it cannot be as strong as the regional identities in ethnic separatist conflicts in, for example, the Caucasus. In this sense the DNR has a weak historical base on which to present its separatist claims. This is reflected by their struggle to find a historical predecessor. Indicative of this historical confusion is the statement by Zakharchenko in 2017 that he created a new state, 'Malorossiya' which would replace Ukraine (BBC 2017). This was later denied by Kremlin spokesperson Peskov and the leaders of the LNR.

6.2: Culture

Activists from Donetsk participate in patriotic events in Russia, presumably as Russian patriots and not as DNR patriots.[146] As one of the stated goals of the DNR is integration with Russia, they are Russian nationalists. In other articles only Russian language is seen as an important part of DNR identity. The woman quoted earlier at a meeting about the 97 year existence of the DNR emphasizes the language issue. When Pushilin stresses in an interview about the just agreed upon Minsk agreements that there are many Russians left in Ukraine which the DNR needs to think about.[147] He does not emphasize that there are many Donbas people left in Ukraine, and Russian speakers are not mentioned anywhere in the time sample. Due to the conflict in the Donbas, the linguistic and ethnic makeup of Ukraine has become a

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necessity of education the youth with patriotism requires the return of the novel 'The Young Guard' by Aleksandr Fadeev to the school subject of literature.'

[146] From 18 Feb. (18:10, Identity Documents sample).

[147] From 12 Feb. 2-15 (21:20 Minsk sample): Нам важно было переключиться и подумать немного шире о той части Украины, где много русских остается. *'It was important for us to switch and think about those parts of Ukraine where a lot of Russians remain.'*

topic of many articles. Articles in the media tend to oversimplify, and note that in the South and East people speak Russian, while in the rest of the country they speak Ukrainian. The linguistic makeup of a country is rarely that simple, and Ukraine is no exception. It is true however that the Donbas is predominantly Russian speaking. However, not all Russian speaking regions in Ukraine are pro-Russian. Basing a separatist identity solely on language is untenable. Sure, Donetsk is thought to be a part of the '*Russkij Mir*' or Russian world, but this concept only shows up once in all the articles.[148] It is thus unclear whether people from the Donbas are Russians or Russian speakers. While, the idea of Russian world does not come out strongly in the articles, although the connection with Russia is certainly stressed.

There are other ways of delineating group identity which are not history or language such as an article about the burying of a time capsule by members of the 'young republic' youth organization. Here they take a more ambiguous stand, as the leader is quoted while burying the capsule that he wishes that people in the 22nd century will '*always remember those who shed blood on for your native land*'.[149] Most articles about culture are less dramatic though, and are about events,[150] or about the history of some cultural institution.[151] These have a local focus. Cultural institutions of Donetsk remained open during the war as people longed for some distraction (Lyman 2015). This is also seen by the DNR. DAN news published an article which tells how Zakharchenko organized a day in the planetarium for schoolchildren.[152] Besides obviously praising Zakharchenko, it recognizes that children need

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[148] In a quote from Serdyukov, who participated in the primaries 2 Oct. (13:12, Primaries sample): Мы делаем это, для чтобы наши дети жили в свободной стране, чувствовали себя частью русского мира. '*We do it (voting in the elections) so that our children live in a free country and felt themselves part of Russian World.*'

[149] From 28 Jan. (16:19 Avdiivka sample): (…) чтобы вы всегда помнили о тех, кто проливал кровь за вашу родную землю.

[150] Such as this one from 17 Feb. (12:05, Identity Documents sample): Ансамбль «Донбасс» в канун Дня защитника Отечества представит новую программу в прифронтовой Горловке. '*Ensemble 'Donbas' in the cadre of the Day of the protector of the Fatherland presents a new show in the frontline town of Horlivka.*' 'This holiday is an originally Soviet holiday still celebrated across the post-Soviet space. Ukraine got rid of this tradition and celebrates day of the defender of the fatherland on the 14th of Oct.ober.

[151] From 1 Oct. (21:27, Primaries sample): Донецкая филармония отметила 85-летие концертом и спецгашением художественных почтовых конвертов. '*The Donetsk Philharmonic is celebration its 85th year of existence with a concerts and special artistic envelopes.*'

[152] From 1 Oct. (16:19, Primaries sample): Глава ДНР организовал ученикам Амвросиевской школы-интерната поездку в донецкий планетарий и аквапарк. ''*Head of the DNR organized a trip to the Donetsk planetarium and aqua park for the students of the Amvrosievska boarding school.*'

a distraction from war. Articles about cultural event give DAN news the appearance of an essentially local newspaper. These are the most numerous in the sample. Perhaps this is why DoNi news is not represented in this category. Take for example this article about the Donetsk circus giving free masterclasses.[153] Or about the Donetsk opera having a new show.[154] These are essentially local topics, only interesting for citizens of Donetsk. Cultural institutions and events are hallmarks of stability much needed in a time of war. In Donetsk, the opera remained open even in the hottest phases of the war (Walker 2015). Articles in this category do not serve the explicit goal to form DNR identity and do not relate to the Donbas regional identity. I would argue that we should see these articles more as messages that life in the DNR is similar to life anywhere else.

6.3: Conclusion: Historical Confusion and Culture as a Distraction

If the main priority of unrecognized states is protecting the group they are supposedly representing, that group must then be identified. The DNR has trouble with identifying what exactly constitutes a 'DNR' identity. This results in a confused search for history and for identity with regional, Soviet, and Russian elements. The articles in the sample confirm this conclusion. At first, the DKR was taken as a historical predecessor of the DNR. Then, focused shifted towards Novorossiya. When the Novorossiya project was abandoned, a local, regional focus was sought. In the articles about culture in the time samples, identity building seemed to play a smaller role than presenting the image that the DNR is a functioning state. The lack of articles about history, culture, and identity could be simply because there are other more pressing issues to write about such as the conflict, or because the medium of DAN news is not used for these articles.

Identity is important for unrecognized states as it may set the stage for external recognition as it may legitimize claims for secession (Richards and Smith 2015). Moreover, the condition of non-recognition may bolster national identity. Fabry argues that the uncertain status unrecognized states live in without the legal protection of being a recognized state produces a 'siege mentality' (Fabry 2016, 27). De Cordier attributes the DNR with a kind of 'resistance

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[153] From 17 Feb. (17:25 Identity Documents sample): Артисты донецкого цирка «Космос» проведут серию мастер-классов для народных коллективов ДНР. *'artists of the circus of Donetsk 'Cosmos' are holding series of masterclasses for folk groups of the DNR'*

[154] From 18 Feb. (16:12, Identity Documents sample).

identity', which is based on: 'the Donbas identity, the legacies of the USSR, the Great Patriotic War and anti-fascism, Orthodox Christianity, the freemen identity of the steppe of Novorossiya, and anti-colonial resistance.' (de Cordier 2017, 2). The DNR has a multitude of vectors along which they try to create an identity pointing to a confusion about what DNR identity should be. Moreover, they have the additional problem of differentiating between the Donbas and the DNR identity: yet, there is no specific DNR identity. Cultural affinity with Russia a strong marker of Donbas identity. I would argue that the DNR has tried to use a siege/resistance mentality based on regional identity. The DNR presents itself as the protector of Donbas identity, and Ukraine as going against the Donbas identity.

Chapter 7: Patron state engagement.

The DNR's patron state, Russia, almost fully controls what happens in the DNR. However, Moscow has neither recognized the DNR as an independent state nor annexed it. The forum where Russian support is most tangible is the Minsk agreements. Without Russia, the DNR would not have been at the negotiation table. The DNR also engages with their patron in ways that are more practical. First, Russia can perform recognizing acts that fall short of recognition. This can come in various forms, but in the sample, they are mostly related to students, sports, and professional groups. Second, Russian citizens can visit the DNR. These can be cultural groups or minor officials. And third, Russia lets the DNR participate in events in Russia.
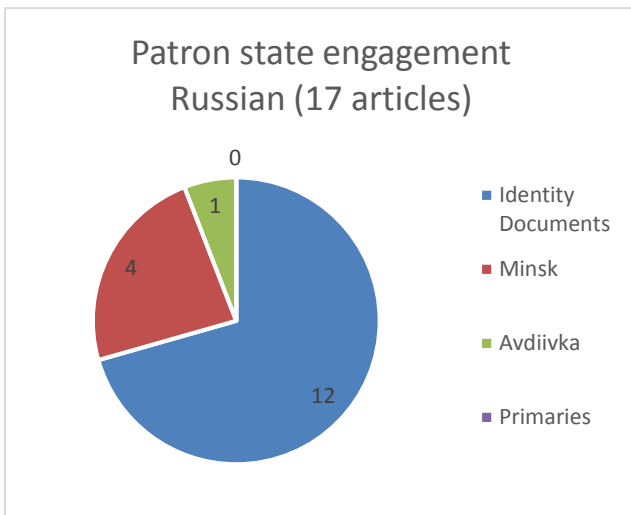

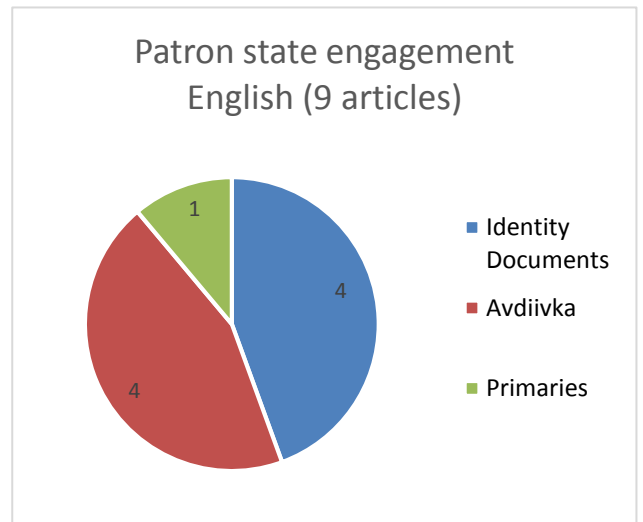*Fig. 16. Russian articles by time sample*

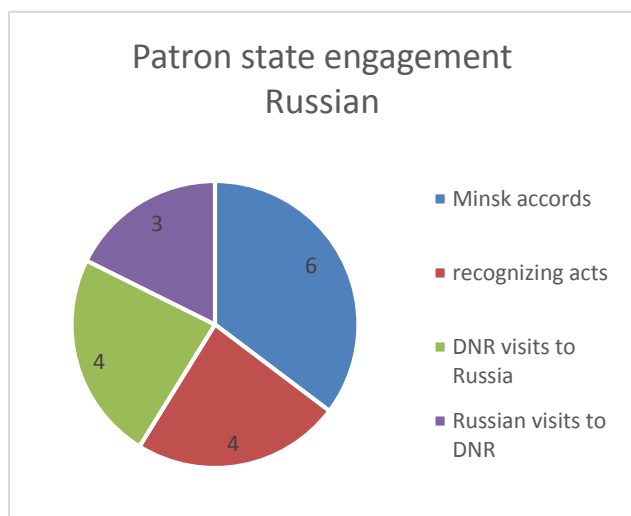*Fig. 17. English articles by time sample*

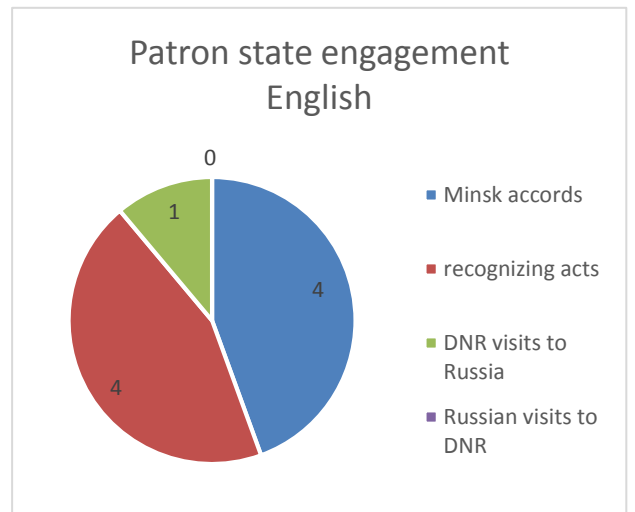*Fig. 18. Subcategories Russian*

Fig. 19. Subcategories English

In unrecognized states, most interaction with the patron state will not be made public due to its sensitive nature (O Beacháin et al.2016, 448). This would be the case in the DNR. Russia is heavily supporting the DNR both militarily and financially but officially, Russian army has never been in Ukraine. In Russian language sample patron state engagement is predominantly found in the Identity Documents time sample whereas in the English language sample it is more mixed. During the identity documents sample, as its naming suggests, Vladimir Putin issued a decree recognizing documents from the DNR/LNR. As such, most articles are from that time sample. The Minsk agreements are used in multiple ways by the DNR, some of which have already been described in previous chapters. Articles specifically about the agreements show up in the Minsk agreements sample, while reference to the agreements exists throughout all samples.

7.1: Minsk agreements

Most articles related to the Minsk agreements are not about Russian support, as Russian and DNR line is that the DNR is an independent actor in the talks. Rather, the international side of the agreements is highlighted. Articles related to the agreements are mostly about Kyiv breaking the agreements. Furthermore, in the primaries sample the Minsk agreements feature as a legitimation of the elections. During the negotiations in Minsk the DNR with the help of Russia had a military advantage on the front line around Debal'tseve. They were thus in a strong negotiating position backed by Russia. The DNR's representative at the Minsk talks was Denis Pushilin. In the process of negotiations, Pushilin, backed by Russia, made demands: '*a full and comprehensive political settlement of the conflict with Ukraine is possible on if that country will have a non-block status and will be neutral in its relations to any security union*'.[155] This statement reflects the subservient role of the DNR in the Minsk talks. While nominally an independent actor, they serve mostly Russian interests. It is telling that the first article on the February 12 about the Minsk agreements (who were agreed the night of the 11th to the 12th) is about Vladimir Putin confirming that the ceasefire will start on the 15th of February.[156]

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[155] From the 11 Feb. (21:33, Minsk sample) article: «Полное и всеобъемлющее политическое урегулирование конфликта с Украиной возможно только в том случае, если эта страна будет иметь внеблоковый статус и будет нейтральна по отношению к любым военным союзам»

[156] 12 Feb. (12:18, Minsk sample): В Минске заключена договоренность о прекращении огня с 15 февраля — Путин. '*In Minsk an agreement is made about a ceasefire from the 15th of February - Putin*'

The Minsk agreements are taken as an opportunity to start building the 'state' on their own and with the help of Russia.[157] [158] Pushilin takes the importance of the Minsk agreements further as he presents them as an uneasy solution to the problem which exists, namely, that many 'Russians' (unclear whether he means Russian speakers or ethnic Russians) are left in Ukraine. He argues Russia cannot forget their compatriots still living in territory controlled by Kyiv.[159] Tellingly, he makes the comparison with the whole of the Donbas and Russia: the DNR cannot forget Russians left in Ukraine just as Russia could not forget Russians in the Donbas.[160]

Due to the missing Minsk time sample, there are less articles about the Minsk agreements in the DoNi sample. DoNi news takes a similar position to DAN news with regards to the Minsk agreements. They portray Kyiv as unwilling to implement them.[161] It presents the DNR as an independent actor in the Minsk agreements. Articles about the Joint Center for Control and Coordination are more positive. The JCCC was created to help implement the ceasefire and ensure protection for the OSCE SMM monitors. The JCCC consisted of Ukrainian and Russian officers.[162] The JCCC was responsible for coordinating ceasefires so that essential infrastructure could be repaired. DoNi attributes Russian side of the JCCC of having coordinated ceasefires to repair infrastructure damaged by Ukrainian shelling which fits with Russian propaganda line that Russia is trying to create peace. [163]

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[157] Such as in this 12 Feb. (21:18, Minsk sample) article where Zakharchenko is quoted saying that the agreements: «положит конец боевым действиями позволит ДНР и ЛНР заняться мирным строительством на благо народа» '*put an end to the hostilities and allows the DNR and LNR to engage in the peaceful building (of their states) for the benefit of the people*'.

[158] Or as in 12 Feb. (19:25, Minsk sample).

[159] Article from 12 Feb. (21:18, Minsk sample): Донбасс сейчас борется не только за свои права, но и за права всех жителей Украины – Пушилин. '*Donbas does not only fight for its own rights, but also for the rights of all citizens of Ukraine - Pushilin*'.

[160] 12 Feb. (21:18, Minsk sample): Так же как и Россия не смогла забыть и откреститься от нас». '*Just like Russia could not forget about and disown us*'.

[161] Evident from this headline 17 Feb. (10:51, Identity Documents DoNi sample): 'Minsk talks – smokescreen to prepare AFU offensive'

[162] Russia withdrew from the JCCC in December 2017

[163] From 30 Jan. (15:13, Avdiivka DoNi sample).

7.2: Recognizing acts

Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognizing the documents given out in the DNR/LNR on February 18, 2017. These documents included all types of certificates (death, marriage, birth, etc .), as well as passports. Putin made the decision public during the München security conference, just after U.S. vice president Mike Pence had strongly judged Russia's behaviour in Ukraine. Additionally, it came right after a flare up of the conflict near Avdiivka, leading commentators to argue that the move to recognize documents was made to put pressure on the West (Górecki 2017). The decree states that it is guided by humanitarian principles (Putin 2017). According to the decree, inhabitants of certain regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblast can now travel to and from Russia without needing a visa. This was a major step forward and a major PR victory for the DNR. The first article appearing on DAN news about the decision is a summary of the decree. In a second article Pushilin is quoted saying that the decree was '*long awaited*' by the people of the Donbas,[164] and thanked president Putin. In a subsequent article, Zakharchenko also gets the chance to thank Putin. In stark contrast with Western commentators, Zakharchenko sees the decree as proof that Russia '(…) *supported and continues to support the rights of its compatriots and fights for their lives, their culture, their language, and, eventually, for their honour and dignity.*'[165] Thus, DAN employs this recognition as a propaganda tool. The recognition of documents is presented as a sign that Russia cares deeply about the fate of those living in the DNR. Moreover, Zakharchenko calls it the '*merit of every citizen of the DNR*', although he does not explain how the citizens of the DNR influenced this decision.[166] In total, only three articles are dedicated to this decision. One would expect more importance given to this event.

DoNi news has the same number of articles about the recognition of identity documents. They cite Zakharchenko saying: 'If the Motherland is supporting our struggle openly and safely, it means that this struggle is righteous.'[167] This statement confirms the

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[164] From 18 Feb. (18:55, Identity Documents sample): Пушилин назвал долгожданным указ о признании в РФ документов, выданных в ДНР и ЛНР. '*Pushilin called the decree about the recogniztion of documents issued by the DNR and LNR by Russia long awaited.*'

[165] From 18 Feb. (19:28, Identity Documents sample): (…) Россия поддерживала и будет поддерживать право своих соотечественников бороться за свою жизнь, свою культуру, свой язык и, в конце концов, за свои честь и достоинство»

[166] Same article, Это признание заслуг каждого жителя Донецкой Народной Республики.

[167] From 19 Feb. (15:05, Identity Documents DoNi sample).

DNR sees Russian acts such as these as contributing to their struggle for independence. Aimed at an international audience, DoNi news exploits Russia's recognition of identity documents as a major victory for the DNR. The OSCE was strongly against Russia's move of recognizing identity documents, arguing that this was a step in the eventual recognition of the republics (Gutterman 2017). It is unclear how much Putin's decree changed the situation on the ground. Russian border guards at the border uncontrolled by Kyiv may have long turned a blind eye to people travelling with DNR/LNR passports. Furthermore, many people may have already owned a Russian passport. In other unrecognized states Russia has started a process called 'passportization' in which it gives residents of these entities Russian citizenship (Nagashima 2017). To what extent this has already happened in the DNR is not clear. Furthermore, in Ukraine having double citizenship is illegal but the government has no way of checking if people have double citizenship. Therefore, before the conflict many people in the Donbas could have already had Russian citizenship (Hoffmann and Chochia 2018). So far the recognition of identity documents has been the biggest recognizing act Russia has made towards the DNR.

7.3 Russian visits to DNR and vice versa

Besides large acts such as the recognition of documents, Russia engages with the DNR in other ways. This can be the visiting of the Donbas by Russians. One example already mentioned of such visits was the meeting between the writers' union of Russia and writers from the DNR. This article is mostly about returning the novel 'the Young Guard' by Fadeev into the school curriculum. However, it also shows that the DNR is engaging with Russia on a 'low politics' level. Indeed, the meeting is described as '*(…) strengthening the cultural ties between Russia and the young republic.*'[168] The 'Russian Center' in Donetsk thus plays a key role in Russian engagement with the DNR. Another example of the DNR working together with Russian organizations on a low level is the cooperation of the DNR with Russian organizations from the regions. For example, on the 17th of February the ice hockey federations of the DNR and Chechnya signed a cooperation agreement.[169] Signing such an

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[168] from 29 Jan. (16:55 Avdiivka sample): (…) укрепление культурных связей России и молодых республик.

[169] From 17 Feb. (18:33, Identity Documents sample): Хоккейные федерации ДНР и Чеченской Республики

agreement is a way in which the DNR is presented as having close relations with Russian officials. Moreover, cooperation with Russian regions is less risky for Russia.

The Identity Documents sample has articles about a delegation from occupied Crimea going to Donetsk. Head of the delegation was Andrej Sobolev who is a member of the federation council in Russia as well as a member of the executive organs of the Sevastopol' city administration. Sobolov was accompanied by Russian music ensemble '*Music-X*' performed in the program '*We are one family*'. This visit is described as '(…) *marking the beginning of a new stage of cultural cooperation between the DNR and Russian city of federal significance*'.[170] The title of the program alludes to the *Russkij Mir* ideology which sees the Donbas and Russia as parts of a civilizational space. Likewise, in symbolic fashion Sobolev gifted Zakharchenko a golden bell as a sign of the unity of their respective regions.[171] There are obvious similarities between Crimea and the Donbas as both are products of Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Indeed, Sobolev emphasizes that they are both products of the so-called 'Russian spring'.[172] These articles serve the same purpose as the aforementioned articles about DNR groups going to Russia. By describing visits of groups and officials from Crimea (which the DNR recognizes as Russian territory), DAN news is presenting the DNR as an independent state that aspires to have closer relations with Russia. Moreover, although Russia, the patron state, does not recognize the DNR officially, regions of Russia appear to have the freedom to engage with the DNR. Alternatively, they could be pressured into engaging with the DNR. Engaging with the DNR might also be a way of showing loyalty to the Kremlin. On the other side, for the DNR media, the engagement with Russia provides a welcome opportunity to prove the DNR integration process with Russia is going well. The timing of these articles strengthens this assumption: they appear just as Russia recognized identity documents given out in the DNR.

подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве. '*Hockey federations of the DNR and the Chechen Republic signed an agreement about cooperation.*'

[170] From 19 Feb. (16:15, Identity Documents sample): (…) положив тем самым начало новому этапу культурного сотрудничества между ДНР и российском городом федерального значения.

[171] From 19 Feb. (14:56, Identity Documents sample): Член Совфеда от Севастополя передаст Главе ДНР в подарок символ города как знак единения регионов. '*Member of the federation council will give the head of the DNR a symbol of the city as a gift as a sign of the unity of regions.*'

[172] from 19 Feb. (20:22, Identity Documents sample): «Вместе с Донецкой и Луганской Народными Республиками мы ровесники «Русской весны», —сказал, выступая в театре Соболев. '*Together with the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics we are contemporaries of the 'Russian Spring'.*'

Relations between the DNR and Russian regions are highlighted again in an article about DNR students participating in Russian patriotic events. Although no high officials were delegated, still people with official sounding titles were sent.[173] Other articles also describe the participation of delegations from the DNR in Russian events or conferences.[174] This is interesting as in the other samples there is a distinct lack of such articles. This could be a coincidence, and further research with a larger sample could establish whether articles about DNR-Russian engagement are published more during periods in which Russia officially performs a recognizing act. Articles about visits to Russia serve to cement the relationship with Russia. Articles about, for example, young people participating in competitions in Russian regions illustrate that the DNR is already cooperating with Russia in many aspects.

Surprisingly, the DoNi sample has no articles about such visits. One would expect that the visit of a Crimean official to Donetsk would be good propaganda material for DAN as well as DoNi. Possibly the material is again 'too local', similar to articles about cultural events. Moreover, it might just not be sensational enough: DoNi writes in alarmist headlines mostly about war. The visit of a Crimean official with a Russian pop group does not fit in with their usual work. Again, there is a remarkable absence of DoNi articles about delegations from the DNR visiting Russia. The only such article is, in DoNi style, about children flown to a Moscow hospital to receive treatment.[175] There is a general absence of DoNi articles on patron state engagement beyond translations of articles about Minsk or the recognition of identity documents. I would argue this is because the 'international' engagement of the DNR with Russia has a primarily local character and DoNi does not report on local events except for war related issues.

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[173] From 18 Feb. (18:10 Identity Documents sample): (…) командир центрального штаба Республиканских молодежных студенческих трудовых отрядов Павел Анацкий и комиссар центрального штаба Максим Жусупов. (…) 'the commander of the general staff of the republican student labor brigades Palev Anatskij and the Kommisar of the general staff Maksim Zhusupov.'

[174] Such as 18 Feb. (15:45; 18:03; 18:40 Identity Documents sample).

[175] From 28 Jan. (17:31, Avdiivka DoNi sample): 13 Donetsk children sent to Moscow for treatment - TV Report.

7.4: Conclusion: Recognizing acts short of Recognition

States can interact with unrecognized states in different ways (Ker-Lindsay 2018, 364). The patron state interacts most with the unrecognized state it supports. In the case of the DNR, the patron state fulfills first and foremost the role of security guarantor as the conflict is still ongoing. However, as argued above, such a form of interaction will not be made public. Considering the situation in the Donbas, the DNR will not publish records of how much Russia helped them militarily. What stands out more in the samples is interaction with Russia on a smaller scale, such as interaction in the cultural sphere and interaction with Russian regions. Most articles about Russian visits to the DNR and vice versa were from the Identity Documents sample. While one of the self-professed goals of the DNR is to build an independent republic, paradoxically, integration into Russia is also a stated goal. Articles about patron state engagement support both these directions. On the one hand, the engagement is depicted as distinctly international. On the other, articles depict this engagement as a sign the DNR is integrating with the 'motherland'. This corresponds to the foreign policy options of other post-Soviet unrecognized states; there is a constant strain between relying on the patron state and claiming independent existence and unrecognized states exist somewhere on a spectrum of more dependent and more independent (Berg and Vits 2018, 402-403). The DNR is on the dependent end of the spectrum. The rhetoric of DAN news discussed above in all three segments of patron state engagement presents the DNR as a part of Russia. Perhaps this is a sign the DNR has not completely given up the idea of being annexed by Russia.

Chapter 8: International Engagement.

There is significant variation in how unrecognized states engage with countries besides their patron state. Some unrecognized states have extensive international connections, such as Taiwan. Others are more isolated and rely almost exclusively on their patron, like South Ossetia. For unrecognized states, any interaction with the outside world contributes to their (perception of) recognition.

Fig. 20. Russian articles by time sample
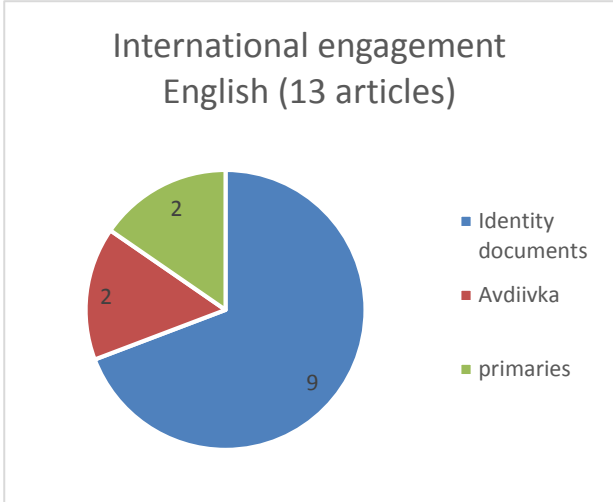
Fig. 21. English articles by time sample

Fig. 22. Subcategories Russian

Fig. 23. Subcategories English

International engagement exists in three forms in the samples: 1) articles which may or may not be intended for an international audience that are about international engagement 2) articles not specifically about international engagement intended for an international audience, and 3) articles specifically about international engagement for an international audience. This section will discuss all three but will focus on the first and the third forms as the second form has already been discussed in previous chapters. Most articles in the DAN news sample are

related to the Minsk agreements and the OSCE.A minority is related to foreigners visiting the DNR. In the DoNi sample, Minsk and the OSCE show up, but most articles are about various types of international affairs.

8.1 Minsk and the OSCE

As described in the previous chapters, the DNR media uses the Minsk agreements in multiple ways: to stress patron state support, and to discredit Kyiv. The Minsk agreements and the SMM, are used as international platforms. The OSCE is the only international organization the DNR is in intensive contact with. The Minsk agreements and the OSCE SMM are used by the DNR to engage with the outside world. Another way is drawing attention to their claim that Kyiv does not adherer to the agreements. The goal is the same: trying to get international attention through the Minsk process. A good example of this is the petition that was prepared in the DNR in February 2017. It was an '*appeal from the People's Soviets of the DNR and LNR to the leaders of Russia, the U.S.A., and Germany with the request to stop the genocide of Donbas from the side of Ukraine*.[176] Such a petition does not have any real international consequences as none of the states it is directed to recognize the DNR. However, it does provide citizens with the idea that the DNR is taking action against Ukraine on an international level. To add strength to this petition, there was also a march through the centre of Donetsk with the same purpose. The Head of the 'parliamentary faction' of the Donetsk Republic movement explained that the Minsk process is the way the world 'listens' to the Donbas.[177] The Minsk agreements are the only international forum in which they participate and are supposedly listened to. In the article about this march a woman is quoted saying that their efforts will direct the attention of international society to the '*criminal junta*' that is '*rewriting history*'.[178] Again, such protests will not convince the leaders of international society that Ukraine is perpetrating a genocide of the Donbas.

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[176] From 17 Feb. (10:56, Identity Documents sample): обращения председателей Народных Советов ДНР и ЛНР к лидерам Российской Федерации, США и Германии с просьбой остановить геноцид Донбасса со стороны Украины.

[177] From 18 Feb. (13:03, Identity Documents sample): «Благодаря встречам в Минске нас услышал мир, и они знают правду (...). '*Thanks to the meetings in Minsk the world listened to us, and they know the truth.*'

[178] From 18 Feb. (13:03, Identity Documents sample): Мы уверены, что наши усилия направленные на привлечение внимания международного сообщества к тому, как преступная хунта переписывает

The DNR criticizes the OSCE, arguing that the SMM does not do enough to observe alleged Ukrainian crimes.[179] The same day Plotnitskij and Zakharchenko announced their 'humanitarian aid' program for the Donbas they had a meeting with deputy head of the SMM Aleksander Hug. Zakharchenko is quoted by DAN saying that after this meeting European states will have some 'hard mental work' to do.[180] DAN news and the DNR deem these meetings to be important. However, the OSCE does not publicize these meetings in the same way. Zakharchenko alleged that the SMM is ignoring ceasefire violations by the Ukrainian side. Moreover, he said he is unwilling to pull back any arms if the Ukrainians do not do so first. According to DoNi, 'Alexander Hug responded to all charges with stock phrases and appeals to observe the Minsk agreements.'[181] Furthermore, during the flare up of the conflict around Avdiivka, Pushilin was quoted by DoNi saying that the OSCE monitoring is 'insufficient' because it does not record the calibre used and does not point out the violator.[182] According to DoNi and the DNR, the violator is always Ukraine. The criticism of the SMM goes together with a rhetorical commitment to the Minsk agreements.

8.2 Foreigners visiting the DNR and vice versa

Another way of engaging with international society, as we have seen in the previous section on patron state engagement, is sending and receiving delegations from other states. Usually these interactions are with Russia, but, as described in chapter on democratization, there is also engagement with citizens from European states. Undeterred by the international isolation,

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историю (…). '*We are convinced that our efforts will direct the attention of international society to how the criminal junta is rewriting history (…).*'

[179] Such as in this 17 Feb. article (15:32, Identity Documents sample): Глава ДНР выразил надежду на объективное освещение ситуации в Донбассе наблюдателями ОБСЕ. '*The head of the DNR expressed the hope for an objective covering of the situation in the Donbas by the observers of the OSCE.*'

[180] From 17 Feb. (13:16, Identity Documents sample): «европейские государства задумаются, для Европы начнется тяжелая умственная работа». '*European states will have to think, for Europe heave mental work is starts.*'

[181] From 17 Feb. (19:12, Identity Documents DoNi sample).

[182] From 30 Jan. (19:58, Avdiivka DoNi sample): "We consider the OSCE SMM activity insufficient. To ease the tensions and to settle the conflict it is necessary to clearly identify the violator of the ceasefire, to record the caliber of the arms used in shelling and the type of arms used. We urge the OSCE and the JCCC to do anything possible to make ceasefire manifest itself into reality, not just into empty rhetoric."

DAN news posted an article about how economists from the DNR have visited over 50 international and local conferences.[183] These apparently included conferences in the U.S. and Latvia.[184] Moreover, the article notes that economists from the DNR have been published in international journals and that the journal of the institute is indexed in the database in Russia, Japan, and Google.[185] This example shows how something seemingly apolitical is turned into a strategy of international engagement. At the same time, it is a sign to the inhabitants of the DNR that they are living in a normal state which has international connections. The latter also happens in an article otherwise wholly dedicated to the under 10 chess championship: it finishes with the remark that the winners will represent the DNR at international tournaments.[186] Unless those tournaments are in other unrecognized states, these children will probably not represent the DNR anywhere. Nevertheless, the message is clear: the DNR is a normal state that participates in international affairs like any other state. An article from the Avdiivka time sample shows how a visit from international guest is presented. On the January 28, 2017 American trombone player Nicholas Conn came to visited Donetsk. Conn stated he was '*not afraid of any sanctions, because I believe that playing music for the pleasure of people is not a crime.*'[187] This reminds of the international 'observers' at the primaries. Willing foreigners are found and used to convey the message that the DNR is a normal state. The article further boasts that in 2017 artists from the UK, France, and Greece will visit Donetsk. Foreigners are used to portray the DNR as a normal state. These foreigners might come to the DNR out of ideological convictions such as Janus Putkonen who runs DoNi news, or Giulietto Chiesa who was an international observer at the primaries. However, it is also beneficial for the DNR when people visit on apparent apolitical reasons.

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[183] From 18 Feb. (12:46, Identity Documents sample): Ученые-экономисты ДНР в 2016 году приняли участие в 50 международных и местных конференциях. '*Economic scientists of the DNR took part in over 50 international and local conferences.*'

[184] The 'international' conferences visited also included Russia and the LNR.

[185] From 18 Feb. (12:46, Identity Documents sample): (журнал) индексируется в международных наукометрических базах Российской Федерации, Японии, а также Академии Google.

[186] From 19 Feb. (17:07, Identity Documents sample): Как ожидается, лучшие юные шахматисты войдут в детскую сборную ДНР по шахматам и будут представлять Республику на международных соревнованиях. '*As expected, the best young chess players will go into the children's chess team of the DNR and will represent the republic at international competitions.*'

[187] From 28 Jan. (18:47, Avdiivka sample): Я не боюсь каких-либо санкций, потому что уверен в том, что играть музыку на радость людям – не преступление».

DoNi publishes more articles about international topics, seemingly at random, than DAN. These articles are to discredit Ukraine and/or the West. Take for example this headline from the Primaries sample: 'Western instructors train Ukrainian military in new torturing methods'.[188] An article that alleges that Dutch investigators are 'sabotaging' the MH17 investigation also fits in this category.[189] There two articles about Trump and Putin talking on the phone.[190] One of the most interesting articles of this category is an article by Janus Putkonen in which he defends his claim that the US had sent 3600 tanks to Europe.[191] This article has been widely shared (over 40,000 combined views) in international fringe media but also broadcast in Russian state media (Nimmo 2017). It has been widely denounce as fake news- while 3600 vehicles were indeed transferred to Europe, only 180 of them were actual tanks. Putkonen defends his piece by saying that he what he meant by 'tank' was an armored fighting vehicle and *not* a main battle tank. Putkonen's original piece was likely a deliberate fake. What is interesting here is that Putkonen had felt the need to respond to these allegations of fake news. He finishes the article saying that ''the real "fake news" in the West are those mainstream media sources, who are not telling you all these facts and who are accusing as liars those of us, who are offering truthful numbers and other concealed information about US-EU-NATO aggression.''[192]

Another interesting DoNi article is one that cites a MP from the European parliament, Jean-Luc Schaffhauser, who argues that the EU should put pressure on Kyiv to make them fulfill the Minsk agreements.[193] Schaffhauser claimed the EU should threaten Ukraine with sanctions if it does not hold substantial talks with the 'de-facto Donbas authorities' about implementing the agreements. Schaffhauser: is a right-wing French MP famous for receiving

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[188] From 3 Oct. (15:53 Primaries DoNi sample). Another almost identical article was posted at 18:11.

[189] From 30 Jan. (09:00, Avdiivka DoNi sample).

[190] From 28 Jan. (11:12 Avdiivka DoNi sample) and 30 Jan. (13:31 Avdiivak DoNi sample).

[191] From 17 Feb. (13:57 Identity Documents DoNi sample): '3,600 US Tanks in Europe' - Truth or Fake News from DoNi Donbas News Agency?

[192] From 17 Feb. (13:57 Identity Documents DoNi sample).

[193] From 17 Feb. (19:36, Identity Documents DoNi sample).

140,000 euros for brokering a 9-million-euro loan to Front National from a Russian bank (Lamant 2014). The final article in this category is about a telephone conversation between Poroshenko and U.S. secretary of state Rex Tillerson in which Tillerson allegedly told Poroshenko to adhere to the Minsk agreements.[194] These articles are all anti-Western in their own way and do not seem to have the explicit goal of legitimizing the DNR internationally.

8.4 International legitimation through DoNi

Articles by DoNi have the explicit goal of informing a foreign audience about the events in the Donbas.[195]Almost half of DoNi articles in the time sample are translations of Russian versions. As such, many articles are about the conflict. Nevertheless, if the only goal of the regime was just to have a translation of their media, they could just have translated all DAN news articles. Instead, Putkonen and Néant have started their own company out of ideological conviction to bring Donbas pro-separatist news to a wider audience. Putkonen and Néant are actively trying to participate in what they see as an 'information war' between Russia and the West. This translates into a main difference between DAN and DoNi. DAN news may publish short articles about cultural events that took place, effectively working as local newspaper. Furthermore, they publish articles from time to time that do not relate to politics or the situation in the DNR. The intended audience of DAN would be the people living in the DNR. These people read the DNR news because they want to know what is going on in their place of residence. DAN news is one of many Russian language sources propagating Russian/DNR view. Thus, DAN readers are similar to any other audience for a newspaper focused on a particular geographic area.

DoNi readers are of a different category. I would argue that while Putkonen and Néant may intend to reach a wide international audience, they mostly reach people who are already convinced the 'Western' media is lying to them. They are mostly targeting those in the EU, as their DoNi press center publishes in English, French and Italian. This has an influence on the type of articles they publish which are less of a local character. Moreover, regime performance and state building are mentioned less, as the articles in these categories were

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[194] From 18 Feb. (17:12 Identity Documents DoNi sample).

[195] See the https://dninews.com/?q=content/about-us: Main task for DoNi media organization is to collect and share trusted and confirmed information from Donbas people's republics, and provide daily publications mainly in English for foreign audience.

mostly of a local nature. Culture, history and identity do not show up at all in the DoNi sample. I would argue that this is also due to the intended audience. The result is that the international legitimation strategy of DoNi is focused not so much on proving the DNR is a stable state and a democracy as is common in unrecognized states (Caspersen 2015, 190). Rather, they focus on reporting the alleged crimes the Ukrainian military and battalions commit in the Donbas. DoNi is thus focused on discrediting Ukraine. While they are engaged in the external legitimation of the DNR in some way, their scope is broader than only the DNR.

8.5: Conclusion: international media and international engagement

The Minsk agreements are seen by DAN news as a platform for international engagement. Articles about the Minsk agreements and are highly critical first of Kyiv not fulfilling the agreements. DAN news covers international engagement mainly through Minsk. This is presented as the only international format through which the world listens to the DNR. However, as with other formats in which unrecognized states participate together with recognized ones, the main goal is eventual reintegration (de Waal, 2017). As such, the DNR rather paradoxically stresses their independence in a forum designed to reintegrate them into Ukraine. The message DAN news is sending out to a domestic audience is that the DNR is drawing the attention of international actors to alleged Ukrainian violations of the agreements. As such, the international engagement articles serve a domestic purpose. The same logic applies to articles about international visitors to the DNR- they are primarily meant to show that the DNR is considered an actual state by foreigners.

The international aspect of the DNR media as presented by DoNi should be seen as an aspect of the disinformation campaign of Russia against the West. The DAN news articles do not fit into this disinformation campaign, as DAN news articles, even those about international themes, have a local perspective and are mostly intended for a local audience. Studies of the media strategies of other unrecognized states will be necessary to establish whether the DNRs use of DoNi to propagate pro DNR and anti-Ukraine and anti-NATO information is unique among unrecognized states. Given the contentious nature of the Ukraine conflict and the geopolitical faceoff that resulted from it (or caused it), the DNR has more need for such a disinformation strategy. Indeed, the events in Ukraine has given rise to a polarized information environment (Toal and O'Loughlin 2017, 911). Moscow has the need

for such a strategy, as they are heavily involved in the DNRs war for secession from Ukraine. As I have showed in the chapter on democratization, the DNR attracts people from the EU or other Western countries who are ideologically committed to the DNR. This translates less into practical international legitimation strategies, and more into Ukraine bashing to an international audience. Consequently, through DoNi the DNR is trying more to discredit Ukraine as a member of the international community than to portray themselves as an acceptable member.

Chapter 9: Conclusion: assessing the legitimation strategies of the DNR

This thesis has drawn on Beetham, Gilley and Clark in order to operationalize the concept of legitimacy. Power is seen as legitimate if it conforms to established rules, these rules come from shared beliefs by those in power and those subject to power. Moreover, those subject to power need to have a way of expressing consent (Beetham 1991). Bruce Gilley holds that development, democracy/rights, and governance are key in explaining what makes a state legitimate (Gilley 2009). Clark sees external legitimacy mainly as the acceptability of membership into the international community that is largely dependent on internal factors. In unrecognized states, external and internal legitimacy exist in degrees. These entities embark on legitimation strategies, which focus on the building blocks of legitimacy most important to them. The research presented in this thesis aimed to contribute to research on unrecognized states as well as the conflict in Ukraine. It has done so by examining the 'state' media of the DNR, asking the question: how does the DNR attempt to legitimize itself domestically and internationally?

9.1: Discrediting Ukraine as a Legitimation Strategy

The category of 'conflict and security' was by far the biggest in both Russian (41%) and English (53%) language samples. Ensuring security is an important legitimation strategy for all unrecognized state. Security is provided by themselves or with the help of a patron state. In the category of 'conflict and security' the most prevalent articles were small articles about how many times Kyiv had attacked the DNR. These articles are a consequence of the conflict. However, they also serve another function which is framing the conflict as a war of the Ukrainian army against DNR civilians. The vilification of Ukraine becomes particularly visible in the subcategory of 'Ukraine immoral' were the side of Kyiv, primarily the battalions, are credited with having conducted or planning to conduct horrible acts against the civilian population. Additionally, the Ukrainian army is described as demoralized or incompetent. The legitimation strategy of providing security in the DNR is centered on discrediting Ukraine It presents the DNR as the protector of the population of the Donbas, which Ukraine is trying destroy. It is used as a domestic and international legitimation strategy. Domestic because it asserts the need for the DNR to exist; it is a way to present reintegration into the parent state as the worst possible option. DoNi news stood out by its focus on the immorality of Ukrainian

actions. It aims to present the DNR defending its population against Ukrainian aggression. In doing so, DoNi fits into a wider anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaign.

Regime performance and state building were the second most used strategies in the DAN news sample. This encompassed a broad array of articles in which DAN news credited the DNR with having provided something, or more broadly, with functioning as a state. DAN news did this by presenting articles that described the institutions of the DNR. Moreover, they published articles about the political system. In the Identity Documents sample two types of articles particularly stood out: those about the humanitarian aid program and the economy. Both were a reaction to the railway blockade put up by Ukrainian battalions in January that year. The humanitarian aid program showed the DNR presents itself as being able to provide for the people they consider to be their citizens living in Kyiv controlled territories. This is an example of how the DNR tries to legitimize itself *in opposition* to Ukraine; the comparison with Ukraine seems to be an essential element in both domestic and international legitimation strategies. In the DoNi sample regime performance was less prominent as a strategy. I believe this to be due to the essentially local nature of the issues the articles dealt with. The few articles published by DoNi were connected to the blockade and presented a favorable image of the DNR as opposed to Ukraine.

Democratization was only present in the Primaries sample. Turnout was a major theme in the articles about the elections, reflecting a Soviet and post-Soviet authoritarian pattern. The content of the elections was not present in the media. Despite the fact they were primaries for local elections, local issues did not come up. Nevertheless, the DAN news presented the elections as a massive show of consent to the ruling elite. International observers were used in the DAN sample to bolster the legitimacy of the elections in the eyes of the local population. In the DoNi sample they served as a tool of international legitimation. In general, the presence of foreign observers is a sign that the DNR is aware that foreign election observers are an essential part of elections. Moreover, the essential international character of these local elections corroborates Clark's and Caspersen's argument that democratization has become an important element of external legitimacy in general, and in unrecognized states in particular (Clark 2007; Caspersen 2011). The elections were compared with elections in the countries the international observers were from, and they unanimously concluded that the democracy in the DNR is better than in the West. Due to Moscow's large amount of control over DNR internal affairs, any meaningful democratization is not possible. Thus, it seems that the DNR primarily prioritizes the international element of democratization.

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History, culture and identity were topics that came up relatively rarely. Interestingly, the DoNi sample boasted not one article related to these themes. I would argue that this the case because many of the articles in this category were of an essentially local nature. Establishing a group identity is vital if the main claim to legitimacy of the regime is protection of a group. In the DNR however the search for identity was a confused one that at times incorporated imperial, Soviet, regional, and 'Russian world' elements. One constant was the connection with Russia, and the partnership with Russia in cultural projects. Most articles about culture seemed to illustrate the normality of life in the DNR.

Without patron state support the DNR would not exist. However, the most essential spheres of support do not appear in the media. The exact role the patron state plays in providing security is wholly ignored, reflecting Russia's plausible deniability strategy. President Putin issuing a decree recognizing the identity documents given out in the DNR/LNR was the most direct act of recognition by Russia. The news coverage of the Identity Documents sample however was more focused on smaller recognizing acts such as trips of DNR groups to Russia or trips of Russian citizens to the DNR. Patron state engagement was presented in two ways: as *international* contacts, and as steps towards *integration* into Russia. Other international contacts are through the Minsk process and foreigners visiting the DNR. Foreigners are deeply involved in presenting a favorable image of the DNR to an international audience. People such as Janus Putkonen and Christelle Néant disseminate DNR propaganda to a mostly EU audience and as such are part of a wider disinformation campaign. Discrediting the parent state is again a vital element of the international legitimation strategy of the DNR.

The connecting element in legitimation strategies, domestic and international, is the comparative element. The DNR is presented *in opposition* to Ukraine. It seems that the main strategy of the DNR is to convince their population that life is worse in Ukraine. It seems less important to be pro-DNR than to be anti-Ukraine. Such strategies are common in unrecognized states (Kemp 2005). Given the tensions between Russia and Ukraine (and the rest of Europe) following the annexation of Crimea and the start of the conflict, this strategy fits into a broader international campaign by Russia to discredit Ukraine. Therefore, the international legitimation of the DNR carried out by the foreigners working at DoNi news is inherently connected to the polarized information environment that was created after Crimea.

9.2 Discussion

The methodology used has some consequences for the validity of the conclusions. The chosen theoretical framework has allowed me to build upon the research of other scholars when examining the legitimation strategies of the DNR. Scholarship on legitimation strategies of unrecognized states allowed me to analyze DNR legitimation strategies. A disadvantage of the chosen theoretical framework is that the outcomes of the research are influenced by the framework: legitimation strategies not fitting in the theoretical framework may not have been noticed or wrongly interpreted. This touches upon the basic difference between a guided and a conventional content analysis. I believe that this problem was reasonably mitigated. The initial categories are broad enough to capture most of the content clearly. Furthermore, the more detailed categories are still quite broadly conceived. The categories and subcategories are designed to be understandable to any reasonably intelligent individual without a specialization in international relations or Russian and Eurasian studies.

The absence of an English language Minsk sample created problems with comparing the DAN and DoNi samples. I had no second coder to corroborate my categorization of the articles. Finally, the chosen time samples determine to some extent what legitimation strategies are present. The selection of the time samples by critical moments has the disadvantage that they may not be a good representation of the whole. For example, including the Avdiivka and Minsk samples may have caused 'Security and Conflict' to be disproportionally present. However, the advantage is that it allowed me to examine a wider array of legitimation strategies. The limitations described above are limitations inherent in qualitative analysis and concern the questions of repeatability and objectivity. The benefit of qualitative analysis is that it allows the researcher to explore the reasoning behind certain actions. In the study of legitimation strategies, both methods are valuable. Quantitative for understanding which strategies are used, and qualitative for how they are used. The research presented in this thesis has been of a qualitative nature, as it has explored *how* legitimation strategies as described in theoretical framework have been implemented in the DNR. Therefore, the conclusions based on which strategies are most prominent in the DNR need to be confirmed by quantitative research. Future research on the online presence of unrecognized states could take a more quantitative direction. For example, it could use large N datasets to examine to what extent unrecognized states differ in their online presence. Alternatively, it

could develop in a qualitative direction and analyze the online output of unrecognized states using methods such as discourse analysis.

9.3: Assessment of DNR Legitimation Strategies and their Implications

A tentative assessment to what extent the legitimation strategies of the DNR have been successful is based on an understanding of which factors are most important in internal and external legitimacy. Comparing the results of the research to the few opinion surveys that are available such an assessment is possible. The DNR mainly legitimizes itself domestically by emphasizing its role in protecting citizens from Ukraine and by discrediting Ukraine. Internationally, the main strategy is also to discredit Ukraine. The most recent opinion poll of residents of the DNR/LNR[196] shows a deep distrust of the government in Kyiv. Moreover, the respondents from the DNR/LNR are strongly in favor of having a special status, within Ukraine (35%) or within Russia (33.1%) (Sasse 2017, 11-12, 14). Note how 'an independent country' does not come out strongly. A poll done by the Donbas Think Tank in spring 2016 of 605 people in uncontrolled territory (the DNR) and 805 people in controlled territory (Donetsk Oblast) is more focused on the issues people face. Asked what they were most afraid of, 78% in the DNR mentioned the return of armed conflict to their place of residence. As for the perception of where life is better, 33% answered in Ukraine while 49% said there was no difference. Moreover, when asked to compare the governments readiness to listen to the concerns of people, 43% of people in the DNR said the DNR did better, while 31% saw no difference.

These answers touch upon the most prevalent legitimation strategies the DNR uses: security, state building/regime performance, and democratization, corroborating my findings. The second and third points fit with Gilley's conceptualization of what factors are most important for legitimacy. Regime performance and state building are essential parts of legitimacy, and the DNR claims to provide both factors better than Ukraine. Democratization is important for the DNR as an international legitimation strategy. However, it seems that as a domestic strategy it may also work, although this may also be due to the poor performance of the Ukrainian state on a local level in the Donbas. The emphasis on security may mean that if

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[196] This poll encompasses the whole of occupied territories. However, due to the similar situation the DNR and LNR are in, opinions are likely to be similar.

people are worried about their physical safety due to a threat of war, other factors of legitimation become less important. In this scenario, providing security may be the most effective legitimation strategy. Whether legitimation strategies have been successful in terms of Beethams conceptualization of legitimacy is harder to establish. The DNR has not acquired power according to the rules. Moreover, while they try to justify their power in terms of their beliefs, they seem more focused on delegitimizing Ukraine. Consent is shown in elections, but it is unclear to what extent this is genuine consent. Internationally the DNR seems to adhere to Clarks theory that democracy has become an important part of external legitimacy. However, there is no indication that the DNR has moved in the spectrum of acceptability of unrecognized states (Berg and Toomla 2009). The recent elections after Zakharchenko's death were widely condemned by international society, and sanctions against Russia over the Donbas are still in place. This is a worrying outcome for Ukraine because it means that domestic legitimation strategies of the DNR may be successful to some extent. Internationally, DNR legitimation strategies are less successful. However, this does not mean that people are likely to choose life in an independent DNR over life in Russia, or life in Ukraine with a large degree of autonomy.

The current conflict is unlikely to be solved without a Russian military withdrawal. Nevertheless, in the meantime the government in Kyiv can take some steps to make eventual reintegration easier. Attempts by Kyiv to reintegrate the parts of the Donbas controlled by the DNR should acknowledge that in the past several years the attitudes of the residents of the DNR may have changed. The longer the present situation continues, the harder reintegration into Ukraine will be. Kyiv will need to convince the population of the DNR that reintegration is positive for them by ensuring safety and stability. However, the grievances of DNR citizens with the government in Kyiv cannot be solved only by a PR offensive. Rather, Ukraine should be more careful with shelling of areas where people live. Moreover, it may have to guarantee amnesty for those who cooperated with the DNR, as amnesty for the rebels is a key feature of conflict resolution (Kudelia 2018). The Kyiv government should pay extra attention to issues of regime performance and democratization in the parts of Donetsk oblast that it controls. Kyiv should clearly demonstrate that people on their side of the contact line have a better life, and that the authorities in Ukraine listen to the concerns of the local population. There is a large amount of contact between the populations on both sides of the contact line. If people on the Kyiv side enjoy an increase in safety and living standards, that information will reach residents of the DNR. Considering DNR legitimation strategies rely on discrediting Ukraine,

ensuring a better life for those in Ukraine may be the most powerful delegitimation strategy Kyiv has at its disposal.

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Appendix I

This appendix contains all the titles of the articles in Russian language sample. Without exception, they are taken from www.dan-news.info. All articles were downloaded and converted into PDFs in September 2018.

Minsk Russian Time sample (10-12 February 2015)

10th of February 2015

Time	Title
9:55	За сутки в Донецке под обстрелами погибли два мирных жителя, 12 ранены — мэрия
10:59	Украинские силовики 37 раз за ночь обстреляли населенные пункты ДНР — Минобороны
11:34	Центру экстренной медпомощи ДНР не хватает 700 сотрудников, пополнения ждут через несколько месяцев
12:11	Батальон «Азов» атаковал Широкино под Мариуполем, ополчение удерживает позиции — Минобороны
12:15	Украинские силовики целенаправленно выпустили «Точку-У» по Донецку — Минобороны ДНР
12:19	Украинские силовики потеряли за ночь 42 человека убитыми и ранеными — Минобороны
13:21	Новые ограничения на продажу билетов «Укрзализныци» не скажутся на ситуации в ДНР — Минтранс
13:27	Сообщение Минсвязи ДНР о формировании реестра ИТ-предприятий
13:51	На День донора в донецкой ЦГКБ номер 1 собралось втрое больше участников, чем ждали медики
14:41	10 февраля в 19:30 брифинг замкомкорпусом МО ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА
15:33	Обмена пленными между ополчением ДНР и ВСУ сегодня не будет – омбудсмен ДНР
15:49	В ДНР выстраиваются очереди на мобилизацию в ополчение (фото)
16:17	Взрывотехники МЧС обезвредили 8

	элементов РСЗО «Град» и «Ураган» в Донецке, Горловке и Макеевке
16:35	Контактная группа в Минске встретится после 18:00 — МИД Белоруссии
19:16	Представитель ДНР на мирных переговорах Денис Пушилин прибыл в Минск и ожидает начала встречи
19:32	Обстрел Краматорска – провокация ВСУ, направленная на дискредитацию ополчения, заявили в Минобороны ДНР
20:53	В Минске началась встреча Контактной группы
21:00	Офицеры ВСУ бросают свои подразделения и скрываются из Дебальцево – Минобороны ДНР
21:02	Минобороны ДНР располагает данными, что ВСУ готовят наступление на Донецк
21:04	Ополчение ДНР заняло все высоты вокруг Дебальцево – Минобороны ДНР
21:28	Внимание! Отмена утреннего брифинга. 11 февраля в 19:30 вечерний брифинг замкомкорпусом МО ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА
23:01	В Минске завершилась встреча Контактной группы по урегулированию ситуации в Донбассе
23:05	ДНР и ЛНР передали членам Контактной группы предложения по мирному урегулированию — Пушилин
23:26	Совместное заявление полпредов ДНР и ЛНР в Контактной группе Дениса Пушилина и Владислава Дейнего
23:37	О прекращении огня пока говорить рано — Пушилин

11th of February 2015

Time	Title
01:04	Возобновление переговоров в Минске будет зависеть от готовности, прежде всего, Украины дать ответ на предложения ДНР и ЛНР – Пушилин
9:17	ВСУ нанесли удар по центру Донецка, снаряд попал в автостанцию «Центр», где находилось большое количество людей
9:57	В результате обстрела станции «Центр» в Донецке ранены как минимум 9 человек
10:12	Обстрел автостанции в Донецке был спланированной диверсией —

	Минобороны ДНР
10:38	Украинские силовики потеряли за ночь 35 человек убитыми и ранеными — Минобороны ДНР
11:15	Минтранс ДНР попросил ОБСЕ расследовать обстрел железнодорожников украинскими силовиками
11:52	Жертвами обстрела автостанции в Донецке стали шесть человек, восемь ранены — Минздрав
12:15	В донецкую автостанцию «Центр» попал снаряд калибра 152 мм — мэр Донецка
12:31	На базе МВД ДНР создан штаб быстрого реагирования на обстрелы и диверсии
13:19	Обмен пленными между ДНР и ВСУ отложен из-за бюрократических трудностей с украинской стороны
14:14	В результате сегодняшних обстрелов в Донецке погибли 5 человек, 8 ранены — данные мэрии
14:34	В Донецке и Макеевке обезврежены неразорвавшиеся снаряды и фрагменты ракет — МЧС ДНР
14:47	Трагедия на автостанции окончательно продемонстрировала безразличие Киева к жизням мирных граждан – МИД
14:53	Сообщение Министерства труда и соцполитики ДНР о выплатах компенсаций пострадавшим от военных действий
17:18	ДНР обеспечена основными медикаментами на несколько месяцев вперед — Минздрав
18:01	В ДНР отказались от взимания таможенных сборов на импортируемые продукты
19:51	Ополчение ДНР отразило за день 6 атак ВСУ в Дебальцево, кольцо вокруг города укрепляется – Минобороны ДНР
19:57	Более 2 тысяч 300 украинских силовиков погибли за последние 25 суток – Минобороны ДНР
20:03	Украинские силовики более 30 раз за день обстреляли населенные пункты ДНР — Минобороны
20:17	12 февраля в 10:00 брифинг замкомкорпусом МО ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА
20:25	Организованная эвакуация из Дебальцево в ДНР остановилась, Киев не идет

Time	Title
	навстречу Донецку – Басурин
20:26	Контактная группа по Украине возобновила работу в Минске
21:33	Полное политическое урегулирование конфликта с Украиной возможно, если эта страна будет иметь внеблоковый статус — Пушилин
22:47	В больницу № 20 Донецка попал снаряд ВСУ — МЧС
23:21	В переговорах Контактной группы есть положительные подвижки – Пушилин

12th of February 2015

Time	Title
05:30	В ДНР отмечают 97 лет со дня создания Донецко-Криворожской республики
10:09	Украинские силовики 55 раз за сутки обстреляли населенные пункты ДНР — Минобороны
10:15	Нацистский батальон «Азов» мешает эвакуации мирного населения поселка Широкино — Минобороны ДНР
10:25	На выходе из Дебальцевского котла в сторону Украины силовиков ждут заградотряды — Минобороны ДНР
11:08	Ночь в Донецке прошла напряженно, утром канонада продолжается — мэрия
12:18	В Минске заключена договоренность о прекращении огня с 15 февраля — Путин
12:43	В случае нарушения Киевом достигнутых договоренностей новых соглашений не будет — Глава ДНР Захарченко
13:24	В Донецке учреждено городское отделение «Молодой Республики»
13:38	12 февраля в 19:30 вечерний брифинг замкомкорпусом МО ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА
13:49	В Донецке началось празднование 97-летия Донецко-Криворожской Республики
14:09	В ДНР создан профсоюз металлургической и горнодобывающей промышленности
15:38	Украинские силовики обстреляли Куйбышевский район Донецка — мэрия

16:07	Сотни граждан ДНР вышли на митинг в честь 97-летия Донецко-Криворожской Республики
17:29	Установленный в Минске срок освобождения пленных реален для ДНР, но затруднителен для Киева — Морозова
17:33	Киев удерживает 580 пленных из ДНР, еще 1500 человек пропали без вести — Морозова
17:52	Зона вещания цифрового телевидения ДНР охватила регион от Волновахи до Краматорска — Минсвязи
18:50	Пургин обсудил историческое наследие Донецко-Криворожской Республики с внуком Артема и писателем Владимиром Корниловым
19:13	13 февраля в 10:00 брифинг замкомкорпусом МО ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА и министра образования ДНР Игоря КОСТЕНКА
19:25	Реализация подписанного в Минске соглашения даст возможность многократно нарастить поставки гумпомощи в Донбасс – ЦУВ
19:39	Киеву следует демонстрировать не только навыки разрушения, но и созидания – ЦУВ
19:47	ВСУ в Дебальцево дезорганизованы и подавлены, все попытки прорвать окружение безуспешны – Минобороны
20:01	Ополчение ДНР сделает все для прекращения огня – Басурин
20:05	За сутки ВСУ потеряли 127 человек убитыми, за время активной фазы зимних боев — почти 2400 человек, заявили в Минобороны
21:18	Донбасс сейчас борется не только за свои права, но и за права всех жителей Украины – Пушилин

Primaries Russian time sample (1-3 October 2016)

1st of October 2016

Time	Title

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5:30	В ДНР наступил «День тишины» перед первыми в истории Донбасса праймериз
7:38	ВСУ накануне первого разведения сил применили тяжелое вооружение при обстреле территории ДНР — источник
9:52	В Донецке началась передача бюллетеней для праймериз участковым избирательным комиссиям
10:00	Активисты «Молодой Республики» за три месяца помогли восстановить 16 домов в прифронтовом поселке
10:44	В селе Петровское к югу от Донецка началась подготовка к первому разведению сил и средств
11:08	Украинская сторона сорвала разведение сил в Петровском — СЦКК
13:03	ЛНР завершила отвод сил и средств в районе Золотого – ЛИЦ
13:05	Украинские силовики за сутки почти 180 раз обстреляли ДНР, заявили в командовании Республики
14:10	Пушилин в рамках сдачи норм «Готов к труду и обороне» 50 раз поднял гирю в 16 кг (фото)
14:12	Глава ДНР организовал ученикам Амвросиевской школы-интерната поездку в донецкий планетарий и аквапарк
15:14	1 октября в 16:30 брифинг замкомандующего оперативным командованием ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА
16:37	Праймериз в ДНР окажут влияние на политическую ситуацию во всей Европе
16:41	Международные наблюдатели в день праймериз намерены побывать на максимальном количестве участков
16:46	ВСУ за сутки открывали огонь по территории 9 населенных пунктов ДНР – Басурин
16:49	Разведка ДНР сообщила об усилении позиций ВСУ танками, БМП и автомобилями с боеприпасами
16:51	Силы ДНР развернули полевые кухни для жителей прифронтовых Докучаевска, Зайцево, Октябрьского
21:27	Донецкая филармония отметила 85-летие концертом и спецгашением художественных почтовых конвертов

2nd of October 2016

Time	Title
00:00	В Донбассе впервые в истории пройдет предварительное общественное голосование
7:50	Экологи ДНР начали восстановление лесов в районе легендарной Саур-Могилы
8:16	В Донецке открылись избирательные участки, первые в истории Донбасса праймериз начались
8:26	ВрИК заявила, что первые в Донбассе праймериз начались без нарушений
8:46	ВСУ выпустили почти 80 артснарядов и мин по окраинам Ясиноватой и Горловки – источник
9:40	В селе Петровском приступят к разведению сил 3 октября – Минобороны ДНР
11:00	Мэр Донецка на первых в истории ДНР праймериз «проголосовал за будущее Республики»
11:08	Захарченко принял участие в первом в истории Донбасса предварительном голосовании
11:13	Правопорядок на праймериз в ДНР обеспечивают более 900 полицейских – МВД
11:23	Обращение Главы ДНР Захарченко к жителям Республики
11:37	Праймериз призваны выстроить идеальную систему избирательного процесса – Захарченко
12:08	Более 124 тыс. избирателей проголосовало на праймериз к 12:00 – ВрИК
12:43	Иностранные наблюдатели за первые четыре часа голосования на праймериз не выявили нарушений
13:00	2 октября в 14.00 брифинг замкомандующего оперативным командованием ДНР Эдуарда БАСУРИНА (АДРЕС ИЗМЕНЕН)
13:06	Праймериз – это шаг к свободе Донбасса, заявил один из кандидатов на пост мэра Донецка Артем Сердюков
13:08	Образованию нужны учителя-универсалы, компетентные во многих науках

13:39	В прифронтовой зоне Донецка наиболее активно голосует молодежь – директор школы поселка Азотный
14:11	Разведка ДНР сообщила об усилении позиций ВСУ танками, БМП и иностранными наемниками
14:14	ФОТО: Жители прифронтового Куйбышевского района пришли на праймериз-2016
14:19	Командование ДНР заявило о полной готовности к разведению сил в Петровском 3 октября
14:21	Командование ДНР заявило об обострении ситуации на фронте, ВСУ за сутки открывали огонь 269 раз
14:22	Двое бойцов ДНР погибли, еще один ранен за сутки в результате обстрелов со стороны ВСУ – Басурин
14:24	Вернувшиеся из Украины и России жители ДНР пришли на голосование ради улучшения жизни в Донбассе
14:26	Командование ДНР исключило любую угрозу безопасности избирателей на праймериз
14:54	Учителя Донбасса в ходе конфликта показали пример мужественности – Народный учитель СССР
15:07	За семь часов предварительного голосования на участки пришли более 290 тыс. избирателей – ВрИК
15:27	Полиция ДНР не зафиксировала нарушений общественного порядка при проведении праймериз
15:33	Голосование среди пациентов организовано на высоком уровне – главврач республиканской больницы
15:45	Глава ДНР анонсировал масштабные реформы в республиканской системе образования
15:57	Наблюдатели из Италии и Южной Осетии заявили, что не ожидали столь высокой явки на праймериз
16:25	Автопробег в поддержку праймериз в Донецке собрал 125 автомобилей
17:44	Фоторепортаж: Ленинский район на юге Донецка активно участвует в процессе праймериз
17:45	Репортаж: Праймериз в Калининском районе. Выбор шахтеров
18:06	Количество избирателей

	проголосовавших на праймериз к 18:00 приблизилось к 350 тысячам
18:26	Власти наиболее обстреливаемого района Донецка отметили высокую явку на праймериз (ФОТО)
18:40	Рестораторы Донецка напоили горячим чаем избирателей центрального района столицы
19:24	Фоторепортаж: Праймериз в самом крупном районе столицы – Кировском
19:45	Наблюдатель из Италии: Не смотрите на Европу, стройте свою демократию
20:00	Избирательные участки закрылись, в ближайшее время начнется подсчет голосов — ВрИК
20:32	В ДНР официально начался подсчет голосов
21:05	ВрИК огласила предварительные данные по явке избирателей, на участки пришли почти 370 тыс. Человек
21:08	Праймериз пойдут на пользу политическим институтам ДНР и ее имиджу в мире — депутат
21:23	Праймериз в Донецке прошли без эксцессов – МВД
22:20	Наблюдателей из Чехии впечатлила хорошая организация праймериз на фоне большого наплыва избирателей

3rd of October 2016

Time	Title
5:31	3 октября в 10.00. большая пресс-конференция по ПОДВЕДЕНИЮ ИТОГОВ ПРАЙМЕРИЗ
7:47	ВСУ накануне очередного разведения сил обстреляли ДНР из тяжелой артиллерии
8:43	Минимум девять домов повреждены в результате обстрела Ясиноватой со стороны ВСУ — администрация
10:16	В предварительном голосовании приняли участие свыше 370,5 тыс. человек — окончательные данные ВрИК
10:19	Мэр Донецка победил на праймериз с результатом 83,2%
10:27	Члены ОД «Донецкая Республика» победили в качестве самовыдвиженцев в

	505 округах из 514 на праймериз
10:47	ВрИК не исключила продолжения проведения праймериз в городах ДНР
11:38	Командование ДНР предложило Киеву начать разведение сил и средств в Петровском 3 октября в 15:00
13:06	ДНР, Украина, ОБСЕ и СЦКК согласовали начало разведения сил в Петровском 3 октября в 15:00
13:10	Донецкие медики на избирательных участках во время праймериз оказали помощь 101 жителю
13:14	Международные наблюдатели отметили высокую организацию всех этапов проведения праймериз 2 октября
13:33	Горняки ДНР с начала года добыли почти девять миллионов тонн угля
15:01	Первое за время конфликта разведение сил в ДНР началось в селе Петровское к югу от Донецка
15:03	Донецкие власти намерены вернуть жителям прифронтового поселка Октябрьский автобус до ж/д вокзала
15:13	В ДНР завершился первый этап разведения сил
15:52	Силы ДНР вернутся в район Петровского, если Киев до 16:00 не подтвердит факт отвода своих сил — Басурин
16:12	ВСУ начали обстрел района Петровского с позиций, откуда должны были вывести войска – Минобороны
16:40	ОБСЕ обратилась к украинской стороне с просьбой «принять меры», после начала обстрела района Петровского
16:57	Киев сорвал разведение сил в Петровском, силы ДНР возвращаются на исходные позиции
18:10	МЧС и Минфин ДНР разделили 1-2 места в турнире по шахматам среди министерств и ведомств
19:50	ВСУ за сутки 90 раз обстреляли территорию ДНР
20:24	Разведка ДНР зафиксировала усиление позиций ВСУ минометами, танками и артиллерией

Avdiivka Russian time sample (28-30 January 2017)

28th of January 2017

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Time	Title
9:45	Огнем ВСУ на юге ДНР нарушено газоснабжение, повреждено два жилых дома – местные власти
12:08	Квалификацию водителей троллейбуса и трамвая в ДНР за время конфликта получили 80 человек
14:02	Под огнем украинской армии за сутки погиб один военнослужащий ДНР – командование
14:10	«Правый сектор» готовит провокационные обстрелы объектов с хлором вблизи ДФС для обвинения сил ДНР
14:33	Число обстрелов территории ДНР со стороны украинской армии за сутки возросло до 1270 раз – Басурин
15:44	Донбасская юракадемия отметила свое двухлетие награждением, концертом и показом ролика о жизни вуза
16:19	Донецкая молодежь заложила в столичном парке им. Щербакова «капсулу времени» для потомков XXII века
17:04	Нарушенное обстрелами газоснабжение села Заиченко на юге ДНР восстановлено – местные власти
17:30	ВСУ обстреляли Докучаевск, прямым попаданием поврежден многоэтажный дом и магазин – мэр
18:47	Фоторепортаж: Американский тромбонист выступил на донецкой сцене с оркестром столичной филармонии

29th of January 2017

Time	Title
9:42	Шесть сел на юге ДНР остались без электроснабжения в результате обстрелов со стороны ВСУ – власти
10:16	Село на юге Ясиноватой обесточено в результате огня со стороны ВСУ, обстрел продолжается – власти
10:50	ВСУ открыли огонь из тяжелой артиллерии по окрестностям Ясиноватой, выпущено свыше 70 снарядов
11:16	ВСУ с вечера выпустили 265 снарядов и мин по прифронтовым зонам ДНР вдоль

	линии соприкосновения
11:24	Обстрелом со стороны ВСУ повреждены два домостроения в Макеевке — командование
12:32	В ДНР за сутки в результате украинских обстрелов повреждено пять домов и детский сад – Басурин
12:32	Украинские силовики за прошедшие сутки более 1000 раз обстреляли территорию ДНР – Басурин
12:35	ВСУ атаковали позиции ДНР в районе Авдеевки, после чего открыли огонь из артиллерии – Басурин
12:38	Армия Украины за несколько часов выпустила почти 950 снарядов и мин по району Ясиноватой — Басурин
13:10	Обстрелом ВСУ убит военнослужащий ДНР, еще один ранен — командование
13:27	Депутаты НС ДНР в рамках благотворительной акции организовали для детей показ спектакля «12 месяцев»
13:37	ВСУ обстреляли водохранилище Верхнекальмиусской фильтровальной станции – «Вода Донбасса»
13:48	Мирный житель ранен в результате обстрела Донецка со стороны ВСУ — командование
14:17	Командование ДНР назвало подразделение, причастное к обстрелу Куйбышевского района Донецка
14:23	Съемочная группа телеканала НТВ попала под обстрел в Макеевке
15:14	Старейший донецкий клуб юных журналистов «Юнпресс» отметил свой 30-летний юбилей
16:09	Обстрелами украинских силовиков повреждены два жилых дома на юге ДНР – власти
16:22	Нарушенное огнем ВСУ электроснабжение шести сел на юге ДНР восстановлено – местные власти
16:48	Мирный житель, раненный при обстреле Донецка, находится в состоянии средней тяжести – медики
16:55	Писатели РФ, ДНР и ЛНР предложили вернуть в школьную программу роман Фадеева «Молодая гвардия»
17:02	ВСУ обстреляли Донецкую фильтровальную станцию, зафиксированы повреждения – «Вода Донбасса»

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17:55	ВСУ готовятся обстрелять подконтрольные Киеву территории Донбасса из РСЗО «Град» — разведка ДНР
18:08	Обстрел Донецкой фильтровальной станции велся из тяжелой артиллерии – командование
18:10	Энергетики ДНР восстановили энергоснабжение села на юге Ясиноватой, нарушенное огнем ВСУ – мэр
18:20	Боевики ВСУ за день потеряли 20 человек убитыми, свыше 30 получили ранение – командование ДНР

30th of January 2017

Time	Title
9:49	При обстрелах Донецка и Макеевки повреждения получили шесть домов, школа и котельные — источник
10:02	Пять многоквартирных домов в Донецке и окрестностях остались без газа после ночных обстрелов
10:10	ВСУ с вчера выпустили по прифронтовой территории ДНР свыше 200 снарядов и мин
10:27	Электроснабжение шести южных сел ДНР нарушено обстрелом со стороны ВСУ – сводные данные
10:30	Украинская армия возобновила обстрел Макеевки, школьников эвакуировали в подвал – командование ДНР
10:36	СЦКК согласовал «режим тишины» для восстановления ЛЭП на юге ДНР – командование Республики
10:46	Мирная жительница Макеевки погибла, три человека ранены при обстреле со стороны ВСУ
10:54	КПП «Майорск» в Горловке попал под огонь украинских силовиков – источник
12:12	Жители ДНР с июля 2015 года усыновили более 100 детей-сирот – Госслужба по делам семьи
12:18	Депутаты фракции «Донецкая Республика» за осеннюю сессию провели 368 приемов в отделениях ОДДР
13:42	Молодые художники ДНР создадут

	объединение для реализации патриотических арт-проектов
13:52	Заявление полномочного представителя ДНР на переговорах Контактной группы в Минске Дениса Пушилина
14:09	ДНР призывает ОБСЕ и СЦКК любыми способами добиться от Украины реального прекращения огня — Пушилин
14:23	Украинская армия за сутки почти 2000 раз нарушила режим прекращения огня – Басурин
14:42	Число погибших за сутки под обстрелами со стороны ВСУ мирных жителей ДНР возросло до двух человек
15:13	Наблюдательный пункт СЦКК под Ясиноватой оказался в зоне обстрела со стороны украинской армии
15:49	Потери украинской армии убитыми и ранеными за сутки превысили 65 человек
16:29	Ясиноватский машиностроительный завод получил повреждения при обстреле со стороны ВСУ
16:32	Останки мамонта вернутся в экспозиционный зал Донецкого республиканского краеведческого музея
16:33	31 января в 9:00 брифинг уполномоченного по правам человека в ДНР Дарьи МОРОЗОВОЙ, пресс-секретаря МГБ ДНР Марии ПЕТРОВОЙ и военнослужащего ДНР Эдуарда КЛЫПЫ
17:15	Нарушенное обстрелами ВСУ электроснабжение южных сел ДНР восстановят к концу дня – Яновский
17:31	МЧС ДНР в связи с ухудшением погоды открыло в Республике 12 мобильных пунктов обогрева
18:11	Обострение на фронте вблизи фильтровальных станций под Донецком не повлияло на водоснабжение региона
18:13	Последствия обстрела Донецкой фильтровальной станции 29 января (ФОТО)
20:13	Донецкая фильтровальная станция обесточена в результате обстрела – «Вода Донбасса»
21:12	Двое мирных жителей ранены при обстрелах Донецка и Макеевки украинскими силовиками — командование
21:27	Киев потерял убитыми 10 боевиков, еще

	15 ранены при попытке атаковать позиции ДНР под Ясиноватой

Identity documents Russian time sample (17-19 February 2017).

17th of February 2017

Time	Title
9:30	Для заполнения рынка ДНР товарами отечественного производства принимаются все возможные меры – МЭР
9:42	ВСУ с вечера обстреляли девять населенных пунктов ДНР, выпущено порядка 365 снарядов и мин
10:03	Жилой частный дом поврежден в Ясиноватой в результате обстрелов со стороны ВСУ – местные власти
10:15	Производители бытовой химии ДНР за 2016 год выпустили на рынок Республики 40 новых продуктов
10:56	Обращение к лидерам Запада и РФ подписями поддержали 80 сотрудников Минстроя ДНР
10:56	Сотрудники Гортехнадзора ДНР собрали подписи в поддержку обращения к лидерам мировых держав
11:25	ЛНР и ДНР подготовили программу гумпомощи жителям подконтрольной Киеву территории Донбасса
12:06	Ансамбль «Донбасс» в канун Дня защитника Отечества представит новую программу в прифронтовой Горловке
12:20	Совместное заявление Глав ДНР и ЛНР о гуманитарной помощи Донбассу
12:21	Главы ДНР и ЛНР объявили о начале программы гуманитарной помощи оккупированному Донбассу
12:32	Глава ДНР заявил о намерении упростить прохождение КПП для жителей оккупированной части Донбасса
12:39	17 февраля в 16:30 брифинг замначальника Центра управления в кризисных ситуациях МЧС ДНР Виталия ЗАРУБИНА
12:46	Главы ДНР и ЛНР проведут в Луганске совместную встречу с замглавы СММ ОБСЕ Александром Хугом

14:24	Комментарий и.о. министра иностранных дел ДНР Натальи Никоноровой
14:26	Программа помощи жителям оккупированного Донбасса имеет исключительно гуманитарные цели – МИД ДНР
14:41	Под обстрелами ВСУ за неделю погибли восемь военнослужащих ДНР, двое ранены – командование
14:47	Украинские силовики за неделю свыше 6 тыс. раз открывали огонь по территории ДНР – Басурин
14:53	Встреча лидеров Народных Республик и замглавы миссии ОБСЕ проходит в Луганске
14:57	Первый в 2017 году гумконвой МЧС РФ прибудет в Донецк 21 февраля
14:57	Подрыв склада ВСУ под Авдеевкой унес жизни пяти украинских военнослужащих, семь ранены – Басурин
15:06	За неделю из украинских подразделений под Авдеевкой дезертировал 21 человек – разведка ДНР
15:10	Киев до конца года планирует занять ряд населенных пунктов «серой зоны» в Донбассе – Захарченко
15:32	Глава ДНР выразил надежду на объективное освещение ситуации в Донбассе наблюдателями ОБСЕ
15:36	Захарченко и Плотницкий подписали программу помощи жителям оккупированной части Донбасса
16:24	Гуманитарная программа по воссоединению народа Донбасса
16:33	Саперы МЧС ДНР за неделю обезвредили 50 взрывоопасных предметов
17:07	Число подписей жителей ДНР за мир в Донбассе превысило 160 тысяч
17:25	Артисты донецкого цирка «Космос» проведут серию мастер-классов для народных коллективов ДНР
18:33	Хоккейные федерации ДНР и Чеченской Республики подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве
18:41	Программа помощи жителям оккупированного Донбасса начата из-за их бедственного положения — Пушилин
20:15	ВСУ днем обстреляли восемь районов Республики из артиллерии и танков – источник

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Time	Title
20:29	Вечер памяти знаменитой певицы Анны Герман собрал в Макеевке более 400 зрителей

18th of February 2017

Time	Title
9:39	ВСУ утром открыли огонь по Ясиноватой, обстрел продолжается – местные власти
11:00	За время военных действий в Горловке повреждено и разрушено более 3,4 тыс. зданий – мэрия
11:05	В столице ДНР началось массовое шествие против невыполнения Киевом Минских соглашений
12:00	Более 20 тысяч жителей ДНР на митинге в Донецке выступили за полную реализацию Минских соглашений
12:46	Ученые-экономисты ДНР в 2016 году приняли участие в 50 международных и местных конференциях
13:12	Коммунальщики Енакиево присоединились к сбору подписей под обращением к лидерам Запада и РФ
13:47	В аппарате Морозовой заявили о взятии в плен украинскими силовиками трех жителей ДНР
14:00	ВСУ за сутки почти 2 тыс. раз обстреляли ДНР, под Волновахой замечена тяжелая артиллерия – Басурин
14:01	Под украинскими обстрелами за сутки погиб один военнослужащий ДНР – командование
14:17	ВСУ открыли огонь по Спартаку во время работы там полевой кухни для нуждающихся жителей – Басурин
15:03	Концертом и возложением цветов отметили в Дебальцево вторую годовщину освобождения города
15:29	Количество поврежденных обстрелами домов в ДНР за все время боев превысило 24 тысячи – Минстрой
15:45	Профсоюзы медиков ДНР и Санкт-Петербурга намерены подписать договор о двустороннем сотрудничестве

Time	Title
15:58	Массовое шествие и митинг в центре Донецка прошли без нарушений правопорядка – МВД ДНР
16:12	Обновленный состав хора и солистов «Донбасс оперы» вернул оперу «Турандот» на донецкую сцену
17:46	В Ясиноватой обстрелом повреждена ЛЭП, питающая насосную станцию Южнодонбасского водовода
17:55	Путин подписал указ о временном признании в РФ документов, выданных в ДНР и ЛНР
18:03	Представители Минобразования ДНР посетили чемпионат WorldSkills Russia в Астраханской области
18:10	Активисты студотрядов ДНР получили награды в рамках российской патриотической акции «Снежный десант»
18:40	Музыкальные педагоги ДНР приняли участие во Всероссийском семинаре руководителей духовых оркестров
18:46	Обращение к трем мировым лидерам о ситуации в Донбассе поддержали свыше 164 тыс. жителей ДНР
18:55	Пушилин назвал долгожданным указ о признании в РФ документов, выданных в ДНР и ЛНР
19:01	Захарченко выразил благодарность России за признание документов ДНР
19:33	Заявление Захарченко по поводу второй годовщины принятия Резолюции Совбеза ООН по Минскому процессу
19:48	Глава ДНР заявил о готовности Донецка ко всем шагам для мирного решения конфликта в рамках «Минска»
21:24	Донецкая фильтровальная станция обесточена в результате обстрелов — «Вода Донбасса»

19th of February 2017

Time	Title
8:00	Экологи ДНР начали сбор шишек в рамках нового этапа восстановления лесов после боев
9:46	Артогнем ВСУ обесточено Коминтерново, в Ясиноватой снаряд

	попал в крышу жилого дома – местные власти
10:10	Подача воды в пять районов Донецка частично сокращена из-за нарушенного электроснабжения ДФС
10:44	19 февраля в 13:00 пресс-конференция члена Комитета Совета Федерации по науке, образованию и культуре Андрея СОБОЛЕВА
14:01	ВСУ за сутки почти 2,5 тыс. раз обстреляли ДНР, под Донецк стягивается украинская артиллерия – Басурин
14:02	ВСУ при поддержке минометов атаковали позиции ДНР под Донецком — Басурин
14:56	Член Совфеда от Севастополя передаст Главе ДНР в подарок символ города как знак единения регионов
15:04	ВСУ обстреляли бригаду электриков под Ясиноватой — командование
15:12	Коммунальщики ДНР восстановили электроснабжение в Коминтерново после обстрелов – власти
16:15	Российский сенатор заявил о начале нового этапа культурного сотрудничества Севастополя и ДНР
16:34	Жертвуя пешкой: шахматисты ДНР до 9 лет вступили в борьбу за звание лучшего на турнире в столице
19:59	Культурный диалог между Севастополем и ДНР открылся концертом российских артистов в Макеевке

This appendix contains all the titles of the articles in the English language sample. Without exception, they are taken from www.dninews.com.All articles were downloaded and converted into PDFs in September 2018.

Primaries English time sample (1-3 October 2016)

1ˢᵗ of October 2016

Time	Title
10:37	Ukrainian military violate ceasefire regime 863 times over past week
11:26	Handover of ballot papers for primaries to ballot commissions starts
12:14	Ukrainian side disrupts disengagement of forces in Petrovskoye
12:45	2 dead people, more three wounded over past week as result of Ukrainian shellings
13:16	DPR Ombudsman: Ukrainian military arrest 5 Republican citizens
13:22	Election silence in the DPR before the first-ever primaries in Donbass
14:13	Young Republic activists help restore 16 houses in frontline locality
14:52	LPR forced to pull back forces amid Kiev sabotaging disengagement
15:27	Protests of thousands to burst in Kiev in October
16:00	AFU redeployed 300 tons of ammunition to Donbass, including incendiary and phosphoric shells
17:13	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report - 1.10.2016
17:37	DPR primaries to exert impact on political situation EUwide
17:52	Novorossiya supporters destroyed photo show displaying bloody AFU punishers

2nd of October 2016

Time	Title
10:24	Primaries launched, polling stations open in Donetsk
10:33	DPR Election Commission observes no violations after primaries launched
11:40	British observer: Primaries grant all candidates equal rights
12:18	DPR Head: Together we will make the rule people's indeed!
13:27	Ukrainian journalist came to vote in LPR primaries anonymously
14:38	Foreign observers detect no violations in DPR primary vote first hours
15:03	Ukrainian army shelled DPR territory with mortars and heavy artillery at night
15:48	More than 290 thousand voters took part in primaries within 7 hours
16:34	Ukrainian army shell DPR territory 269 times over past 24 hours, two soldiers perished
16:53	Triumph of freedom: Janus Putkonen casts vote in DPR primaries as official Republic's citizen
20:42	DPR polling stations closed, ballots' count starts
21:03	Primaries in DPR and LPR: today was a historical day for Donbass
(No Time)	Gallery: Primaries in Donetsk People's Republic 2.10.2016

3rd of October 2016

Time	Title
9:23	No incidents reported during primaries in Donbass republics
10:13	AFU fired at DPR terrritory with heavy artillery on the eve of forces' disengagement
11:22	Russian security service detains Ukrainian intelligence

	officer over espionage charges
12:11	Russian Foreign Ministry comments on arrest of Ukrainian spy
12:50	One People's Militia soldier killed, two wounded in Kiev shelling LPR
13:27	International observers state DPR primaries an example to West
14:16	Ukraine's Foreign Ministry urges Russia to release journalist suspected of espionage
15:05	Mayoral primaries' front runner Martynov scores great success, final turnout over 370 thousand
15:28	Primaries may be arranged in other DPR cities after success in capital
15:33	Primary elections in the Lugansk People's Republic – an observer's account
15:33	Western instructors train Ukrainian military in new torturing methods
16:29	AFU start shelling area of Petrovskoye from positions, from where they are to withdraw their troops
16:54	DPR miners win almost 9 million tons of coal from beginning of year
17:38	OSCE appeals to Ukrainian side to take steps after shelling start of Petrovskoye area
18:03	Primaries in Donetsk and Lugansk People`s Repblics: final results
18:42	Kiev disrupts disengagement of forces in Petrovskoye, DPR forces go back to departure positions
18:11	Western instructors teach Ukrainian soldiers torture new methods
19:23	At least 9 houses damaged as result of shelling Yasinovataya on part of AFU
20:01	LPR: Kiev refuses to withdraw forces from contact line near Stanitsa Luganskaya

Avdiivka English time sample (28-30 January 2017)

28th of January 2017

Time	Title
10:26	Two houses damaged as Ukrainian forces shell DPR southern territory
11:12	Trump, Putin to talk by phone at 20:00 Moscow time on Saturday
12:33	Poroshenko wants to increase weapons export as source of income
13:02	Igor Plotnitsky expresses condolences over death of the first LPR Leader Valery Bolotov
14:34	Infantry platoon training in Donetsk People's Republic - Video Report
14:54	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report, 28.01.2017
15:37	Pensions are rising in Donetsk People's Republic - TV Report
15:55	Ukrainian criminals shell DPR territory 1,270 times over past 24 hours
16:22	DPR serviceman died under Ukrainian army's fire over 24 hours
16:52	Aftermath: Ukrainian shelling civilians in the city of Brianka, LPR - Video Report
17:31	13 Donetsk children sent to Moscow for treatment - TV Report
17:40	Drunken Ukrainian soldier shot himself
18:02	RIP - Valeriy Bolotov, the founder of Lugansk People's Republic
18:49	Donetsk Defense TV News Report, 28.1.2017

29th of January 2017

Time	Title
12:26	Kiev forces' direct hit damages multi-storey building and a shop in Dokuchaievsk
12:36	Village knocked out by Ukrainian fire in Yasinovataya south, shelling continues
13:00	Basurin: Kiev forces attack DPR positions

	near Avdeyevka and launch artillery fire
13:38	Ukrainian military fire at DPR territory over 1,000 times for past day
14:08	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report, 29.01.2017
14:30	Civilian wounded as Kiev troops shell Donetsk
14:59	Ukraine's army launches nearly 950 projectiles and shells onto Yasinovataya area for several hours
15:26	Five houses and a kindergarten damaged in DPR by Ukrainian shellings this day
15:58	Russian NTV reporters come under Kiev's fire in Makeyevka
16:28	DPR frontline in south ready to repel Ukrainian attacks - Video Report
16:42	Ukrainian shellings damage two houses in DPR south
17:03	One DPR soldier killed, one wounded – Operational Command
17:29	AFU fire at Verkhnekalmiusskaya filter plant reservoir – "Water of Donbass"
17:32	Ukraine firing with heavy artillery Avdeevka village - TV Report
17:58	Power supply of six villages in DPR south restored
18:17	Ukraine shells Makeyevka and Kuibyshevsky in DPR on Sunday - Video Report

30th of January 2017

Time	Title
9:00	Dutch investigators sabotaging probe of MH17 crash – Ex-Russian Official
10:08	Kiev shellings damage six houses, school building and boiler rooms in Donetsk and Makeyevka
11:12	One woman died, three civilians wounded as Ukrainian criminals shell Makeyevka

11:30	Ukrainian forces launch over 200 shells onto DPR territory since evening
12:08	Mayorsk checkpoint in Gorlovka shelled by Ukrainian murderers
12:57	Ukrainian forces resume Makeyevka shelling, school pupils hide in basement
13:31	Putin, Trump convinced Ukraine crisis cannot be protracted
15:13	JCCC coordinates ceasefire regime to repair power lines in DPR south
16:06	Ukrainian army violates ceasefire regime almost 2,000 times over 24 hours
16:25	Frontline Report: Ukrainian attack repelled in outskirt of Donetsk city
17:23	School in Makeyevka shelled by Ukraine on Monday morning - Video Report
17:24	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report, 30.01.2017
17:46	Ukrainian radicals blow up railway track in grey zone between Donbass and Ukraine
18:09	JCCC observation point area near Yasinovataya shelled on AFU part
18:30	Ukraine Shelled Apartment Houses in Donetsk city - Video Report
18:41	Two DPR civil residents died under AFU shellings over 24 hours
19:18	DPR People's Militia hiring new soldiers to artillery unit - TV advertisement
19:31	Kiev authorities get Avakov in a tight corner
19:58	Pushilin: 'Ukraine does everything possible to resume full-scale hostilities' - TV Statement

Identity Documents English language time sample (17-19 February 2017)

17th of February 2017

Time	Title
8:46	Ukrainian forces shell Yasinovataya
10:18	Ukrainian ammunition detonates near Avdeyevka
10:51	Minsk talks – smokescreen to prepare AFU offensive
11:36	Ukrainian forces shell nine DPR localities overnight
12:11	Residential house damaged in shelling of Yasinovataya
12:40	LPR and DPR prepare humanitarian aid program for Kiev-occupied Donbass territories
13:13	DPR Head attends opening of new longwall
13:47	Donbass will stand the blockade!" – DPR Head Alexander Zakharchenko
13:57	'3,600 US Tanks in Europe' - Truth or Fake News from DONi Donbass News Agency?
14:19	DPR and LPR leaders to hold meeting with OSCE Deputy Head Alexander Hug
14:57	Joint statement by LPR and DPR Heads Igor Plotnitsky and Alexander Zakharchenko
15:19	DPR to ease checkpoint procedure for residents of Kiev-occupied part of Donbass
16:28	First loan provided in Donetsk People's Republic - TV Report
16:41	Ukrainian punishers open fire at DPR territory over six thousand times
17:19	DPR MFA: Aid program for occupied Donbass meant for humanitarian purposes only
17:54	Zakharchenko in Lugansk: 'We Remember Our Duty' [Video]
18:22	Zakharchenko expresses his hope for Donbass situation objective coverage by OSCE
18:55	Russian humanitarian convoy arrives in Donetsk on February 21
19:02	Donetsk Defense TV News Report, 17.2.2017
19:12	Alexander Zakharchenko: "OSCE Mission refuses to accept our arguments"
19:36	EU should put pressure on Kiev to stabilize

	Donbass situation – EU lawmaker
19:54	Kiev plans to occupy several localities in Donbass 'grey zone' – Zakharchenko

18th of February 2017

Time	Title
10:33	Ukrainian army engages fire on Yasinovataya
11:22	One million children in Donbass need urgent humanitarian aid — UNICEF
12:09	Ukrainian army violates ceasefire eight times - LPR People's Militia
12:40	LPR People's Militia bomb technicians demine 10km of conduit
13:19	Rally in Donetsk City: 20,000 DPR residents demand implementation of Minsk Agreements
13:49	Zakharchenko's Order: 'No withdrawal of our weapons before Ukraine'
14:23	Over 3,400 buildings destroyed in Gorlovka during war
15:12	DPR Citizens: 'Ukrainians, you are occupants, not liberators - stop the war!' - Video Report
15:30	OSCE Deputy Chief Alexander Hug accepts LPR documents on weaponry withdrawal
15:58	Ukrainian forces shell Spartak during field kitchen's work
16:30	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report, 18.02.2016
17:12	Poroshenko and Tillerson discuss Donbass crisis
17:54	Putin signs decree: Russia's recognition of DPR and LPR documents

19th of February 2017

Time	Title
12:36	Ukrainian artillery-shelling causes Kominternovo village de-energizing
13:10	Three DPR residents captured by Ukrainian fighters this week
14:36	Donetsk filtration plant de-energized by Kiev shellings, water supply disrupted
15:05	Ukrainian punishers shell DPR territory almost 2, 500 times over 24 hours
15:05	Zakharchenko's statement on Putin's Decree on recognition of DPR documents
15:41	Kiev troops fire at electricians' brigade near Yasinovataya
16:05	Decree on recognition of DPR, LPR documents in RF long-awaited event – Pushilin
16:39	Donetsk Defense: Situation Report, 19.02.2017
17:20	DPR positions come under Ukrainian mortar attack near Donetsk
17:59	'Deadlock': Donbass blockade risks plunging Ukraine into energy collapse