

Defining the 'People's Republics' of the Donbas

*A research into the origins, structure and patronage of the Donetsk
and Luhansk People's Republics*

Master Thesis in Russian and Eurasian Studies

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*the mushrooms of Donbas, silent chimeras of the night,
emerging out of the emptiness, growing out of hard coal,
till hearts stand still, like elevators in buildings at night,
the mushrooms of Donbas grow and grow, never letting the
discouraged
and condemned die of grief,
because, man, as long as we're together,
there's someone to dig up this earth,
and find in its warm innards,
the black stuff of death
the black stuff of life.*

Serhiy Zhadan, 2007

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Introduction

In November 2013, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich refused to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union after being pressured by Russian President Vladimir Putin. As a result of Yanukovich's refusal to sign, students flocked to the Independence Square in Kyiv, better known as the Maidan Nezalezhnosti, to protest his decision. The students were later joined by ordinary Ukrainians, who protested in favor of a better relationship with the European Union and the West in general. The protesters occupied the Maidan Square for three months, with the Yanukovich government violently cracking down on them and killing many protesters. The protests, later dubbed the Revolution of Dignity, turned out successful, with Yanukovich fleeing the country in February 2014. The protesters' joy however was short-lived, for days after the ousting of President Yanukovich, the Russian army occupied and illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula in Southern Ukraine. Months later, Russia started a hybrid warfare in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine. In the spring of 2014, pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas seized government buildings and strategic crossroads and declared themselves independent from Ukraine, respectively as the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the Donetsk oblast (province) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) in the Luhansk oblast (Plochy, 2016, p. 343). The war escalated soon after the declaration of independence, with the separatists, aided by Russian 'volunteers' and 'vacationers', Russian weapons and even the regular Russian army, occupying large parts of the Donetsk- and Luhansk oblasts. Although Ukraine was initially successful in liberating the occupied areas, the separatists and the Russians fought back, resulting in a freezing of the war. Despite the conflict currently being frozen, soldiers and civilians on both sides still die on a weekly basis in the Donbas.

Even though the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic have declared themselves independent, their independence has not been recognized officially by any UN member state. The DPR and the LPR consider themselves independent sovereign nations, however the Ukrainian government and most Western states believe that Russia is covertly occupying the Donbas, hiding behind the DPR and LPR 'governments' in order not to officially occupy the region. In order for the conflict to be resolved, it is very important to understand what the DPR and the LPR actually are. If they can be considered as independent de facto but not de jure, it is important to involve them in the process of conflict resolution. However, if

they are fully controlled by Russia and mere puppets of the Kremlin, it might be easier to hold talks directly with the Kremlin instead of with the de facto authorities of the DPR and the LPR. The research question of this Master Thesis is therefore:

“Which terms can best be used to define the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic?”

In order to answer the research question, there are five relevant terms that will be examined in this research. These terms are protectorate, client state, associated state, vassal state and puppet state. In the first chapter, the relevant literature concerning these five terms will be reviewed and discussed. In the second chapter, a thorough chronological overview of the conflict in the Donbas will be given, as well as an analysis of the Russian involvement in this conflict. Chapter three will describe the DPR and the LPR in detail. Chapter four until eight will give a description of each term and will have an analysis applied to the situation in the Donbas to see whether or not these terms are applicable to the DPR and the LPR. The findings will be summarized in the conclusion.

In order to examine the five terms that will be used in this research, a thorough analysis of the available academic literature concerning these terms will be conducted. Although only academic literature will be used to analyze the terms, (online) dictionaries will be used to provide definitions when the literature does not provide a clear one. Academic literature will also be used to research the DPR, the LPR and the conflict in the Donbas. Quality newspaper articles will be used to describe specific events. In order to be able to understand the point of view of the de facto authorities of the DPR and the LPR, their own English-language propaganda news channel *DoNi News Agency* will be used to shine a different light on certain events. It would have been interesting to examine their Russian-language news channels as well, however my Russian is at this point not yet good enough to be able to perfectly understand news articles in Russian. However, the *DoNi News Agency* articles do appear to be rather similar in tone to the Russian-language news articles from the DPR and the LPR.

It is worth mentioning the several different names for geographical locations and for entities that are being used in this research. In English, the Ukrainian breakaway republics in the Donbas are often referred to as the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic, the DPR and the LPR. In Russian however, they are referred to as the Donetskaya

Narodnaya Respublika, the DNR, and the Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika, the LNR. In Ukrainian, the abbreviations are similar, with their official names being the Donets'ka Narodna Respublika and the Luhanska Narodna Respublika. Hence, in some quotes in this research, there will be spoken of the DNR and the LNR, which means exactly the same as the DPR and the LPR. Furthermore, for cities and regions in Ukraine, the official Ukrainian spelling will be used. However, in some quotes or in names of certain organizations, the Russian spelling of cities and regions will be used. Examples of this are Odesa being called Odessa in Russian, and the Donbas being the Donbass in Russian.

In order to provide a clearer understanding of the situation in the Donbas, Appendix 1 on page 52 contains a situation map of the DPR, the LPR and the frontline in the Donbas.

Chapter One

Terms relevant to the DPR and the LPR

In order to start researching which term(s) can best be used to define the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, an extensive research into the available literature concerning relevant terms that can be used to describe the breakaway republics is necessary. In this chapter, five terms that are possibly relevant to the Donbas 'People's Republics' will be researched, namely puppet state, protectorate, vassal state, client state and associated state.

The term puppet state is not a new term. Especially during the Second World War, the Axis Powers installed many puppet regimes and created new puppet states in territories that they had occupied. Although the word puppet state is a fairly new word, the phenomenon itself existed long before the 20th century. It has been argued that Napoleonic Holland, which was a state that existed around 1810, can be considered as a French puppet state (Marek, 1954, p. 170).

Scholar Ivanel calls puppet states a form of covert occupation. In his article *Puppet States: A Growing Trend of Covert Occupation*, he argues that a puppet states' existence is "fundamentally dependent upon the support of another state", which he calls a sponsor state (Ivanel, 2016, p. 46). Ivanel argues that there are currently five puppet states in the world, with a sixth one being in the making. These puppet states are Transnistria: a Russian puppet state in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Russian puppet states in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh: an Armenian puppet state in Azerbaijan and North Cyprus: a Turkish puppet state on Cyprus. Ivanel believes that a sixth puppet state is in the making in Eastern Ukraine, namely a Russian puppet state in the Donbas. Ivanel argues that there are four criteria that define a puppet state. First, a puppet state is not self-sustainable, and depends on what he calls a sponsor state "either economically, military, politically or in all these respects" (Ibid). Second, the sponsor state controls either entirely or partially the politics of its puppet state, with political decisions mostly being "passed down to the puppet by its sponsor" (Ibid, p. 47). In some cases, the puppet state and the sponsor state decide together on policy. Hence, this does not mean that a puppet state can not have a certain degree of autonomy. In theory, a

puppet state could even have a certain influence on its sponsor state, however never to such an extent that it could undermine the sponsor state's control (Ibid).

Ivanel's third criterion of a puppet state is international recognition (Ibid). Puppet states are either completely unrecognized, such as Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, recognized by only one UN-member state, such as North Cyprus which is recognized by its sponsor state Turkey, or recognized by their sponsor state and a handful of UN-member states that are geographically far away from the puppet state and irrelevant to it. Examples of this are Abkhazia and South Ossetia which are recognized not only by Russia but also by Venezuela, Nicaragua and some Pacific island-states.

The fourth criterion, according to Ivanel, is a puppet states' "quasi-permanent" existence (Ibid, p. 48). As Ivanel puts it, "the objective of a puppet state is not its independence, but rather its integration with the sponsor state. While that cannot be achieved, maintaining the status-quo is the main objective as it represents a form of de-facto annexation" (Ibid). Furthermore, Ivanel states that by looking at the four criteria, one can conclude that a puppet state is a form of occupation, which he refers to as 'covert occupation'.

Ivanel argues that the use of a puppet state can be very beneficial for a sponsor state. First of all, by using a puppet state instead of actually occupying a territory, the reputational cost of such an operation would be significantly lower than it would be during an actual occupation. The main goal of using puppet states however is to avoid the burden of international law (Ibid, p. 52). By using international case law, Ivanel argues that puppet states can be used as a "smoke screen that shelters sponsor states from responsibility under the law of war" (Ibid, p. 53). Furthermore, under international law, an occupying state carries certain responsibilities to the population of a territory it occupies. Ivanel argues that by making use of a puppet state, the sponsor state avoids such responsibilities. In other words, a sponsor state can use a puppet state to commit its violation of international (humanitarian) law. As Ivanel puts it, "the use of fake secessionist claims materialised as puppet states offers the perfect venue for a state to escape the constraints of international law, especially those of IHL¹, and perform de facto annexations" (Ibid, p. 63).

¹ International Humanitarian Law

Verhoeven came up with a definition to describe “états fantoches” (literally: puppet states). Verhoeven calls a state a puppet state when “the elements who allowed to identify it [as a state] exist only in appearance”² (Verhoeven, 2000, p. 57). He defines the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo in the 1930’s-40’s as a textbook example of a puppet state.

In her book *Identity and Continuity of States in Public International Law*, Marek describes puppet states as an invention intended to disguise a violation of international law by an occupying state. She states that puppet states “are supposed to commit, for the benefit of the occupying power, all unlawful acts which the latter does not want to commit openly and directly” (Marek, 1954, p. 110). Marek stresses the difference between puppet states and puppet regimes, stating that “A puppet state is an entirely new organism created by the occupant, whereas in a puppet government only the governmental functions are a creation of the occupant, the original State having been in existence before the occupation” (Ibid, p. 111).

Marek describes two criteria an entity needs to fulfill for it to be considered a puppet state. First of all, the occupant state needs to consent to the creation of a government in the occupied territory. The second criterion is the incompatibility of an independent government in a state that is under hostile occupation. Marek states that although especially the first criterion is very relevant, it is usually difficult to determine it, as the occupant state is often reluctant to admit its involvement in the creation of a puppet state (Ibid, p. 112). The second criterion is easier to determine, however, as Marek states there are several examples of states being under occupation who had autonomously functioning governments. Hence, Marek states that “except in the case of an obvious imprudence committed by the occupant, it is practically impossible to lay down a formal criterion for the puppet character of a government or State set up under occupation” (Ibid, p. 112). Marek therefore states that “it is both possible and necessary to introduce the *presumption* of such a character in the case of all governments and States which come into being under belligerent occupation” (Ibid, p. 113). Hence, Marek believes that one should assume a state to be a puppet state once it comes into being during a hostile occupation, and that a puppet state can not be determined by looking at criteria, but only by presumption. Furthermore, Marek states that puppet states under hostile occupation often come into being in a revolutionary way. Marek concludes her research into puppet

² Translated from French by Maurits Foorthuis. Original: « lorsque les éléments qui ont permis de l’identifier n’existent qu’en apparence ».

states by stating that puppet states are illegal entities under the Geneva Convention (Ibid, p. 120).

Crawford defines puppet states as “nominal governments under effective foreign control, especially in cases where the establishment of the puppet State is intended as a cloak for illegality” (Crawford, 2007, p. 78). As does Marek, Crawford states that regimes or states that are established during a hostile occupation, an illegal intervention or during the threat of force can be presumed to be puppet regimes or states. In cases where there is no clear occupation, threat of force or illegal intervention, Crawford states that one can look at several factors to determine whether or not a state is a puppet state. According to Crawford, a puppet state is a puppet state when “the entity concerned was established unlawfully, by the threat or the use of external armed force; that it was imposed on, and rejected by the vast majority of the population it claimed to govern; that in important matters it was subject to foreign direction or control; that it was staffed, especially in more important positions, by nationals of the dominant State” (Ibid, p. 81). Crawford does not agree with Marek in her claim that the Geneva Convention outlaws puppet states. He believes that the actions of puppet states can be considered as legal by the Geneva Convention (Ibid, p. 157).

Gerrits and Bader did research into the Russian patronage over the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In their research, they refer to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Russian *protectorates*. In their article *Russian patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: implications for conflict resolution*, Bader and Gerrits link the strength of a target state’s organizational power to whether or not it can be turned into what they call a protectorate. “If organisational power is defined as the combined effect of a ruling regime’s political preferences and administrative capabilities, it could either facilitate or frustrate a larger power’s ambitions” (Bader and Gerrits, 2016, p. 306). They continue by stating that the weak organizational powers of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has allowed for them to be made into Russian protectorates. In other words, if small and arguably artificial states such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia have weak governments, they can easily be turned into Russian protectorates.

Bader and Gerrits describe in their article how Abkhazia and especially South Ossetia are almost entirely dependent on Russia. Without Russian military and financial aid, both

countries would almost immediately cease to exist. In other words, one can not state that Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be considered as entirely independent states.

The term protectorates as described by Bader and Gerrits seems to be similar to the term puppet states as defined by Ivanel, Crawford and Marek. Ivanel describes puppet states as being “fundamentally dependent on the support of another state” (Ivanel, 2016, p. 46), which fits the description of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as provided by Bader and Gerrits.

In their book *The Kingdom of The Netherlands in the Caribbean: 1954-2004: what next?*, De Jong and Boersema describe the concept of an associated state. According to them, the concept of an associated state ranges from “semi-sovereign autonomy schemes to independent statehood” (De Jong and Boersema, 2005, p. 106). The authors describe how some independent states that are recognized by the United Nations, such as Micronesia which is freely associated with the United States, can be considered associated states. However, other associated states, such as the Cook Islands, which are associated with New Zealand, are not independent states but merely autonomous regions. The definition of an associated state as provided by an online dictionary is the following: “a nation with limited sovereignty, especially a former colony that now assumes responsibility for domestic affairs but continues to depend on the colonial ruler for defense and foreign policy” (dictionary.com).

Armstrong and Hills write about the concept of associated states in an article about the political status of Micronesia in its relationship with the United States of America. They write about “the political status known as free association” which, according to them, would form “the basis for a close and enduring relationship” and “would maximize internal self-government and ensure autonomy sufficient to enable them to establish their own international legal personality” (Armstrong and Hills, 1984: 485). Hence, according to their definition, an associated state would have a maximum internal self-government and enough autonomy.

The term vassal state is mostly used when referring to ancient times. More recently, the term has been used by British Brexiteer Jacob Rees-Mogg when referring to Britain’s post-Brexit position vis-à-vis the European Union. In an article explaining Rees-Mogg’s choice of words, British newspaper *The Guardian* refers to a vassal state as a state that is “often obliged to pay money to its superior, and usually expected to provide military assistance on demand” (The

Guardian, February 2nd, 2018). According to an online dictionary, a vassal state is “any state that is subordinate to another. The vassal in these cases is the ruler, rather than the state itself. Being a vassal most commonly implies providing military assistance to the dominant state when requested to do so; it sometimes implies paying tribute, but a state which does so is better described as a tributary state. In simpler terms the vassal state would have to provide military power to the dominant state” (definitions.net).

A research into the academic literature shows that the term vassal state is mostly used to refer to ancient empires. In an article about Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian imperialism for example, Tsevat describes the way the Assyrians and Babylonians made use of vassal states. Tsevat defines a vassal state as follows: “If Assyria or Babylonia chose to retain the national ruler of a conquered land in his office or to replace him by a conational rather than make the land an Assyrian or Babylonian province administered by a governor, it imposed a contract of fealty on the ruler” (Tsevat, 1959, p. 199). Such a contract would be called a vassal treaty. In other words, Tsevat argues that a vassal state is when a country occupies another country and instead of annexing it installs a puppet regime.

In an article on the legal position of Tibet, Alexandrowicz gives a description of a vassal state and its duties and obligations. Alexandrowicz argues that vassal states do not have external sovereignty, but only internal sovereignty (Alexandrowicz, 1954, p. 266). The ‘owner’ of the vassal state, who Alexandrowicz calls the suzerain, is however supposed to respect the internal sovereignty of its vassal state. The vassal state is, according to Alexandrowicz, bound to the suzerain in such a way that all treaties signed by the suzerain are binding to the vassal state. This means that even if the suzerain were to start a war, the vassal state would be a part of it as well. Alexandrowicz furthermore argues that a vassal state is not an independent nation, and that “it remains a portion of the suzerain state which represents it entirely in relations with other nations” (Ibid).

Veenendaal did research into the foreign relations of small states, and argues that these small (island) states can often be considered as client states. Veenendaal describes three characteristics of client states. First, there is the element of exchange: the relationship between a client state and the so-called patron state are reciprocal in that both states have something to offer to each other (Veenendaal, 2017, p. 565). Second, the relationship between both states is unequal “in terms of resources and capabilities” (Ibid). The third

characteristic, according to Veenendaal, is that “patron-client relations are based on compliance of the client with the demands and interests of the patron on which [it] depends” (Ibid). The fourth and final characteristic is that the patron-client relationship “generates a form of loyalty that enhances the stability or structural character of patron-client linkages” (Ibid). Hence, although client states are sovereign states and on paper entirely independent, their dependency on their patron state is such that it largely effects their level of sovereignty in a negative way.

According to Gasiorowski, “An international cliency relationship is a mutually beneficial, security-oriented relationship between the governments of two countries that differ greatly in size, wealth, and power” (Gasiorowski, 1991, p. 2). Gasiorowski argues that the exchange of goods and services is the main principle of a cliency relationship. Furthermore, he argues that the patron state often provides the client state with economic aid, security assistance, military assistance in the form of training and equipment, and security treaties (Ibid). Gasiorowski believes that patron states generally seek client states that are strategically important to them, such as countries that are located near their own borders or close to the borders of an enemy state. Furthermore, countries that have many raw materials or have access to strategic shipping lanes are often picked as client states by patrons. According to Gasiorowski, “a client government typically enters a cliency relationship to obtain economic aid, security assistance, and protection against domestic or foreign adversaries” (Ibid).

Gasiorowski also argues that a patron may “seek to spread its ideological views or expand its base of support in international forums such as the United Nations” (Ibid, p. 2-3). Furthermore, as the patron state’s security interests in the client states often require the client state to be stable, patrons may provide the client states with “goods and services that enhance their ability to repress” the population in order to reduce political instability (Ibid). On top of that, according to Gasiorowski, a patron state may even intervene militarily in order to secure its interests in the client state. Gasiorowski describes Iran during the time of the Shah as an example of an American client state.

In order to research which term is best applicable to the DPR and the LPR, the criteria of the terms as mentioned in chapter one will be applied to the DPR and the LPR to see whether or not these terms can be used to define the two breakaway republics. Table 1 features the five terms and the relevant criteria that can be used to recognize them. This table will be used to

research which term(s) is or are applicable to the DPR and the LPR. There are four different ways to describe a sponsor state that appear in the relevant literature. Apart from sponsor state these are dominant state, patron and suzerain. All four terms have the same meaning and all four terms will be used in this research.

Term	Criteria
Associated state	Limited sovereignty, decides upon its own domestic policies but depends on bigger state for its defense- and foreign policy, has maximum self-government on domestic issues.
Vassal state	Internal sovereignty, represented internationally by its suzerain, often has a puppet regime, is subordinate to another state, required to provide military assistance to suzerain when asked to, term is rather outdated and not so much used in modern times.
Client state	A client-patron relationship is unequal in terms of resources and capabilities and has an element of exchange, a client state is to comply to the demands of its patron, a client state is loyal to such an extent that it enhances the client-patron relationship, a client state is on paper independent, but its sovereignty is negatively affected by its patron, a client-patron relationship is a mutually beneficial and security oriented relationship, the patron provides mostly economic aid and military assistance, a client state is strategically important to its patron,

	<p>a patron state may seek to spread its ideological values to the client and to receive its support in international forums such as the UN, a patron state may seek to reduce political instability in the client state and repress its population.</p>
<p>Puppet state</p>	<p>Its existence is fundamentally dependent upon the support of another state, it is not self-sustainable and depends on the sponsor state either economically, militarily, politically or in all these respects, its politics are entirely or partially controlled by its sponsor and political decisions are passed down to the puppet state by its sponsor, although the puppet state might also decide together with the sponsor on policy, in theory the puppet state could even have a certain influence on the sponsor state, a puppet state is not or hardly recognized internationally and its existence is quasi-permanent and a de facto annexation by the sponsor, the elements who allow to identify the puppet state as a state exist only in appearance, a puppet state is used by the sponsor state to commit violations of international law, a regime can be considered a puppet state when it is established under hostile occupation, during an illegal intervention or the threat of force, a puppet state is staffed by people from the dominant state.</p>

Protectorate	Weak organizational power, would cease to exist without the dominant state's financial and military aid, is so dependent on the dominant state that it can not be considered an independent state.
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Table 1.

Chapter two

Chronological overview of the conflict in the Donbas

In November 2013, after the refusal of then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, angry Ukrainian protesters flocked to the Maidan Square in downtown Kyiv to protest the decision. After months of violent protests, Yanukovich fled to Russia in February 2014. Days after the ousting of Yanukovich, Russian troops occupied and subsequently annexed the Crimean peninsula in Southern Ukraine. It was, however, not enough. In the spring of 2014, separatists in the East-Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk occupied town halls and airports. After months of fighting, allegedly with the support of Russian troops, they managed to capture large parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, including the regional capitals. In this chapter, a chronological order of the events that happened in the Donbas in 2014-2015 will be discussed. Furthermore, the Russian influence on these events will be researched.

In March 2014, pro-Russian demonstrations and pro-Maidan demonstrations occurred all over the Donbas. By April, the demonstrations had escalated and the pro-Russian protesters and separatists managed to capture many city halls and other governmental buildings in the region, often with the help of Russian 'tourists' who were bused in from across the border. In the beginning of May, the separatists declared the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in respectively the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts (Fischer, 2019, p. 9). According to Wilson, the first protests and the initial separatist uprising were financed by a group of oligarchs loyal to Yanukovich, called "The Family" (Wilson, 2016, p. 645). Wilson argues that although some media talk about a "'grassroots' phenomenon with genuine 'popular support'" (Ibid: 631), the uprising in the Donbas is no such thing. Although the local population was generally unhappy with the government change in Kyiv, the "key triggers that produced all-out war were provided by Russia and local elites in the Donbas" (Ibid).

After the first protests had been organized by the Yanukovich family, the Russian intelligence agencies started destabilizing the Donbas in the spring of 2014 (Plokhy, 2015, p. 342). Paramilitaries who were trained and financed by the Kremlin appeared all over the Donbas in April 2014. In the mean-time, Yanukovich used his ties and financial resources in the region

to help the Russians in destabilizing it. Other local oligarchs, such as Rinat Akhmetov who is currently the wealthiest oligarch of Ukraine, also contributed to the destabilization. Akhmetov wanted to protect and preserve his businesses in the Donbas while at the same time maintaining a leverage on Kyiv by controlling the separatists (Wilson, 2016, p. 645). By the end of May 2014, a combination of Russian paramilitaries, Russian nationalists and local activists had captured most of the region. At this point, Akhmetov lost control over the uprising to the Russians (Plokyh, 2015, p. 342).

On the 25th of May 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected President of Ukraine in the snap elections following the ousting of Yanukovych. Just two weeks before, the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk had declared their independence following a highly controversial referendum. The separatists were in control of large parts of the Donbas region at the time of Poroshenko's election. Ukraine fought back, however, and in the beginning of July it recaptured the city of Sloviansk in Donetsk oblast (Ibid, p. 344). The capture of Sloviansk was followed by more military successes for the Ukrainian army. More and more cities were liberated and the city of Luhansk was surrounded by Ukrainian forces. In an attempt to stop the Ukrainian advance, Russia began supplying the separatists with heavy armory. This led to a civilian plane being shot down by separatists over Eastern Ukraine on July 17th. The plane, Malaysia Airlines MH17, carried hundreds of innocent civilians on their way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur (Ibid).

By mid-August 2014, the DPR and the LPR were on the verge of defeat. With Luhansk entirely surrounded and with many smaller towns having been liberated by the Ukrainian forces, a victory was expected to be only a mere weeks away (Ibid). The turning point however was the battle of Ilovaik. The small town of Ilovaik lays at a crossroad of roads and railway connecting the city of Donetsk to the Russian border. The Ukrainian army believed that by capturing Ilovaik, they would be able to cut off Donetsk from Russia and surround the city (Newsweek, November 4th, 2014). The first days of the battle were more difficult than expected for the Ukrainian army, as the insurgents were heavily armed. The turning point came on the 24th of August, 2014, when Ukraine celebrated its 23rd independence day. On this day, the regular Russian army crossed, although unofficially, the borders into Ukraine and attacked the Ukrainian troops at Ilovaik (Ibid). The Ukrainian troops were completely shocked by the Russian attack. Although they knew that Russia was involved in the 'uprising' in the east, as

they had to fight against Russian weapons and Russian ‘volunteers’ before, they never expected the regular Russian army to enter the conflict. Some of the Russian soldiers who were captured by Ukrainian troops claimed they did not know they were in Ukraine and thought they were participating in an exercise near Taganrog, on the Russian side of the border (Ibid).

By the 29th of August, the Ukrainian army had to give up Ilovaisk. As they were surrounded, they negotiated a retreat through enemy lines back to the rest of the Ukrainian army. As they walked unarmed through enemy lines, they were fired upon by the Russian army (Ibid). Hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers died or went missing that day. At the same time, the Russian army had crossed the border and taken Novoazovsk on the Azov Sea. Furthermore, the port city of Mariupol was under imminent threat of being occupied. With Mariupol under threat and with the many lives lost in Ilovaisk, Poroshenko was left no choice but to start negotiating a ceasefire.

Ukraine and the European Union negotiated a ceasefire agreement with Russia in the neutral Belarusian capital of Minsk. The ceasefire agreement, named Minsk I, came into effect on the 5th of September 2014 (Kostanyan and Meister, 2016, p. 2). Although initially successful in putting a temporary stop to the fighting, Minsk I turned out to be a failure. In the beginning of 2015, massive fighting erupted around the city of Mariupol and around the city of Debaltseve, both in Ukrainian hands at that time. The battle of Debaltseve resulted in a success for the separatists, who captured the city after fierce fighting. Out of fear of losing Mariupol as well, the Ukrainian authorities agreed to signing the Minsk II Agreements in February 2015 (Ibid). The Minsk II Agreements froze the conflict. It did not succeed in implementing a full ceasefire, nor was it successful in implementing most of the points as agreed upon in Minsk II (Ibid, p. 3), however the front line practically stopped moving as a result of the agreement.

Although the conflict froze the front line in February 2015, it did not mean a full end to the hostilities. Up until today (December 2019), the hostilities continue with separatists, Ukrainian military and civilians dying on a weekly basis. By the spring of 2016, 9000 people had lost their lives, 20,000 were wounded and around two million had fled to either Russia or free Ukraine (Plokhy, 2015, p. 344). With the conflict more or less frozen, it was now time for the separatists to build a ‘state’ in the territories that they occupied.

Russian role in securing the territories

As discussed before, the Russian Federation played a rather significant role in securing the Ukrainian territories in the Donbas for the separatists. Although attacks on the Ukrainian military by regular Russian forces such as in Ilovaisk are rather rare, the Kremlin used several other tactics to destabilize and covertly occupy Eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian military observer Kostiantyn Mashovets, the Spetsnaz-GRU, which is a Russian elite light infantry organization, was active with three to four battalions in the Donbas during the summer of 2014 (Bukkvoll, 2016, p. 19). Some of these units may have even been active in the Donbas from mid-March 2014, which is at least a month before the uprising fully started (Ibid, p. 18). Unlike the regular Russian troops, these special forces had generally tried to avoid taking part in direct warfare. This did not always succeed however, as several special forces operatives had been wounded during battles in the Donbas in 2015 (Ibid, p. 19). Other activities of the special forces included sabotaging the Ukrainian military in Ukrainian territory far from the frontlines (Ibid, p. 20).

The leaders of the initial Donbas uprising were mostly young radical men who had been active in Russian nationalist groups in the Donbas before (Bodie, 2017, p. 297). Russia's initial strategy was to send in experienced military 'advisers' in order to help these men initiating the uprising. The Kremlin believed that by providing the separatists with adequate leadership, ammunition and funding, they would succeed in gaining control over the Donbas (Ibid). Initially, the Russian plan worked, however, as was demonstrated previously in this research, the Ukrainian military began regaining control over the region in June/July 2014, which is why regular Russian troops came to the rescue during the battle of Ilovaisk. Regular Russian forces also participated in the January 2015 battle of Debaltseve. Although separatist forces also participated in that battle, Russian forces were very much present (Ibid, p. 300). In interviews with several newspapers, multiple Russian soldiers who were active in the Donbas estimated that each separatist unit contains around 15 Russian 'volunteers'. These so-called volunteers are Russian soldiers who, according to the Kremlin, went fighting in the Donbas voluntarily during their vacation. Furthermore, one Russian soldier claimed that regular Russian troops fight in the Donbas for about a week before being replaced by fresh troops (Ibid, p. 301).

Other proof of Russian interference in the Donbas is the large-scale presence of Russian heavy weaponry in separatist hands. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin estimated in the

autumn of 2015 that Russia at that time had 4200 regular troops, 40,000 militants, 1000 artillery platforms and more than 400 tanks located in the Donbas (Ibid).

One interesting figure to take a closer look on is Igor Girkin, better known by his nom de guerre Igor Strelkov. Igor Girkin is a Russian army veteran who has been previously active in Chechnya and Transnistria and who played a role during the annexation of the Crimea. In April 2014, Moscow-born Girkin arrived in the Donbas, although it is unclear whether he did so on his own initiative or by the Kremlin's orders. In an interview with Russian media in the fall of 2014, Girkin claimed that it was him personally who was responsible for the war in Eastern Ukraine (The Moscow Times, November 21st, 2014). Girkin arrived in the Donbas about a week after the first pro-Russian separatists had started attacking and occupying Ukrainian government buildings. Girkin admitted that his plan was to start a full-scale uprising, but that in the beginning "nobody wanted to fight" (Ibid). He claims that if his unit hadn't crossed the border into Ukraine, "everything would have fizzled out, like in Kharkiv, like in Odessa" (Ibid). In Kharkiv and Odesa, initial pro-Russian protests by locals in combination with Russian 'tourists' bused in from across the border died out after a few weeks. Hence, Girkin claims that had he and his men not pushed for war with the Ukrainian government, the same thing would have happened in the Donbas: a couple of violent protests which would have died out after a few weeks. Girkin argues that the separatists in the Donbas had never planned to be independent, but instead wanted to be absorbed by Russia, just like as happened in Crimea (Ibid). He often criticized the Kremlin for not annexing the Donbas.

Chapter three

'State-building' in the DPR and the LPR

The first 'governments' of the DPR and the LPR consisted mainly of Russian nationals. The first self-proclaimed 'President' of the Donetsk People's Republic, who was the one to declare its independence from Ukraine, was Aleksander Borodai (Bodie, 2017, p. 297). Borodai is a Russian citizen who had previously been active during the war in Transnistria. Igor Girkin became the first 'Defense Minister' of the DPR. Other members of the DPR and LPR's initial 'governments', as well as Donbas warlords such as the infamous Arsen Pavlov, better known by his nom de guerre Motorola, were all Russian citizens (Wilson, 2016, p. 648). Borodai was replaced by Oleksandr Zakharchenko, a Ukrainian citizen, in August 2014. He remained however active in the DPR as its Deputy Prime Minister. Igor Girkin was also replaced by a Ukrainian citizen in 2014, most likely because of his criticism of the Kremlin for not annexing the Donbas.

Although most of the 'governmental' people of the LPR and DPR were replaced by Ukrainian nationals in the summer of 2014 in order to keep an appearance of a 'local' uprising, many warlords in the Donbas were Russian citizens. Many of these warlords were hastily assembled (war-)criminals and army veterans who often had experience fighting in Chechnya and/or Transnistria. When the worst fighting was over in the beginning of 2015, a wave of assassinations began, targeting the Russian and Ukrainian warlords in the Donbas. Warlords and 'government' officials in the Donbas were gunned down, 'committed suicide', were poisoned or exploded in car bombings (Foreign Policy, October 25, 2016). In October 2016, infamous warlord Arsen Pavlov died when the elevator in his apartment building in Donetsk exploded (Ibid).

Although separatist leaders pointed their finger towards Ukraine after every assassination, it is unlikely that the Ukrainian secret service managed to place such a sophisticated bomb inside Pavlov's heavily guarded apartment block (Ibid). Analysts believe that the Kremlin might be behind the attacks, and even some separatists privately admit that it might be Moscow who is murdering them (Ibid). The why behind the assassinations might be that now that the frontline is frozen, Moscow wants to get rid of the violent warlords, who are often accused of war-crimes or are linked to the downing of MH17. Furthermore, eliminating the most extreme

elements in the DPR and the LPR might allow Moscow to force Kyiv to negotiate with less radical figures from the Donbas de facto authorities.

The latest assassination of a DPR leader happened in August 2018. DPR 'President' Oleksandr Zakharchenko died in an explosion in a Donetsk restaurant where he was having lunch (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 31st, 2018). Although it was likely to be not him but Moscow who made the important decisions in the war, he was the public face of the war and was very infamous in Ukraine for being the main separatist leader in the Donbas (Meduza, September 4th, 2018). Zakharchenko had Ukrainian blood on his hands, and if he had been killed on Moscow's orders, it likely happened in order to replace him with someone less radical.

Days after the assassination of Zakharchenko, he was replaced by Denis Pushilin: a Donbas native who had formerly pursued an unsuccessful career in local politics. Although Pushilin is not as charismatic as Zakharchenko, he is more loyal to Moscow and easier to control (Dreyfus and Vilmer, 2019, p. 120). One year before, in 2017, the 'President' of the LPR, Igor Plotnisky, was also replaced by a more stable figure following a coup d'état committed by members of his own de facto government (Ibid). The DPR and the LPR organized 'elections' in November 2018 in order to confirm the new leaders. The elections were a very clear violation of the Minsk II Agreements, but according to Ukrainian NGO *Democracy House*, there are five reasons as to why the de facto authorities decided to organize elections anyway. The main reason to organize elections was to give the new leaders some sort of fake legitimacy (Democracy House Briefing, November 6th, 2018). A positive extra for the Kremlin was to replace all those in the de facto authorities with blood on their hands with less dubious people in order to make it easier for Kyiv to negotiate with them. Furthermore, a goal of the elections was to strengthen the Donbas leadership in the run-up to the Ukrainian elections of 2019, to fix a new sphere of Russian influence in the Donbas by 'electing' candidates who were chosen by the Kremlin and finally to increase the loyalty of the local population by making them believe they have influence on the DPR/LPR leadership (Ibid). Numerous prominent militants were blocked from participating in the elections by being kidnapped, not being allowed into the Donbas or by being attacked (Ibid). The participating 'candidates', who ended up not being elected, advised the public not to vote for them but to vote Pushilin instead.

A different interesting phenomenon that is worth taking a closer look upon is Russia's 'passportization' policy in the Donbas. In April 2019, the Kremlin announced it would simplify

the path to Russian citizenship for residents of “certain” parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, meaning the separatist controlled parts (The Moscow Times, April 26th, 2019). This is a trend that fits within the general behavior of Russia towards conflicts in the former Soviet Union. Russia generally hands out passports in territories that it helped breaking away, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Nagashima, 2019, p. 186). A part of the strategy is that later on, Russia can use the excuse of ‘protecting’ its own citizens against made-up threats coming from the central government (Ibid). The Ukrainian government called the passportization attempt a Russian “undistinguished interference in domestic affairs of Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state”, thereby strongly condemning the move (Ukr Inform, July 18th, 2019).

Although Russia has not (yet) recognized the DPR and the LPR, nor has it recognized the results of the independence referendum of May 2014, it does recognize certain official documents issued by the de facto authorities. In February 2017, President Putin signed a decree ordering the recognition of identity documents, diplomas, birth certificates and marriage certificates issued by the de facto authorities of the DPR and the LPR (The Telegraph, February 18th, 2017). Furthermore, Russia now recognizes license plates and vehicle registration plates from the DPR and the LPR. The move was criticized by the Ukrainian authorities, with President Petro Poroshenko calling it “another proof of Russian occupation as well as Russian violation of international law” (Ibid).

When reading the English-language propagandist news website of the DPR, the so-called *DoNi News Agency*, one can see that there is a lot of focus on DPR integration with Russia. As Russia’s military and financial support to the DPR and the LPR are unofficial, the DPR media can not report on it. The DPR media does show that the de facto authorities of the DPR are very much interested in integrating the territory they occupy with Russia. For example, there is a “Russia-Donbass integration committee”, of which a Russian State Duma Deputy is a member (DoNi News Agency, March 28th, 2018). One of the aims of the committee is to organize a “children’s patriotic movement” in the DPR and the LPR (Ibid). Furthermore, the *DoNi News Agency* article states that several Russian autonomic republics, such as for example Chechnya and Dagestan, have established integration ties with the Donbas. Other proof of the wish of the DPR and the LPR authorities to integrate with Russia is for example the visit of

Zakharchenko to the Crimea, during which he stated that “Your act [of being annexed by Russia] has become an example for us” (DoNi News Agency, March 16th, 2018a).

From this chapter it can be concluded that Russia’s influence on the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is significant. It all began with Russian ‘tourists’ who were bused in to participate in pro-Russian demonstrations in the Donbas. It escalated with Russian ‘volunteers’ and ‘vacationers’ who were helping the separatists in fighting the Ukrainian army until finally the regular Russian army came in. It is likely that Russian special forces and the secret service had been active in the Donbas at least a month before the conflict escalated. The initial ‘governments’ of the DPR and the LPR were mainly filled with Russian citizens, which shows the Russian hand in these ‘local uprisings’. Furthermore, the wave of assassinations of DPR/LPR officials and warlords can likely be attributed to Russia, who replaced them with people who were more loyal and easier to control. The latest passportization attempt fits within the general behavior of Russia towards regions it helps breaking away from their central government, as does its recognition of official documents and license plates of the DPR and the LPR.

Applying the five terms to the DPR and the LPR

In order to understand which term(s) is or are best applicable to the DPR and the LPR, a thorough analysis of the five terms as provided by the relevant academic literature will be conducted and applied to the situation in the DPR and the LPR. In the following chapters, the characteristics of protectorates, client states, associated states, vassal states and puppet states will be compared to the situation in the DPR and the LPR in order to understand which of the five terms can best be used to describe the two breakaway republics. A closer look will be taken on some examples of protectorates and puppet states in order to see if the situations in these puppet states and protectorates are similar to the situation in the DPR and the LPR.

Chapter four

Protectorate

In this chapter, the term protectorate will be analyzed and compared to the DPR and the LPR. As can be seen in table 1, there are certain characteristics of a protectorate that were defined by Gerrits and Bader. A protectorate has a weak organizational power and it is very much dependent on the dominant state. Without the dominant state's financial and military aid, it would cease to exist. A protectorate is in fact so dependent on the dominant state that it can not be considered an independent state.

Bader and Gerrits define organizational power as "the combined effect of a ruling regime's political preferences and administrative capabilities" (Bader and Gerrits, 2016, p. 306). They argue that when a country is administratively less capable and thus has a weak organizational power, it is prone to become the protectorate of a larger state. A protectorate is fully dependent on the dominant state, especially financially and militarily. Dominant states often take care of most of a protectorate's state budget, take care of its infrastructure, public administration and other tasks (Ibid, p. 298). Militarily, the dominant state supports its protectorate by for example building military bases on its territory. Other forms of military support would be protecting the protectorate's borders and intervening militarily whenever the protectorate is involved in a conflict.

Bader and Gerrits name the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as examples of Russian protectorates. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are regions within Georgia that fought an independence war with Russian help in the early 1990's (O'Loughlin, Kolosov and Toal, 2015, p. 423). The independence war resulted in a frozen conflict, which effectively deprived Georgia of exerting control over the two breakaway republics. The frozen conflict flared up again in August 2008, when Georgian President Saakashvili launched a military operation aimed at putting a halt to smuggling in South Ossetia (Ibid, p. 428). Russia responded immediately by invading both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as crossing the border into Georgia and occupying several Georgian cities. After only five days of war, Russia retreated from the undisputed Georgian territories, but remained present in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Days after the war, it recognized both territories as independent nations. The Russian army remains present today in the breakaway republics with several military bases.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are de facto states today, which means they have "for a period of two years or greater, established territorial control in a distinct geographic region and proclaimed itself an independent sovereign polity but failed to acquire widespread international recognition and legitimacy as such in the international system" (Ibid, p. 424). This definition appears to be applicable to the DPR and the LPR as well. Although it is clear that Georgia is currently not exerting control over the territories, the level of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are a topic of debate. As Bader and Gerrits use South Ossetia and Abkhazia as textbook examples of Russian protectorates, it is interesting and necessary to take a closer look into these breakaway republics in order to draw a parallel to the DPR and the LPR and hence to be able to determine whether or not the DPR and the LPR can also be considered protectorates.

Why can the Georgian breakaway republics be considered as Russian protectorates? The main reason why is that without Russian support, both republics would cease to exist. The Russian Federation covers most of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's state budgets, it builds new infrastructure, carries out public administration, it promotes their international recognition and it protects their borders (Bader and Gerrits, 2016, p. 298). Without Russian financial aid, the breakaway republics would not be able to pay public-sector wages or even maintain government institutions (Ibid, p. 307). Furthermore, Russia is the main trade partner for

Abkhazia and basically the only one for South Ossetia, which only increases their financial dependency on Russia.

After Russia officially recognized the territories as independent sovereign nations, it signed multiple 'friendship' treaties with them, which resulted in the construction of several Russian military bases in South Ossetia and military and naval bases in Abkhazia. Furthermore, the treaties resulted in a coordinated foreign policy and a common defense and security policy (Ibid, p. 302). Without Russian military support, both republics would not be able to survive, for it is unlikely that they would be able to withhold the Georgian army by itself, would the Georgian government decide to undertake another attempt at winning back its separatist regions.

Starting already in the early 2000s, when Soviet passports started to expire, Russia began a policy of 'passportization' when it started handing out Russian passports in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The issuing of Russian passports proved especially beneficial to Russia in 2008, when it could use the argument that it has the responsibility to protect its own citizens against 'Georgian aggression' (Ibid, p. 303).

The weak organizational power of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's governing elites have effectively turned them into Russian protectorates (Ibid, p. 308). This does not mean however that they lack a certain autonomy. It has occurred on several occasions that the Russian-backed candidate lost elections in Abkhazia - which organizes relatively fair elections - and in South Ossetia. Furthermore, Abkhazian and South Ossetian politicians often criticize Russia on various issues. However, as no politician could afford not supporting Russia's role in the territories, Russia does not need to micromanage local politics.

Can the DPR and the LPR be considered Russian protectorates?

The DPR and the LPR contain many features of a protectorate, the most obvious one being their military dependency on Russia. Although Donbas separatists managed to temporarily occupy several governmental buildings in the beginning of their anti-Ukrainian uprising, it is unlikely that they would have achieved much more than that without Russian military support. When the uprising escalated into a full-blown conflict in the spring of 2014, the separatists suddenly had managed to get their hands on heavy Russian weaponry (Wilson, 2016, p. 647). Although they often claimed to have received this weaponry somewhere locally, an

overwhelming amount of evidence points towards Russia having supplied the rebels with weapons. The Ukrainian separatists not only made use of Russian weapons in order to establish their de facto states. During the summer of 2014, almost all separatist units contained around 15 Russian 'volunteers' or 'vacationers' (Bodie, 2017, p. 301).

Especially when looking at the battles of Ilovaisk and Debaltseve in 2014 and 2015, one can conclude that the DPR and the LPR would not be able to survive without Russian military support. This became specifically clear in Ilovaisk in 2014. In August of that year, the DPR and the LPR were on the verge of defeat. Luhansk was entirely surrounded by the Ukrainian army, which was already present in the outskirts of the LPR capital. Donetsk was about to be surrounded, with the Ukrainian army winning battle after battle in the Donbas. Despite their heavy Russian weaponry and the help of Russian 'volunteers', the DPR and the LPR armies were no match for the Ukrainian army. This is when the regular Russian army came in and within days defeated the Ukrainian army in the battle of Ilovaisk. This is again another proof that the DPR and the LPR could not survive without Russian support. If Russia were to decide today to withdraw its men and weapons from Ukrainian territory, it is likely that the DPR and the LPR will again come under the control of Ukraine within a short matter of time. As Belarusian President Alyaksandar Lukashenka once said, "Let's be honest, the days of the DNR and LNR would have been numbered long ago without Russia" (Wilson, 2016, p. 649).

The main drivers behind the initial escalation of the uprising were Russian citizens such as Igor Girkin and Aleksandr Borodai. Although it is not entirely clear whether or not these men were involved in the conflict by the Kremlin's orders, it is a remarkable fact that most prominent Donbas militants at the time were Russian citizens. Furthermore, Russian special forces were active in the Donbas as early as March 2014, which is a month before the start of even the uprising.

A second feature of a protectorate is its financial dependency on the dominant state. This is very much the case for both the DPR and the LPR, who would not be able to survive without Russian financial aid (International Crisis Group Report Number 254). According to Andrei Illarionov, a Russian former economic advisor to President Putin, Russia spends about two billion US Dollars per year on the DPR and the LPR, which is 0,25% of the Russian GDP (Unian, November 19th, 2018). This money is spend on many different sectors in the Donbas. For

example, in 2017 Ukraine cut off its electricity supply to most of the occupied parts of Luhansk oblast. Russia jumped in for help and is now supplying electricity to the LPR (Kostanyan and Remizov, 2017, p. 9). From 2015 onwards, Russia started paying pensions, benefits and even wages to inhabitants of the DPR and the LPR. This led eventually to a full economic dependency on Russia (Fischer, 2019).

In the beginning of 2017, the Ukrainian government established a trade blockade of the DPR and the LPR. From that time onwards, Ukraine did not allow for trade to occur between Ukraine and the DPR and the LPR. A major consequence of the blockade was that now Russia became virtually the only trade partner for the Ukrainian breakaway republics (Kostanyan and Remizov, 2019, p. 17). The *DoNi News Agency*, the propaganda news channel of the DPR, commented on the blockade stating it triggered a “hybrid integration” of the DPR and the LPR with Russia (DoNi News Agency, September 12th, 2017). “The blockade has led to the fact that, actually, despite Donbass had not taken the route of the Crimea, it has not become a part of the Russian Federation, but hybrid integration began due to the economic blockade”, the *DoNi News Agency* quoted political scientist Andrei Yermolayev (Ibid).

One of the reasons for Russia being able to trade so easily with the DPR and the LPR is the rublization of their economies. With rublization is meant the process that replaced the Ukrainian Hryvnia’s in the Donbas with the Russian Rubles. The rublization has allowed many Russian companies to expand into the DPR and the LPR (Milakovsky, 2019). According to *The Wilson Center*, the Ukrainian trade blockade of the DPR and the LPR “gave Russia semicolonial control of economic resources in the noncontrolled territories” (Ibid). This is similar to the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russia is also virtually the only trade partner for both Georgian breakaway republics.

On top of providing financial aid and being the DPR and the LPR’s main trade partner, Russia also provides them with thousands of tons of humanitarian aid (Fischer, 2019). The propagandistic media of the DPR describes the content of the humanitarian convoys as containing “food kits for children and targeted goods” (DoNi News Agency, March 28th, 2018). Ukraine on the other hand suspects Russia from hiding weapons amongst the truckloads of humanitarian support that enter the occupied territories in the Donbas. There is no proof of

this however, as Russia does not allow Ukrainian or international inspections of their humanitarian convoys.

A main feature of a protectorate is its weak organizational power. The weak organizational power of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's ruling elites have allowed for it to become Russian protectorates. A difference between the Georgian breakaway republics and the Ukrainian ones is that the Ukrainian conflict is not a bottom-up grassroots conflict, but rather one that is enforced upon the Donbas by exterior forces. Although the elites in the Donbas were often involved in the conflict and were arguably (partially) controlling it up until around May 2014, they lost control over the war to Russia. The definition of organizational power as provided by Bader and Gerrits is "the combined effect of a ruling regime's political preferences and administrative capabilities" (Bader and Gerrits, 2016, p. 306). One could argue that the administrative capabilities and thus the organizational power of the Donbas' ruling elite in the spring of 2014 was weak. Furthermore, the central Ukrainian government was weak and chaotic in the spring of 2014, and not capable of exerting effective control over the Donbas. Hence, it was fairly easy for Russia to support a separatist takeover of the territories. The current ruling elites of the Donbas are selected and controlled by Russia, however, the DPR and the LPR could in theory still exercise a certain degree of autonomy.

An interesting comparison between the Ukrainian and the Georgian breakaway republics is the Russian policy of passportization. In April 2019, the Kremlin announced it would make it easier for inhabitants of the DPR and the LPR to obtain Russian citizenship. *The Moscow Times* argues that the passportization move in the Donbas is meant "to ensure that whatever new contours the conflict takes on, it will be on Moscow's terms and timescale" (The Moscow Times, April 26th, 2019).

From this chapter it can be concluded that the DPR and the LPR contain all the features of a protectorate as described in table 1. With the weak organizational power of the ruling elite of the Donbas and the weak and chaotic state of the central Ukrainian government in the spring of 2014, it was fairly easy for Russia to start a war in the Donbas. Furthermore, in this chapter it has been established that the DPR and the LPR are financially and militarily dependent on Russia. Hence, one can conclude that the DPR and the LPR can be considered as Russian protectorates.

Chapter five

Client State

In this chapter, the term client state will be analyzed. A comparison will then be made with the situation in the DPR and the LPR to see whether or not the term client state is applicable to the two de facto states in the Donbas.

As can be seen in table 1, there are certain characteristics a state or a de facto state has to fulfill in order for it to be called a client state. First of all, the relationship between a client state and its patron state is unequal in terms of resources and capabilities. This means that the patron state is often a big power, whereas the client state is a much smaller and less powerful state. A client-patron relationship means that there is an element of exchange: both states are able to offer something to each other. Often this means that the patron can offer security to the client, whereas the client could offer for example natural resources or access to the open sea. Their relationship is thus mutually beneficial. Although a client state is independent on paper, it is to comply with the demands of its patron. However, in general a client state is loyal to its patron to such an extent that it enhances the client-patron relationship.

The patron state often seeks a client state that has a strategic importance to the patron. This strategic importance could mean that the client state has access to certain waterways or that it lies close to an enemy state. The patron often provides its client with economic and military assistance. Although not necessarily always the case, a patron state may seek to spread its ideological values to its client. Furthermore, it may seek its support in international forums, such as in the United Nations. When a client state suffers from political instability, the patron may come to the rescue and reduce the instability by suppressing the client state's population, although this is not necessarily always the case.

In the literature concerning client states as reviewed for this research, no examples of de facto states being client states have come up. Scholars write about Soviet client states in Eastern Europe and American client states in Turkey, Iran and Central America during the Cold War (Gasiorowski, 1991, p. 1). In table 1 it can be seen that one of the features of a client state is that it is formally independent, although it has to comply to the wishes of the patron state.

The DPR and the LPR are not recognized by any UN member states, hence they are not formally independent. Although this can be seen as a clear signal that the DPR and the LPR can not be considered as client states, this chapter will first aim to link the other features of a client state to the DPR and the LPR before drawing a conclusion.

Can the DPR and the LPR be considered client states?

The DPR and the LPR do have certain characteristics of a client state. First of all, the relationship between Russia and the DPR and the LPR is unequal in terms of resources and capabilities. Although the Donbas has its share of natural resources, it is obviously nothing compared to those of the biggest country in the world. The relationship is especially unequal in terms of capabilities. The DPR and the LPR can not function without Russian military and financial support. Hence, its military and financial capabilities are close to zero.

A client state is to comply with the demands of its patron. This seems to be the case for the DPR and the LPR, who are to comply to the demands of the Kremlin. Although it is difficult to find a 'smoking gun' for the DPR and the LPR complying to Russian demands, the assassinations of prominent DPR and LPR figures shows that Russia needed to replace the Donbas leadership with people who are easier to control by the Kremlin. In general, as the DPR and the LPR are fully dependent on Russian support and are in fact controlled by Russia, it can be safe to say that they are to comply with Russian demands.

A client state is loyal to its patron to such an extent that it enhances the client-patron relationship. This too is the case for the DPR and the LPR. Although some DPR and LPR officials have criticized Russia in the past for not annexing the Donbas, in general the de facto authorities are nothing but positive about Russia. DPR media also only report in a positive way about Russia and President Putin.

Although a client state is on paper independent, its sovereignty is negatively affected by its patron. This does not seem to be the case for the DPR and the LPR. Although both entities have declared themselves independent, they have not been recognized by any UN member state, not even by their patron state Russia. Although one could argue that the sovereignty of the Ukrainian breakaway republics is negatively affected by Russia, one could also argue that both entities lack sovereignty in general, and that a certain degree of autonomy would be a

better definition of the status of the two entities. Hence, this feature of a client state is not applicable to the DPR and the LPR.

A client state is dependent on the economic and military support of its patron. This is very much the case for the DPR and the LPR. Without Russian financial support, the DPR and the LPR would cease to function. They would no longer be able to maintain their governmental institutions or to pay wages and pensions. Although the DPR media does not mention Russian financial support, it does acknowledge the strengthening of economic ties between the DPR and Russia. The *DoNi News Agency* reports for example on a Russia-Donbas Economic Forum held in 2017. The propaganda channel quotes Russian State Duma Deputy Andrei Kozenko, who believes that “It is necessary to hold an economic forum in the fall in order to develop the ties between enterprises that both Donbass and Russia need” (DoNi News Agency, August 28th, 2017). Especially militarily the DPR and the LPR are dependent on Russian ‘volunteers’, Russian arms and the regular Russian army. Without Russian military support, the DPR and the LPR would likely be overrun by the Ukrainian army in a short matter of time.

A client state is strategically important to its patron. This means that it has for example access to an important sea route or that it lies close to an enemy state. One could argue that the DPR and the LPR have a certain strategic importance to Russia. Russia seems to consider Ukraine its enemy, and by supporting de facto states on Ukrainian territory, it can effectively destabilize Ukraine. A different strategic motivation of Russia to support the separatist entities in Ukraine is to prevent Ukraine from becoming a NATO member. In recent years, several former Soviet countries have become or tried to become NATO members. It is no secret that several Ukrainian politicians had the ambition of turning Ukraine into a NATO member state, especially after Russia had annexed Crimea. Although it is difficult for Russia to put Ukraine back under its control after the worsening of their relations following the Crimean annexation, it can effectively prevent Ukraine from becoming a NATO member by covertly occupying parts of the country, for NATO is not eager to have to defend Ukraine against Russia (Grossman, 2018, p. 52).

A patron state may seek to spread its ideological values in its client state. During the Cold War, this concerned mostly the division between communism and capitalism: the Soviet Union would promote communism in its client states, whereas the United States would promote a

free market economy and, to a certain extent, democracy. This division between these two opposing ideologies is less clear today, however one could still argue that Russia is promoting its ideologies in the DPR and the LPR. For example, as the DPR media have reported, Russian State Duma Deputy Andrei Kozenko supports the creation of a “children’s patriotic movement” in the DPR and the LPR (DoNi News Agency, March 28th, 2018). The aim of such a club would be to promote Russian nationalistic ideology. In general, the war in the Donbas meant a rise of Russian nationalism both in Russia as well as in the Donbas (Verkhovsky, 2016, p. 75).

A patron state may seek the support of its client state in international forums such as the United Nations. This is definitely not the case for the relationship between Russia and the DPR and the LPR. As both the DPR and the LPR are not recognized by any UN member states, they are not members of any international forums. Hence, Russia can not seek its support in these forums.

Finally, a patron may seek to reduce instability in its client state and thereby repress its population. Although one could argue that the DPR and the LPR are repressing the local population with Russian help, especially those who support the central Ukrainian government, it is unclear at this point whether or not Russia is reducing instability in the DPR and the LPR. Both breakaway republics are tightly controlling their population, and there is no evidence that a large scale civil unrest against Russia or the DPR and the LPR has occurred in the occupied part of the Donbas ever since these territories were no longer under Ukrainian control.

From this chapter, one can conclude that the DPR and the LPR fulfill most of the features of a client state. However, as the DPR and the LPR are not sovereign states and have not been recognized internationally, the DPR and the LPR lack a key feature of a client state. Hence, the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic can not be considered as Russian client states, for they are no sovereign and internationally recognized states.

Chapter six

Associated State

In this chapter, the concept of an associated state will be discussed. Furthermore, an analysis of the situation in the DPR and the LPR will be made to see whether or not the term associated state is applicable to the DPR and the LPR.

Associated states have a certain amount of sovereignty, which is however rather limited by the patron state. The sovereignty of an associated state is especially limited concerning its defense and foreign policy. Associated states depend on their patrons for defense, for they are generally not able to defend themselves. The foreign policy of an associated state is also decided upon by its patron.

Although its sovereignty is limited, the key feature of an associated state is its freedom to decide upon its own domestic policies. Associated states allocate their defense and foreign policy to their patrons, but they are able to make their own domestic policies. An associated state-patron state relationship allows the associated state to have a maximum self-government on domestic issues.

As is the case with client states, no examples of de facto states being associated states have been found in the relevant literature. However, as international recognition is not a key feature of associated states, the term might still be applicable to the DPR and the LPR.

Can the DPR and the LPR be considered associated states?

The DPR and the LPR certainly do have certain features of associated states. Especially the outsourcing of its defense policy is something that is applicable to the DPR and the LPR. Although on paper the DPR and the LPR have their own army and their own defense policy, they are heavily dependent on Russian military support. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the Kremlin decides on the defense policy of the DPR and the LPR.

Associated states have a certain limited amount of sovereignty. This does not seem to be the case for the DPR and the LPR. Although both entities have declared themselves independent, they can not be considered as sovereign states. They do have a certain autonomy, but this can

not be regarded as similar to limited sovereignty, for they are Russian-controlled and have no sovereignty (Malyarenko and Wolff, 2018, p. 192).

An associated state allocates its foreign policy to its patron. Although it is not clear to what extent one could speak of a foreign policy of the DPR and the LPR, as they have not been recognized by any UN member states, the DPR did open a “representative office” in Finland in December 2017. According to DPR media, during the opening ceremony, the staff and guests “signed a letter of thanks addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Donetsk People’s Republic, in which they expressed their intention to progressively develop relations between the DPR and Finland in the field of culture, economy, science, information, tourism and other spheres” (DoNi News Agency, December 10th, 2017). Furthermore, DPR media also claim that the DPR has diplomatic offices in Greece, Italy, Czechia and France (Ibid).

The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately responded to the opening of the DPR ‘consulate’ in Finland, stating an official representation of the DPR in Finland does not exist (Stopfake.org, December 8th, 2017). Furthermore, it emphasized that it supports the Ukrainian territorial integrity. The DPR office in Finland has an official website, called dnrhelsinki.com, in which they call themselves the “Novorossia Embassy in EU” (dnrhelsinki.com). Despite the Finnish denial of the existence of an official DPR representative office in Finland, the office’s website claims they have “official status since autumn 2016” (Ibid). Furthermore, the website argues that as different unrecognized countries previously had offices in Finland, such as Palestine and the East German Democratic Republic (GDR), Finland has a tradition of supporting unrecognized countries. “Not surprisingly many of those Finns who once supported GDR, now support DPR”, a statement on the Finish DPR office website states, “This in fact means majority of Finnish intellectuals, most of whom are at least positively interested. For Finnish authorities DPR representative is very comfortable for enstrengthening Finland’s international position and supporting the Minsk peace process” (Ibid)³. The statement furthermore responds to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ rejection of their legitimacy, stating that because of a political crisis in the Finnish government, “Finnish foreign ministry does not have real mandate to represent Finn’s opinion” (Ibid).

³ Spelling mistakes are copied from the original statement.

As the example of the DPR “representative office” in Finland shows, the foreign policy of the DPR and the LPR can be neglected, for it is not being recognized by any UN member state. Attempts at opening offices abroad are regarded as illegitimate by the countries in which these offices are opened. One could however state that Russia is representing the DPR and the LPR internationally, for it often advocates in support of the DPR/LPR narrative abroad.

Although associated states lack full sovereignty, they are sovereign internally, with maximum self-government on domestic issues. It is likely that Russia is not one hundred percent controlling domestic issues in the DPR and the LPR. Several DPR and LPR leaders have criticized Russia before, stating that “We are the Donetsk People’s Republic. We have people who make their own decisions” (Davies, 2016, p. 736). Furthermore, the DPR and LPR leaders often try to make it seem as they make their own decisions and are not mere puppets of the Kremlin. This is not true however. Russia influences the DPR and the LPR to such an extent that they can not be considered as separate entities. Before the major regime change in 2017 and 2018, DPR and LPR leaders had more autonomy than they have today. However, with the assassinations of DPR and LPR leaders and militants and their replacement by figures who are easier to control by the Kremlin, the DPR and the LPR lost a big part of their ability to make autonomous decisions. Currently, Russia is in control of the political processes in the breakaway republics and it directly and indirectly controls most of their decision making (Fischer, 2019). Hence, the self-government the DPR and the LPR might have does exist, although it is very limited and absolutely not to its maximum.

Although the DPR and the LPR contain some features of an associated state, they lack a key feature of it. The DPR and the LPR’s defense policy is allocated to their patron. One could argue that the same goes for their foreign policy. However, the DPR and the LPR definitely do not have a maximum self-government when it comes to domestic issues. Although they may have a certain autonomy from Russia, the level of self-government they may have is definitely not maximum. Hence, the DPR and the LPR can not be considered as associated states.

Chapter seven

Vassal State

In this chapter, a short description of a vassal state will be provided. Furthermore, a comparison will be made with the situation in the DPR and the LPR in order to determine whether or not the DPR and the LPR can be considered vassal states.

A vassal state is very much different than a client state or an associated state. First of all, a vassal state is not an independent nation. It does however have internal sovereignty, allowing its authorities to conduct independent decision-making concerning internal issues. On the international level, a vassal state lacks sovereignty, and it is represented by the dominant state. Although the vassal state has internal sovereignty, its government consists often of a puppet regime installed by the dominant state.

An important feature of a vassal state is its binding relationship with the dominant state. Their legal relationship is such that treaties signed by the dominant state are binding to the vassal. Furthermore, the vassal state is expected to provide military assistance to the dominant state when requested to do so. The term vassal state is rather outdated and is mostly used in ancient times. Empires would annex smaller states and replace its government with a puppet regime, often consisting of locals. In times of war, the dominant empire would demand military support from their vassal states.

A research of the relevant literature has not provided examples of current vassal states. In modern times, the term vassal state is often used in a figurative way of speaking. British politician Jacob Rees-Mogg for example has recently stated that the United Kingdom will become a vassal state of the European Union if, during a transition period before a final British exit from the EU, the United Kingdom must obey European laws without helping to write them (The Guardian, February 2nd, 2018).

Can the DPR and the LPR be considered as vassal states?

The DPR and the LPR contain some features of a vassal state. Just like a vassal state, the DPR and the LPR are not independent. Although they have declared themselves independent, they are so dependent on Russia that they can not be considered independent states. However,

unlike vassal states, the DPR and the LPR lack internal sovereignty. Although they might have some autonomy, also concerning domestic issues they are dependent on Russia and the Kremlin is responsible for most of the decision-making in the Ukrainian breakaway republics.

A vassal state often has a puppet regime installed by the dominant state. This appears to be the case in the DPR and the LPR. The assassinations that occurred in the leadership of the de facto authorities of the Donbas saw them replaced by leaders who were more loyal to the Kremlin and more easily controllable. Although it is difficult to prove, it appears to be so that the current de facto authorities in the Donbas have been installed by Moscow. Hence, one could consider the DPR and the LPR authorities as Russian puppet regimes.

Internationally, a vassal state is represented by the dominant state. It is rather difficult to link this feature of a vassal state to the DPR and the LPR, for both entities are not very active internationally. Still, one could argue that Russia is representing the DPR and the LPR internationally, for often Russia takes decisions and speaks on their behalf in international platforms such as the Normandy format, which is a meeting of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia in which they discuss a solution to the war in the Donbas. The DPR and the LPR are not a party to the Normandy discussions. As it has been mentioned before, the DPR and the LPR have not always accepted Russia representing them internationally. During previous talks held between Russia and the US concerning the war, prominent Donetsk militants stated they would not be bound by any decisions made during the talks (Davies, 2016, p. 736).

A vassal state has a certain legal relationship with the dominant state. This relationship means that treaties signed by the dominant state are immediately binding to the vassal state. This does not seem to be the case in the DPR and the LPR. Treaties signed by Russia are not binding in the Donbas. Officially, Russia does not even recognize the DPR and the LPR as separate entities.

A vassal state is expected to provide military assistance to the dominant state once it is requested to do so. This too is not the case for the DPR and the LPR. Russia provides military assistance to the DPR and the LPR, but the other way around appears not to be the case. Nor would Russia need any military assistance from the DPR and LPR armies.

In the academic literature that has been reviewed in this research, some scholars define the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Russian vassal states. The “Russian Military Concept: 2010” also argues that integrating neighboring territory such as the Donbas into the Russian Federation as a vassal state is the most effective road towards security (Sinclair, 2016).

What is interesting to note is that DPR media often name Ukraine as an example of a vassal state. The propagandist *DoNi News Agency* of the DPR often refers to Ukraine as a vassal state of the European Union, the United States or of the West in general. In an article about Ukraine rejecting a free trade agreement between Russia, Ukraine and the EU for example, the DPR propaganda channel writes that “Nazi Ukraine is fated to be a Western vassal producing only agricultural products” (DoNi News Agency, March 27th, 2016). Other articles express the fear of “the overall strategy of US imperialism to turn Ukraine into a vassal state” (DoNi News Agency, October 30th, 2017).

The DPR and the LPR contain certain features of vassal states. Both states are not independent and they have puppet regimes. However, despite some academic literature calling the Donbas a Russian vassal state, they lack certain key features of vassal states. The DPR and the LPR are not legally bound by treaties signed by Russia. Furthermore, they lack internal sovereignty. More importantly, the Kremlin does not expect the DPR and the LPR to provide them with military assistance in case of a war, rather, it is the other way around. One can thus conclude that the DPR and the LPR can not be considered vassal states, for they lack certain key features of a vassal state.

Chapter eight

Puppet State

In this chapter, the term puppet state will be discussed. Furthermore, an example of a present-day puppet state will be discussed in order to see whether or not it can be compared to the situation in the DPR and the LPR. A thorough analysis of the features of a puppet state will be applied to the DPR and the LPR to see whether or not they can be considered as puppet states.

Unlike for example an associated state, a puppet state is a rather artificial entity that is completely under the control of the dominant state and sometimes even created by it. A puppet state depends on its sponsor state either economically, militarily, politically or in all these aspects. A puppet state's existence is thus fundamentally dependent on the support of its sponsor. The politics of a puppet state are entirely or partially controlled by the sponsor, with the sponsor passing down political decisions to its puppet. However, some sponsor states make policy decisions in accordance with their puppet. Theoretically, a puppet state might even have a certain influence on its sponsor. The most important positions in the government and military of the puppet state are often held by people from the sponsor state, although this is not always the case.

Unlike client states, puppet states or not or hardly recognized internationally. If a puppet state is recognized by UN member states, it has only been done by its sponsor and a handful of states that are allied with the sponsor state. Often these allied states are irrelevant to the puppet state due to their geographical location, such as for example the Pacific island-state of Nauru, which recognizes the independence of Abkhazia (Bader and Gerrits, 2016, p. 300). The elements who allow to identify a puppet state as a state, such as for example an independent government, exist only in appearance. Furthermore, states that are established during hostile occupation, illegal intervention or with the threat of force can be presumed to be puppet states.

There are several reasons a sponsor state might have for creating a puppet state. Often, the existence of a puppet state is a de facto annexation by the sponsor. When a sponsor state invades and occupies a certain territory but can not annex it due to for example international sanctions, it may decide to annex it de facto, but not de jure. This means that in practice, the

territory is still part of the sponsor state, however the sponsor state has installed a puppet regime who pretends the territory to be an independent nation. This means that the existence of the puppet state is often quasi-permanent. An example of such a puppet state would be the Armenian puppet state of Nagorno-Karabakh, located in Azerbaijan.

Other motivations a sponsor state might have to make use of a puppet state instead of annexing a territory have to do with international law. In times of war, soldiers have to stick to the Geneva Conventions of international humanitarian law, which does not allow soldiers to breach humanitarian law by for example raping women or committing genocide. If a soldier decides to violate international humanitarian law, his or her state can be held accountable for doing so. However, if the soldier of a puppet state violates humanitarian law, the sponsor state can not be held accountable, despite being in full control of the puppet state's army (Ivanel, 2016, p. 53). Thus, by making use of a puppet state's army, the sponsor state is not bound to international humanitarian law, meaning that it does not have to worry about being held responsible for civilian casualties for example. This allows the sponsor state to conduct warfare without 'playing by the rules', which gives the sponsor state an advantage over its enemy, which does have to worry about not hitting civilian targets. As Ivanel puts it, "Just a change of uniform, with no alteration of circumstances or level of control protects the sponsor state from responsibility under" international humanitarian law (Ibid).

Ivanel argues that there are currently five puppet states in the world. He considers Transnistria in Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia to be Russian puppet states. Other puppet states mentioned by him are Northern Cyprus, covertly occupied by Turkey, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, an Armenian puppet state. It is interesting to note here that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are considered as Russian protectorates by Gerrits and Bader, which could potentially mean that a protectorate is similar to a puppet state.

As Transnistria shares the same sponsor state as the DPR and the LPR, namely Russia, a more extensive description of Transnistria will be given in order to see whether or not it can be compared to the DPR and the LPR. As Transnistria has already been scientifically determined to be a Russian puppet state by Ivanel, a comparison between Transnistria and the DPR and the LPR is helpful in order to determine whether or not the DPR and the LPR can also be considered as Russian puppet states.

The Moldovan region of Transnistria declared itself independent two months after Moldova did in 1990. Soon after its declaration of independence, the Soviet Interior Ministry moved its troops into the region in order to protect the Transnistrian independence. In 1991, Transnistria established its own police force with the help of weapons provided by the 14th Soviet Army (Hoffmann and Chochia, 2019, p. 230). The Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict escalated during the summer of 1992. The Moldovan Army fought with the Transnistrian separatists over the control of the Eastern Moldovan region (Venturi, 2011, p. 9). The Transnistrian separatists defeated the Moldovan Army in July 1992 with the help of the Russian 14th Army. After the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Russian and the Moldovan Presidents, a trilateral peacekeeping operation was started, with the Russian forces having a leading role (Hoffmann and Chochia, 2019, p. 230).

The freezing of the conflict and the presence of the Russian army in Transnistria allowed Russia to turn the territory into a puppet state. Currently, Transnistria depends on Russia militarily and economically. Russia provides Transnistria with free gas, for which the Transnistrian authorities ask money from the local population, thus gaining important revenues (Ivanel, 2016, p. 49). On top of that, Russia heavily subsidizes the Transnistrian industry. Furthermore, all relevant Transnistrian industry is owned by Russians who are close to the Kremlin (Ibid).

After having defeated the Moldovan Army in 1992, the Russian 14th Army is still based in Transnistria. One of the main tasks of the 14th Army is the protection of Transnistria's borders (Ibid, p. 50). The regular Transnistrian Army itself is also composed mainly of Russian citizens. These are mainly Russian soldiers and generals who left the Russian 14th Army to join the Transnistrian Army. Ivanel argues that it is "hard to imagine" that such acts would happen without the approval of the Kremlin (Ibid). Without Russian support, not many soldiers would be left in Transnistria to prevent Moldova from taking back its lost territory.

Transnistria's most prominent politicians, army personnel and directors are all Russian citizens. The Ministry of Defense, the secret service and the Transnistrian Central Bank are all headed by Russians. Furthermore, virtually all Transnistrian officials are not born in Transnistria, with many of them lacking a link with the region in general (Ibid). Even former Transnistrian President Igor Smirnov was born in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in Russia's Far East.

As is the case in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia is and has been in the past conducting a policy of passportization in Transnistria. Of the 500,000 inhabitants of Transnistria, around 200,000 currently possess a Russian passport (Hoffmann and Chochia, 2019, p. 230). As Hoffmann and Chochia argue, “Russia creates the basis for its possible intervention into the region with the excuse of wanting to protect its citizens from eventual threats” (Ibid). Russia considers the passportization policy as a security measure to be able to have an excuse to intervene whenever it desires to do so.

Unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria is not recognized by Russia nor by any other UN member states. Officially, Transnistria is located on de jure Moldovan territory.

Can the DPR and the LPR be considered puppet states?

In 2015, the DPR and the LPR tried to merge together into one state, to be called the Confederation of Novorossiya. The merger failed, and to this day the DPR and the LPR remain two separate entities on paper, with two separate ‘governments’. When scholar Ivanel wrote his article on puppet states, the merger was still in the making. He argues in his article that the Confederation of Novorossiya is a puppet state “under creation” (Ivanel, 2016, p. 43). Although the fact that Ivanel considers the Confederation of Novorossiya as a puppet state in the making makes it more likely that the DPR and the LPR can also be considered as puppet states, a thorough comparison of the situation in the DPR and the LPR with the features of a puppet state will first be necessary before determining whether or not the DPR and the LPR can be considered as Russian puppet states. A comparison between the DPR and the LPR with Transnistria will also be helpful to determine whether or not the DPR and the LPR can be considered as Russian puppet states, for all three entities share the same sponsor state and Transnistria has already been scientifically determined as a Russian puppet state.

A puppet state is economically dependent on its sponsor state. As has been determined earlier in this research, this is definitely the case for the DPR and the LPR. Trade between Russia and the DPR and the LPR is increasing due to the rublization of their economy. Furthermore, the DPR and the LPR are dependent on Russian financial support and on the Russian humanitarian convoys that are often sent to the Donbas. This situation resembles the situation in Transnistria, which is also dependent on Russian financial support.

Militarily, the DPR and the LPR are also dependent on Russia. Without Russian military support, the Ukrainian breakaway republics would likely be no match for the Ukrainian army. This is a feature of a puppet state the DPR and the LPR have in common with Transnistria. Transnistria also would likely cease to exist as a separate entity without the permanent presence of the Russian 14th Army and without the Russian citizens who are enlisted in the Transnistrian Army.

A puppet state is politically dependent on its sponsor state, with political decisions being passed on to the puppet by the sponsor. After the assassinations of the separatist leadership in the Donbas, Russia installed politicians that were more loyal to the Kremlin and easier to control. Although it is hard to prove, political decisions are likely passed down to the DPR and the LPR authorities by the Kremlin.

When in July 2014 the civilian plane MH17 was shot down over the Donbas on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, an international team started investigating the plane crash. It concluded that the plane was shot down by a BUK-rocket fired by the Russian backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew members on board. This Joint Investigation Team (JIT) discovered by listening to tapped phone conversations between separatists and Russian officials that the FSB, the Russian secret service, was in contact with the separatists on a daily basis, advising them and giving orders about administrative, financial and military affairs (NOS, November 14th, 2019). Thereby the JIT provided another proof of the DPR and the LPR's military, economic and political dependency on Russia.

The most important military, political and governmental positions in a puppet state are held by citizens of the sponsor state. Although some of the Russian citizens that held important positions in the DPR and the LPR have been replaced by local Ukrainian citizens, one can argue that this feature of a puppet state is applicable to the DPR and the LPR. Aleksandr Borodaj, the first 'President' of the DPR, is a Russian citizen. Although he is no longer the DPR's President, he is still active in the DPR government as Deputy Prime Minister. Russian Igor Girkin was the DPR's first 'Minister of Defense' and many warlords who are or previously have been active in the Donbas, such as the infamous Arsen Pavlov, are all Russian citizens with no ties to the Donbas prior to 2014. This is similar to the situation in Transnistria, where most

'government officials' are Russian citizens, some of whom had no relation to the region prior to the conflict.

A puppet state has not or hardly been recognized by UN member states. This matches the DPR and the LPR, as they have not been recognized internationally. It is also similar to the situation in Transnistria, which has also not been recognized by any UN member state.

A puppet state is a de facto annexation by the sponsor state. The situation is quasi-permanent, and the puppet state is only used because the sponsor state can not annex the territory due to several reasons, which is why it decides to use a puppet state. There are several reasons as to why one could consider the DPR and the LPR as being de facto annexed by Russia. Apart from the DPR and the LPR being economically and militarily dependent on Russia, political decisions being passed down by the Kremlin to DPR and LPR authorities and Russian citizens containing prominent positions in the DPR and the LPR, the relationship between the Donbas republics and Russia seems to be almost like the relationship between a province and its federal government. First, although Russia does not recognize the independence of the DPR and the LPR, it does recognize their passports, license plates and other official documents provided by the de facto authorities of the separatist regions. This allows citizens of the occupied territories to travel to Russia without Ukrainian or Russian passports. Second, the DPR and the LPR authorities have made it no secret that their ultimate goal is to be annexed by Russia. Former DPR President Oleksandr Zakharchenko said in 2018 that a union with Russia is the ultimate goal of the foreign policy of the DPR. DPR media quoted him in saying that he believes that "the alliance with Russia is the most important priority of the republic's foreign policy. The common future with Russia is our firm choice" (DoNi News Agency, March 2nd, 2018a). While this is currently not happening, the DPR and the LPR have established together with Russian politicians the so-called "Russia-Donbass Integration Committee". According to DPR media, the committee is "a permanent public organization the activities of which are aimed at strengthening the process of humanitarian, social and cultural integration of Donbass and the Russian Federation" (DoNi News Agency, March 16th, 2018b).

The DPR and the LPR's attempts at integration with Russia are not unanswered by Moscow. First of all, Andrei Kozenko, the coordinator of the Russia-Donbass Integration Committee, is a deputy of the Russian State Duma (Ibid). Kozenko is a member of United Russia, the political

party of Russian President Vladimir Putin. This could be interpreted as a sign of Moscow's support for the Russia-Donbass Integration Committee. Second of all, according to DPR media, Russia organized a big conference in Moscow in 2018 on the "ties between Russia and Donbass" (DoNi News Agency, March 2nd, 2018b). Events such as these are organized by Russia on a regular basis. However, Russian officials are often careful not to mention the DPR and the LPR, but instead talk about the Donbas or Eastern Ukraine. The Russian equivalent of the DPR's Russia-Donbass Integration Committee for example is called the "Committee for Public Support of the Southeast of Ukraine" (Ibid). Other examples of the close relationship between Russia and the DPR and the LPR as mentioned by DPR media are numerous articles about students from the DPR participating in events in Russia (DoNi News Agency, March 13th, 2018). The incredibly close relationship between the DPR, the LPR and Russia in combination with their economic and political dependency and the presence of Russian military on their territory make that one could argue that the DPR and the LPR are de facto annexed by Russia. De jure however, Russia still recognizes them as Ukrainian territory.

A puppet state is often used by its sponsor state as a way to violate international humanitarian law without facing the consequences. According to several official reports from countries, human rights organizations and the UN, human rights are often violated in the Donbas. There are several well-documented examples of battles during which the separatists or the Russian army under a separatist flag committed grave human rights violations against Ukrainian civilians and military in order to win a battle. The most obvious example is the battle of Ilovaisk, which has been described earlier in this research. A UN report has documented many cases of grave human rights violations committed by separatists and Russian forces pretending to be separatists surrounding the battle of Ilovaisk, but also during other battles in the Donbas. The report is filled with dozens of horrifying stories of Ukrainian soldiers, sometimes only 18 or 19 years old, who are wounded and unarmed and begging for their lives or to call their mothers before being shot by DPR or LPR forces (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report, para. 81-85). The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017, conducted by the United States Department of State, states that "Russia-led forces in the Donbas region engaged in politically motivated disappearances, torture, and unlawful detention; restricted freedom of speech, assembly, and association; restricted movement across the line of contact in eastern Ukraine; and restricted

humanitarian aid” (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017, p. 1). Under the pretext of DPR and LPR uniforms, Russians are violating human rights in the Donbas, making it easier for them to win battles and maintaining control over the region and its population.

An interesting comparison between the situation in Transnistria and the situation in the occupied parts of the Donbas is Russia’s policy of passportization. Both in Transnistria and in the Donbas, Russia is handing out Russian passports to local citizens. Russia has made it easier recently for citizens living in the occupied parts of the Donbas to apply for Russian citizenship. Having many Russians citizens in Transnistria and in the Donbas makes for a good excuse for Russia to intervene in these regions under the pretext of protecting its own citizens.

States that have been established during hostile occupation, an illegal intervention or with the threat of force can be presumed to be puppet states. Although the Russian occupation of Eastern Ukraine occurs covertly, one can still assume that the Donbas is currently under hostile occupation. Hence, one could assume the DPR and the LPR, who have been established under hostile occupation, to be puppet states.

From this chapter it can be concluded that the DPR and the LPR contain all the features of a Russian puppet state. Both entities are entirely dependent on Russia, prominent government and military positions in the DPR and the LPR are held by Russian citizens and both entities are not recognized internationally. The DPR and the LPR are de facto annexed by Russia, although they remain de jure a part of Ukraine. Furthermore, both entities have been established during what can be assumed to be a hostile occupation. The situation in the DPR and the LPR very much resembles the situation in Transnistria, which has already been scientifically determined before as a Russian puppet state. Therefore, it is safe to say that the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic can be considered as Russian puppet states.

Conclusion

From the five terms that have been analyzed in this research, only two are applicable to the DPR and the LPR. Both the DPR and the LPR contain many features of a client state, however, as both of them have a total lack of sovereignty and international recognition, they can not be considered as client states. International recognition is not a key feature of an associated state, and the DPR and the LPR contain most features of associated states. However, a key feature being maximum self-governance, the DPR and the LPR can not be considered associated states. Vassal state is also not a term that can be applied to the DPR and the LPR. Although they contain several features of a vassal state, treaties signed by Russia are not binding to the DPR and the LPR, nor are the Ukrainian breakaway republics expected to provide Russia with military assistance in times of war. Rather it is the other way around. Hence, the DPR and the LPR can not be considered as Russian vassal states.

From this research it can be concluded that there are two terms that are applicable to the DPR and the LPR. The DPR and the LPR contain all features of a Russian protectorate. Furthermore, they share many similarities with two entities that have scientifically been determined to be Russian protectorates, namely Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The DPR and the LPR are financially and militarily dependent on Russia. Especially since Ukraine started a trade blockade of the two breakaway republics, Russia has been the only trade partner of the DPR and the LPR, which has been facilitated by the rublization of the local economy. The weak organizational power of the Donbas elites in combination with the weak organizational power of the Ukrainian authorities have made the DPR and the LPR an easy prey for Russia.

The second term that is applicable to the DPR and the LPR is puppet state. The DPR and the LPR are economically, militarily and politically dependent on Russia, with political decisions being passed down by the Kremlin to the de facto authorities in the Donbas. Most of the prominent positions in the DPR and LPR 'governments' are, or used to be, held by Russian citizens. The DPR and the LPR lack international recognition and have de facto been annexed by Russia, even though they remain de jure part of Ukraine. Russia is using the DPR and the LPR as a way to covertly occupy the Donbas and to avoid the burden of international humanitarian law. The DPR and the LPR share many similarities with a region that has already been scientifically determined as a Russian puppet state, namely Transnistria in Moldova.

Interesting comparisons between the two regions are for example Russia's policy of passportization, aimed at creating an excuse for Russia to intervene in the region in order to protect its own citizens.

As Abkhazia and South Ossetia are defined as Russian protectorates by some scholars and as Russian puppet states by others, and as the features of a puppet state and a protectorate are rather similar, one can conclude that a protectorate and a puppet state are very similar. The DPR and the LPR match all features of a Russian protectorate, as well as of a Russian puppet state. Furthermore, they share many similarities with breakaway republics that have already been scientifically determined as Russian protectorates and/or Russian puppet states. Therefore, from this research it can be concluded that the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic can be considered both Russian protectorates as well as Russian puppet states.

This conclusion is essential information for a possible conflict resolution in the Donbas. As it has been determined in this research that the DPR and the LPR fall almost entirely under the control of the Kremlin, it would make no sense to involve the de facto authorities of the DPR and the LPR in a peacebuilding process. Rather, it would be more logical to deal directly with the Kremlin instead.

Appendix 1: Situation map of the Donbas



Figure 1: Map of the situation in the Donbas. The white line marks the border between the Ukrainian oblasts. In the occupied territories, the white line also marks the border between the LPR to the north and the DPR to the south (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, July 2nd, 2018).

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