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Hybrid threats for the Ukrainian part of the Danube region

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Analysis of hybrid threats for the Ukrainian part of the Danube region and hybrid threats for the whole Danube region it`s necessary to answer three main questions:

What are hybrid threats?

What are main characteristics of the Ukrainian part of the Danube region, its strength and weaknesses, it`s vulnerability to hybrid threats?

How hybrid activities are carried out in practice?

1. Lets begin from the first question.

On official website of NATO we can see such definition of hybrid threats.

"Hybrid threats combine military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyber attacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces. Hybrid methods are used to blur the lines between war and peace, and attempt to sow doubt in the minds of target populations. They aim to destabilise and undermine societies."

The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats proposes practically the same definition:

"The term hybrid threat refers to an action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm a target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state or institutional level. Such actions are coordinated and synchronized and deliberately target democratic states' and institutions' vulnerabilities. Activities can take place, for example, in the political, economic, military, civil or information domains. They are conducted using a wide

range of means and designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution."

2. The second question is about vulnerability of the Ukrainian part of the Danube region to hybrid threats.

The Ukrainian part of the Danube region is formed by four Ukrainian oblasts (regions) which are partially located in the basin of the Danube:

• Odesa oblast, which has a direct access to the 174-km-long Kiliia Arm of the Danube, and in which a part of the Danube Delta sub-basin is located;
• Chernivtsi oblast and Ivano-Frankivsk oblast, in which the head-waters of the Prut and the Siret are located
 • Zakarpattia oblast, which is located in the basin of the Tisza river

It has a fragmented and non-compact territorial structure and divided on two parts, the Carpathian (including the Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk and Chernivtsi oblasts) part and the Odesa oblast. Totally it`s occupying 68,100 sq km with a population of 5.9 million.

The Ukrainian part of the Danube region have a favourable geographical position at the cross-roads of international transport, energy transportation and trading roads. Transport possibilities are strengthened due to direct access to the Trans-European waterway Rhine - Main - Danube and Black Sea, developed network of auto and railway infrastructure, 6 sea trade ports and 5 international airports (4 of them functioning). It also have significant natural potential and opportunities for the development of renewable energy (solar, wind, biomass), high recreation and wellness tourism potential, number of nature protected areas and so on.

At the same time the Ukrainian part of the Danube region have some factors which made it more vulnerable to the hybrid threats:

The first one - specifics of historical destiny of regions which forms the Ukrainian part. Through XXth century these regions were parts of different states. This circumstance influenced on populations mentality.

Zakarpattia oblast	Ivano-Frankivsk oblast	Chernivtsi oblast	Odesa oblast (southern districts - Bessarabia)
Till 1918 - Austria-Hungary	Till 1918 - Austria-Hungary	Till 1918 - Austria-Hungary	Till 1918 - Russian empire
1918-1938 - Czechoslovakia	1918-1939 - Poland	1918-1940 - Romania	1918-1940 - Romania
1938-1944 -	1939-1991 -	1940-1941 - Soviet	1940-1941 - Soviet

Hungary 1945-1991 - Soviet Union (Ukrainian SSR) Since 1991 - Ukraine	Soviet Union (Ukrainian SSR) Since 1991 - Ukraine	Union (Ukrainian SSR) 1941-1944 - Romania 1945-1991 - Soviet Union (Ukrainian SSR) Since 1991 - Ukraine	Union (Ukrainian SSR) 1941-1944 - Romania 1945-1991 - Soviet Union (Ukrainian SSR) Since 1991 - Ukraine

Difficult and contradictory history of these regions became a ground for some historical mythology and phobias.

2. Peripheral location of some areas of the Ukrainian Danube region, depressive character of their economy, high level of unemployment and labor migration. These regions are characterized by imbalances in economic development and availability of social services between cities and rural districts.

3. Multinationality of population, at the same time - our wealth and weakness.

Ethnic divisions in the Ukrainian part of the Danube region (in %)

Zakarpattia oblast	Ivano-Frankivsk oblast	Chernivtsi oblast	Odesa oblast (southern districts - Bessarabia)
Ukrainians - 80,5 Hungarians - 12,1 Romanians - 2,6 Russians - 2,5 Romas - 1,1 Slovaks - 0,8	Ukrainians - 97,5 Russians - 2 Poles - 0,1 Others - 0,5	Ukrainians - 75 Romanians+ Moldavians - 19,8 Russians - 4,1	Ukrainians - 62,8 (35,8) Russians - 29,7 (12,7) Bulgarians - 6,1 (24,8) Moldavians - 5 (15,2) Gagauzes - 1,1 (4,6) Jews - 0,6

4. Border position of regions. Border countries have their diasporas in regions, what determines both active transborder contacts and influence of border states.

Moreover Odessa region is neighbouring to the area of "frozen conflict" in Transnistria and autonomous territorial unit of Gagauzia.

Border position makes condition for smuggling, illegal migration and another types of transborder crimes.

5. Dependence on external energy supply (electricity from Moldova to the south part of Odessa region, natural gas from Russia)

All these weakness factors were used for Russia`s hybrid activity since beginning of Russia`s aggression against Ukraine in 2014. We have enough examples for illustration how it`s work on practice.

At first, it was an activity of pro-Russian separatists in Odesa region. They openly declared their demands for a referendum on the federalization of Ukraine, creation of the Odessa People's Republic on the model of Donetsk and Lugansk, openly used Russian state symbols. On March 3, 2014 it was made an open attempt to capture the building of the Odessa Regional State Administration and to raise the Russian flag. The culmination of separatist activity was a confrontation between Ukrainian public activists and separatists on May 2, 2014. Now we can say that since May 2014 an organized separatist movement in southern Ukraine is absent.

However in April-May 2015 it was made an another attempt to provoke separatist movement in southern part of Odessa region. A group of pro-Russian activists organized a so called Peoples Council of Bessarabia and declared Peoples Republic of Bessarabia. This provocation was organized by officer of so called Ministry of State Security of Transnistria. The same person also tried to organise false pro-Romanian separatist movement in the Chernivtsi region.

At second, in the period 2014-2015 in Odessa region was organized series of terrorist acts against patriotic organizations, infrastructure objects (railroad, gas pipeline, etc.). Along with the attempts to cause material damage, it is obvious that they carried the nature of the information and psychological operation: intended to create an illusion about existence of a powerful underground in the Odessa region, to generate insecurity of peoples. In addition, terrorist acts and information campaign around them had its influence on tourist industry, which plays an important role in the region's economy.

Terrorist activity affected not only Odessa region. In February 2018 was organized a fire-rising of Center of Hungarian Culture in Uzhgorod. The purpose of this provocation was obvious - to bring more tension to the relationship between Ukraine and Hungary. This terrorist act was realized in time of deteriorating of relations between two countries because of Ukrainian education law. Participants o this action - three Polish citizens, an organizer - right-wing German journalist loyal to Russia.

At third, manipulation with "Romanophobia", exploiting theses about the "Romanian threat". This theses is used in Odesa and Chernivtsi regions. Actively exploited facts of participation of Romania in the Second World War on the side of Nazi Germany, and fears of non-Romanian population of Southern Bessarabia about possible annexation of this region by Romania.

The bright example - situation in 2013, when in several days, most Ukrainian editions spread the news, that in Romania was discussing how to use the situation in Ukraine and "return" the territory of Northern Bukovina and Southern Bessarabia. The primary source was called the influential Romanian newspaper "Adevarul". As it turned out, it was not an article, and the personal blog of the one of regional correspondent of the newspaper.

At fourth, simulation or creation of fake news. For example, organising protest action specifically to create a virtual "picture". So, in April 2017, State security of Ukraine stopped an attempt to conduct a fake "protest" action which should be finished by provocation. Participants of this action had to go to the Bulgarian Consulate in Odessa to protest against Bulgarian minority`s oppression. Any Bulgarian organization take part in this action. According to the Security Service, the demonstration should be attacked by pseudonationalists. All this should have created a picture for Russian television about minority oppression in Ukraine.

From the same arsenal is provoking anti-Semitism. So in April 2014, anti-Semitic inscriptions appeared on dozens of Odessa houses, and was desacrated the monument to dead Jews and the burial of the victims of the Holocaust. In addition there were inscriptions "Right sector" and "Glory to Ukraine".

Now Russian media produce fakes about so-called Rusyns question in Zakarpattia to provoke separatism in this region.

Last four years Russia also produced fake news about Ukraine for Moldavian information space with using Moldavian media. Themes of these fake news are? for example:

- existing of bacteriological laboratories in Odessa region, which are the reason for epidemics of African swine fever and measles. Such news were published by some Moldavian papers;

- Intention of Ukrainian military to attack Russian army depot in Kobasna (Transnistria) and to "refreeze" the Transnistrian conflict. These fakes were published on one site with Moldavian domain and Russian IP. Now site is closed;

Scales of Russian information warfare is illustrated by recent fact: officers of the cybersecurity department of the Security Service of Ukraine uncovered a large-scale agent network that could be engaged in intelligence and subversive activities ordered by the special services of the Russian Federation. They use for this purpose 12 well-known Telegram channels.

In conclusion. As we see, Russia use a wide range of tools in their hybrid warfare oriented on subversion of stability in the Ukrainian part of the Danube

region. And I think that Ukrainian experience would be useful for another countries of Danube region.