R E V I E W

of the dissertation work of **Irina Oleksiivna Ostrovska**, PhD student in the Department of Political Science of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski"
Subject: **Specifics of Russia's hybrid war in and against Ukraine after its independence in 1991**
for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a professional field 3.3. Political science, code 05.11.02 Political science
Reviewer: Prof. Nikolay Naydenov, Doctor Habil

The proposed dissertation work by Irina Ostrovska meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff, regarding the successful preliminary discussion of her dissertation, the composition of the scientific jury, the minimum national requirements and the terms of the procedure. Four articles in his thematic field and reports in numerous academic forums in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan and Russia support the academic claim of this dissertation.

In terms of quantity, the presented dissertation consists of 224 pages, divided into 3 chapters and a conclusion, to which 25 pages of appendices, abbreviations and bibliography are added (113 cited and 193 used sources). In addition, the dissertation relies on three author surveys with a total of 55 questions and 537 respondents. The submitted abstract objectively reflects the content and meaning of the dissertation.

Irina Ostrovska's primary research question focuses on (i) the specifics of Russia's hybrid war in and against Ukraine and (ii) its impact on Ukraine's future domestically and internationally. The following hypotheses were raised and confirmed: (1) The Ukrainian crisis does not arise out of nowhere, but has certain

prerequisites; (2) Russia's hybrid war in and against Ukraine has been successful to a large extent not only because of the presence of a wide range of political and economic entities dependent on Russia, but also because of the poor awareness of Ukrainian citizens about the traps of the "hybrid war", due to which they easily fall prey to her manipulations; (3) Ukraine's successful opposition to Russia in hybrid warfare depends on numerous domestic and international factors; (4) The Ukrainian experience is important for Bulgaria, because countries that had strong ties with Russia and a close territorial location are more vulnerable to the Russian hybrid war. The latter hypothesis is placed second in the dissertation, but I mention it last because it is more appropriate to analyse the Ukrainian specifics first before considering its international significance.

Irina Ostrovska divides her research task into four main objectives: (1) to define the preconditions for the Ukrainian crisis; (2) to determine what internal and external factors depend on Ukraine's successful opposition to Russia's hybrid warfare in and against it; (3) to identify how a number of countries' ties to Russia make them more vulnerable to hybrid attacks against them; (4) to track and analyse the attitude of Ukrainian citizens in Bulgaria and ethnic Bulgarians from Ukraine towards Russia's hybrid war, with a view to preventing similar crisis processes in the Balkans.

To achieve these goals, doctoral student Osikovska has formulated seventeen tasks: (1) defining the concept of "hybrid war"; (2) a comparative analysis of the similarities between the political, social and other types of contexts of its historical antecedents and that of the present hybrid warfare in Ukraine; (3) determining the extent to which Ukraine is the biggest stumbling block between the West and Russia; (4) establishing the historical and other prerequisites for the hybrid war of the Russian Federation in and against Ukraine; (5) analysing Russian-Ukrainian

relations in the period from the 1990s to the beginning of 2022; (6) examining whether countries with strong ties to Russia and close territorial location are more vulnerable to Russian hybrid warfare; (7) identifying the domestic factors upon which Ukraine's successful opposition to Russian hybrid warfare depends; (h) an examination of the international factors upon which the successful opposition to Russian hybrid warfare depends; (9) situational analysis of the subjects dependent on Russia and the reasons for their dependence; (10) empirical studies of opponents and supporters of Russia in the hybrid war against Ukraine; (11) study of mass phenomena and processes related to Russia's hybrid warfare in and against Ukraine and systematization of the manifested regularities; (12) tracking the dynamics in the image of Ukraine and the Ukrainian crisis in Bulgaria; (13) tracking the relations between Bulgaria and Ukraine in recent years; (14) an analysis of why the hybrid war in and against Ukraine has largely been successfully implemented; (15) predicting how Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine might end; (16) analysing the reaction of Bulgarian experts to the hybrid war in Ukraine; (17) establishing the influence of the Bulgarian diaspora in Ukraine on the relations between Bulgaria and Ukraine against the background of the hybrid warfare in Ukraine.

Three problem circles can be distinguished in the entire body of the dissertation. The most important and structure-determining of these concerns the nature and phenomenology of hybrid warfare. The first chapter gives a broad overview of the concepts of hybrid warfare and its components. Among the presented authors, those who wrote in Ukrainian and Russian dominate. In this specific case, this has its advantage: hybrid warfare unfolds its potential not in the West, but namely in the former post-Soviet political space, and thanks to such researches, the Western academic understanding of hybrid warfare can be significantly enriched. The stages through which the hybrid war goes are distinguished, starting from its historical

incarnations and reaching its apogee in the conditions of modern communication technologies.

The most analytical and original character in this dissertation has the distinction of nine pairs of categories, including vulnerable points in Ukrainian society and the dangers coming from these points. The first of these pairs is called "national". What is distinctive here is the masking of the Russian management strategy as the "Ukrainian choice" and the presentation of the Ukrainian state as a violator of international law, supporting dubious regimes, and unable to govern the country. The second pair examines how corruption, the incomplete system of military defence, the mine-contaminated territories etc. open space for the actions of illegal armed groups, "patriotic" non-governmental organizations, illegal distribution of weapons, etc. The third in this series is the law enforcement sphere. Corruption, impunity, political appointments open up scope for influencing decisions through kompromat, for campaigns discrediting the government, for the appointment of foreign agents and outside influence on the criminal contingent. The fourth sphere is the information sphere, struck by the lack of effective regulation, mechanisms to stop pro-Russian narratives, etc. This is used by the forces working for the Russian interest, who stick labels familiar from Russian propaganda in Bulgaria: "party of war" , "Kiev junta", "Banderovites", "fascists", "Nazis". The spread of such narratives and qualifications takes advantage of democratic norms and procedures in the EU and the US. Their goal is to legitimize what has been appropriated by Russia, to demoralize and disorient Ukrainians, to cause feelings of discrimination and insecurity, to form dividing lines in the society of regional, ethnic and other identity and block the access of people from the occupied territories to Ukrainian information. The next area is cyberspace, which opens up opportunities for hybrid attacks, taking advantage of the lack of information of government officials, the

distribution of unlicensed Russian software, etc. The result of this situation is massive Russian cyberattacks, concealment of perpetrators, software products for collecting personal data, unauthorized access to personal and work emails. Sixth is the economic sphere. It is hampered by the preservation and restoration of the old mechanisms of dependence, increasing financial burdens on the budget, promoting the image of Russia as a place to make money, etc. This opens the door for Russian influence through banks, control of and sabotage in important economic assets, malware, determining the direction of operation of large enterprises. The energy sector, for its part, has been plagued by its dependence on Russian gas, oil, coal and electricity. This gives Russia the opportunity to exerts pressure on Ukraine by: cutting off gas supplies, controlling supplies of oil products (including from Belarus), destabilizing Ukraine's unified energy system and bypassing it. In eighth place is the field of human rights. The rights of Crimean Tatars are ignored, and Ukrainian citizens in Russia are not treated as representatives of one nation, but as belonging to different ethnic groups. Threats along this line are expressed in speculations about the rights of national minorities, language policy, discrimination based on nationality; use of non-governmental activists and parties for destabilization, under the pretext of violating human rights and national minorities; using language policy issues for intolerance towards Muslims, Poles, Jews and at the same time inciting the representatives of the respective faiths to defend their allegedly violated rights and create inter-faith hatred. Apart from this, violation of the rights of national minorities is inspired in order to inflame inter-ethnic hatred and stimulate separatism and destabilize the situation. Finally, there is the use of history to support Russia's current political goals. This field is characterized by low awareness and the dominance of the (post)Soviet point of view in textbooks. This opens up space for the narratives of unity with Russia, the concept of the "three-united Russian people", the awakening of nostalgia for the USSR, for the welfare

and order under communism, for the fact that Ukraine was artificially created in the USSR. And vice versa - Ukrainian historiography, self-awareness, language, religious organizations, etc. are presented as "invented", "imposed from outside", "frivolous", "opportunistically anti-Russian", "non-canonical", "criminal", etc.; and Ukrainian patriotism is discredited as "Ukrainian fascism"

This problematic finds its essential continuation and conclusion in the second chapter of the dissertation, where three important aspects of the hybrid war are examined: (1) the individual aspects - informational, historical and religious; (2) the societal aspects - political, legal, economic and energy and (3) the power aspects - military, chemical, biological and nuclear. The specific parameters of these aspects of hybrid warfare make them a natural complement to the pairs of concepts from chapter one that I have defined as the culmination of the dissertation.

The summary made so far of the essence and manifestations of hybrid warfare explains why the definitions of hybrid warfare so far are significantly poorer than hybrid practices. Hybrid warfare has not yet finished displaying its full arsenal of means, and therefore generalizations about it are provisional in nature, made on the fly, without the time necessary for comprehensive and unambiguous definitions to crystallize. I believe that the doctoral student herself is fighting a hard battle with this problem, trying not to miss anything important and at the same time to give a finished look to her conclusions.

The latter leads us to the second major problematic circle in the dissertation: the description of multiple concrete actions in their sequence through which the great potential of Russia's hybrid attacks against Ukraine emerges, develops and realizes. These plots present the hybrid attacks in flesh and blood, revealing all the complexity

and insidiousness inherent in them. However, I will not comment on them specifically, because they play an illustrative rather than an explanatory function. For the same reason, I'll just highlight the third and final problem area related to survey respondents' perceptions of hybrid attacks. These perceptions are indicative of the different reception of hybrid attacks, depending on gender, age, education, ethnicity, nationality, etc. factors and put the finishing touches on the symptomatology and phenomenology of hybrid warfare.

Organizing all this empirical and theoretical material in a logically consistent manner is a serious challenge for any researcher. In this regard, I would suggest that the doctoral student, when publishing her dissertation work as a book, add the three main aspects of hybrid warfare to the overview of the nine pairs "dangers - hybrid threats" warfare. And in a more general sense, it seems to me more reasonable to divide the dissertation itself into three sections, representing respectively its nature, its actions, and its perception by people. The empirical part would benefit if the questions register not only the ways in which respondents understand hybrid warfare, but also the extent to which they are influenced by it. No matter how this future book is formed, the final version of the text must necessarily go through language editing by a Bulgarian philologist, with the aim of cleaning it from the traces of the author's mother tongue. Finally, I would like to hear the dissertation's reasons for qualifying as "individual" the informational, historical, and religious aspects of hybrid warfare.

In conclusion, Irina Ostrovska's dissertation has a significantly higher practical maturity than a typical doctoral dissertation. The problems she raises and solves are problems of the society in which she lives and with which she identifies. In this sense, it is an exploration of one's own lifeworld. The significance and scale of the

topic, as well as the boldness with which it was researched, are part of my reasons for calling on the members of the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Irina Oleksiivna Ostrovska.

27. 05. 2020 г.
Sofia

Reviewer:
(Prof. Nikolay Naydenov, Doctor Habil)