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Providing Meaning to Violence: Multiple Mobilizations and Dynamics of Conflict Escalation from November 2013 until February 2014 in Ukraine

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Abstract

The article examines the aspects of contention and conflict escalation before and during the period from November 2013 till February 2014 in Ukraine that have not yet received due attention in research. It studies the contention between the government and the opposition and the concomitant Maidan protest mobilizations by groups advocating unity with Russia, and opposing the visions of political community of the radical groups making up part of the Maidan coalition. Conflict escalation is studied as a combination of structural conditions, choices and actions taken by conflict agents, and evolving discursive factors that enable political violence. The analysis indicates that while structural conditions played a role, conflict escalation is a nonlinear and agency-driven process, evolving through mutually influencing choices and actions of the competing parties, that either drive escalation or lead to deradicalization. The article suggests that the modes of contention and radicalization between the government and the opposition opened opportunities for groups supporting unity with Russia to escalate their demands, to radicalize their visions of political community, and to build leverage with Russia. In conclusion, several key narratives and discursive processes enabling the legitimization of the use of force and the implications for peacebuilding are discussed. The findings help to understand better the environment in which violent conflict further escalated in 2014.

Keywords: Ukraine; Maidan protests; conflict escalation; violence; historical memory

Introduction

A dominant lens to analyze the period of contestation in Ukraine commonly referred to as the "Euromaidan," "Revolution of Dignity," or simply "Maidan," lasting from November 21, 2013 until February 21, 2014, has been in terms of popular mobilizations, initially protesting the government decision to suspend the signature of an Association Agreement with the EU, and then increasingly demanding the removal of the government, precipitated by its decision to use repression and force against protesters (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Hrytsak 2019). Another strand of research on this period has focused on the role of the far-right in the anti-government protests and violence escalation (Ishchenko 2016, 2020; Kudelia 2018; Katchanovski 2020; Risch 2021).

The article examines the aspects of contention and conflict escalation before and during the period from November 2013 till February 2014 that have yet to receive due attention in research. It studies the contention between the Viktor Yanukovych government and the political opposition (consisting of the VO Svoboda, UDAR, and Batkivshchyna) and the concomitant Maidan protest mobilizations by institutions, organizations, and communities supporting economic, political, and cultural unity with Russia and other CIS states, and opposing the visions of political

community of radical groups making up part of the Maidan coalition, including the VO Svoboda. The examination of multiple mobilization processes and conflict escalation dynamics across a number of theaters allows us to better understand the environment in which conflict further escalated during the spring of 2014.

In terms of the framework of analysis, following Jackson (2015, 77), I examine the process of conflict escalation as a combination of three key elements – "material and social structures, willing and capable conflict agents, and a series of conflict-enabling discourses and discursive practices." Among structural conditions identified in the article are the legacies of past conflicts expressed in exclusionary visions of political community; the exclusion of regionally-dominant opposition from executive power; the irresponsiveness of the government to the demands not only of groups oriented towards the European integration, but also groups and communities oriented towards economic and cultural cooperation and union with Russia and other CIS countries, which led to the empowerment of "entrepreneurs of violence;" the availability of a refuge to organize a rebellion; and such dynamic factors as the escalation of demands and mutual radicalization in the processes of contention.

Furthermore, drawing on theoretical work on the role of frames, narratives, and discursive practices in contention (Benford and Snow 2000; della Porta 2013) and conflict onset (Bar-Tal and Hammack 2012; Bar-Tal 2013; Jackson 2009, 2015), the article studies the evolution of narratives and discursive practices as factors enabling political violence. According to Jackson (2015), quantitative and structurally based explanations have dominated research on violent conflict onset, and narratives and discursive practices that make organized violence possible have been undervalued. Yet, according to Jackson (2009, 2015), the legitimization of the use of force for political ends becomes a key factor in conflict onset and then needs to be addressed in conflict transformation. The transformative role of violence in redefining groups – their claims, aspirations, and identities – has been noted by a number of scholars (Beissinger 2002, 319; Kalyvas 2006, 389; Bar-Tal 2013, 101–113). As shown in the existing research on violent and nonviolent forms of contention (Chenoweth and Stephan 2012), violent transformations tend to serve as the ground for further violence and political instability. In this article, violence is understood as both human loss and physical harm (injuries) of individuals.

After the review of structural conditions related to conflict onset, the article studies the use of such narratives and discourse structures in contention as threat framing; delegitimization and dehumanization of the Other; the presentation of the in-group as righteous and attribution of full responsibility for violence and conflict escalation to the opponents; and the promotion of narratives of in-group victimhood. Then it traces the milieus in which the use of force became legitimized as means of contention before and during the period from November 2013 till February 2014. I suggest several key discursive processes of conflict escalation. The first was the choice by competing coalitions to provide meaning to violence and instrumentalize it to delegitimize rivals in the context of inability to achieve own group demands. Furthermore, the attribution of escalating mutual violence solely to the rival group contributed to rising inter-group threat perception, competing militia mobilizations, and the spread of mutually delegitimizing discourses. Then the goals of mobilization changed from the achievement of political demands to the defeat of groups framed as a threat and legitimization of the use of force first by marginal actors and then by the government as the only way to stop violence. Yet another salient process was deliberate efforts by competing parties to undermine government legitimacy to be able to advance own group claims and legitimization of power capture.

The main level of analysis is meso-level focusing on political actors, institutions and organizations comprising competing coalitions. According to Vogt (2019, 14), organizations play an aggregating role for group identities and claims, represent them in the political system, and serve as an instrument for seizure of power and as mobilizing structures. Systematic data on protests collected by Ishchenko (2016) shows that the nationalist VO Svoboda representing one radical vision of political community became the most active participant in the Maidan coalition

mobilizations. Mobilizations in key locations in Southern and Eastern Ukraine such as Simferopol, Kharkiv, and Odesa evolving in parallel to the Maidan protests were initiated by the leftist political parties and organizations such as the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) and affiliated with it Organization of Veterans of Ukraine (OVU) and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU), Russian [russkiy] nationalist parties and organizations such as the Russkiy Blok, Russkoye Yedinstvo, Russkaya Obshchina and others, organizations of Russian compatriots, and the Cossack organizations such as the Krymskiy Kozachiy Soyuz. Such mobilizations included between several hundred and several thousand participants. The most important popular mobilization became "Miting Narodnoi Voli" [the meeting of people's will] that gathered, according to some estimates, some 20,000 individuals on February 23, 2014 in Sevastopol.

After the part focused on data and methods of data analysis, the next section of the article reviews relevant literature across several disciplinary fields on the role of discourses and discursive practices in conflict escalation and connects it to the findings of literatures using quantitative and mixed methods on structural determinants and processes and mechanisms of radicalization and conflict escalation. Then the article examines the territorialization and radicalization of political contention prior to the 2013–2014 cycle. Next, it undertakes a chronological analysis of the key episodes of contention during the period from November 2013 till February 2014 and examines the evolution of narrative structures and practices during the studied period. In conclusion, it suggests several key mechanisms and processes enabling the legitimization of the use of force and reflects on the implications for peacebuilding.

Data and Methods

The article examines qualitative data that includes the statements by the opposition (viche resolutions and other statements) and the government and its agencies; decisions, statements and transcripts of debates of local self-government bodies, including the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC); statements, posts or other materials produced by political parties, civil society organizations, and movements; and resolutions of rallies and pickets. Most of these sources have not been analyzed yet in a systematic manner. For the political opposition, I have used the statements and documents that had appeared on the websites of the political opposition and other open sources. Lidiya Kotelyak (Interview with Lidiya Kotelyak 2021) mentioned in an interview with the author that the Rada Maidanu [Maidan Council] took the decision to burn the most important documents when the government launched the "Anti-Terrorist Operation" on February 19 "because we thought that we would be gone" but she did not know what documents had been destroyed.

Furthermore, I have collected data using the method of semi-structured interviews during fieldwork in Western Ukraine, Kyiv, and Kharkiv in 2019 and 2021. In this article, I analyze two interviews with a member of parliament from the political opposition, Lidiya Kotelyak, conducted in July 2021 in Lviv and a participant of both the Orange Revolution in 2004 and 2013–2014 period militia mobilizations conducted in July 2021. Informed consent was collected from each informant recorded on the digital recorder prior to the interview. In the case of the second interview, the informant's right to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality was respected by not disclosing personal data and the place of the interview.

In terms of data analysis strategies, following the steps suggested by Fujii (2018, 73–89), after multiple re-readings of data I identified patterns and themes. Then I examined the data in order to identify causal logics that Fujii (2018, 81) defines as "people's explanations for why something happened the way it did" and different logics used by actors to tie explanations to various causal factors. According to Fujii (2018, 81-82), "The researcher need not try to privilege one set over another, but instead work to account for how and why different actors explain events the way they do." Finally, I mapped and analyzed the data to identify narrative structures and discursive practices in the discourses by the analyzed actors and traced how key narrative elements and practices evolved over the studied period.

Processes, Mechanisms, and Sequences of Radicalization and Conflict Escalation

As mentioned in the introduction, following Jackson (2015), the article examines conflict escalation as a combination of structural conditions, conflict agents making choices and taking actions that promote violent conflict, and discursive factors that enable political violence. Among structural determinants of violent conflict onset, research has identified the role of grievances linked to political and economic inter-group inequalities and political exclusion (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013), state weakness, and the availability of a refuge to organize a rebellion (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Lindemann and Wimmer 2018). A body of research taking both structure and agency-centered perspectives has focused on a number of processes and mechanisms of conflict escalation. One set of studies has connected the emergence of violent conflict to the lack of leverage by groups making claims on the state to achieve their demands in non-violent way that leads to the empowerment of "entrepreneurs of violence" (Beissinger 2002; Chenoweth and Stephan 2012; Vogt 2019). Another body of research concerns the dynamism and radicalization of interactions between the government and challengers. Studies find that state repression against challengers is more likely in the case of escalation of demands by the challengers, the presence of a radical flank among protesters, government insecurity, or weakening social support for the government (Young 2012; Tompkins 2015; Klein and Regan 2018; Ryckman 2020; Vogt, Gleditsch and Cederman 2021). Furthermore, drawing on McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), Chenoweth and Stephan (2012) and Bar-Tal (2013), who argue about the continuity between pre-violent and violent phases of mobilization, the first part of the article studies nonviolent forms of contention and the evolution of group-level understanding of deprivation and group goals preceding the emergence of violent forms of contention.

Second, it draws on a growing body of research across different disciplinary fields focused on the role of social processes in various stages of mobilization and conflict evolution. In the social movements literature, framing has been analyzed together with the political opportunities structure and material and symbolic resources as key to defining the forms of collective action (della Porta 2013, 15). The framing perspective studies "collective action frames" that identify grievances, possible solutions and formulate motivations for political action (Benford and Snow 2000). The literatures on social movements and radicalization include meaning formation or cognitive elements as principle dynamics and mechanisms shaping the processes of radicalization and conflict escalation (della Porta 2013; Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014). Della Porta (2013, 208) notes that cultural and symbolic processes expressed in narratives, rhetoric, or rituals are used by social movements for legitimization of political violence, however, they are not causes of violence as "[r]adical narratives engender radical violent repertoires only when political opportunities trigger escalation."

Bar-Tal and Hammack (2012) and Bar-Tal (2013) identify delegitimization as a key practice and narrative that enable inter-group violence and can become an integral part of the culture of conflict that underpins intractable conflicts. The system of beliefs, narratives, and emotions that provides meaning to the group-level deprivation, identifies group(s) responsible for the deprivation, and sets group-level goals to change the situation is an essential part of mobilization that can escalate into a violent conflict (Bar-Tal 2013). According to Bar-Tal (2013, 148–149), the key social processes in conflict escalation include the development of narratives that describe one's own group goals as existential and justified; one's own group as moral and righteous and the only victim of the conflict and rival group claims as unjustified and unreasonable; and the rival group as immoral and evil and bearing all responsibility for conflict outbreak and violence. Speaking from a constructivist perspective on conflict onset and resolution, Jackson (2009, 181) singles out several key narrative processes instrumentalized by conflict agents that enable political violence: "the construction of exclusionary and oppositional identities; the invention, reinvention or manipulation of grievance and a sense of victimhood; the construction or exaggeration of a pervading sense of threat and danger to the nation and community; the stereotyping and dehumanization of the enemy 'other;' and the legitimization of organized pre-emptive and defensive political violence."

Overall, the analysis of qualitative data undertaken in the article shows that a number of structural conditions linked in the literature to violent conflict onset were in place in Ukraine before the 2013–2014 cycle of contention. However, the analysis suggests that while structural conditions play a role, conflict escalation is a nonlinear and agency-driven process evolving through mutually influencing choices and actions of the competing parties that either drive escalation or lead to deradicalization if parties achieve compromises and are able to sustain them. In conclusion, several key narratives and discursive mechanisms and processes enabling the legitimization of the use of force are suggested. Most importantly, these include the choice made by conflicting parties to instrumentalize violence for the delegitimization of the Other and the advancement of the narrative that the use of force is the only way to stop violence.

Territorialization and Radicalization of Political Contention prior to the 2013–2014 Cycle of Protests

Since the early 1990s, dozens of nationalist organizations appeared in Western Ukraine (Galicia) annexed to the Soviet Union during the Second World War drawing on the legacies of the armed conflict between the nationalist underground and the Soviet regime in the 1940s–1950s. These organizations, defining themselves as "national-patriotic," aimed to rectify the exclusion and delegitimization of the nationalist underground during the Soviet period and made radical exclusionary claims on the Ukrainian state demanding the transformation of what they called "paper independence" into a national state. This involved for them the recognition of the "national-liberation struggle" of the 1930s–1950s at the national level, decommunization, the ban of the CPU, lustration of the former communist functionaries, withdrawal of Ukraine from any unions imposed by Moscow referred to as "the new imperial yoke," and the withdrawal of foreign armed forces from the territory of Ukraine (the list of demands is drawn from the review of the newspaper of the Lviv Oblast Society of Political Prisoners "Neskoreni" from 1991 till 2010). The organizations realized some of their demands at the regional level in Western Ukraine through cooperation with the moderate People's Movement of Ukraine that captured power at the regional level but failed at the national level due to the opposition by the CPU and other parties.

Following the Orange Revolution in 2004, the radical VO Svoboda, absorbing key demands made earlier by the "national-patriotic" organizations with the social base in Western Ukraine, reformed and announced about itself on the political horizon with a new program in 2005. In terms of threat construction, the VO Svoboda projected Russia and the political and economic structures spearheaded by it as historical and present threats to Ukraine and then cast a number of parties and civil society organizations as a "fifth column" by presenting them as manipulated by Russia. For example, in 2008 the VO Svoboda's list of "pro-Moscow" and "anti-Ukrainian parties and civil society organizations" included the Party of Regions, Russkiy Blok, PSPU, CPU and other ethnic Russian organizations. The VO Svoboda projected these organizations as promoting internal separatism inspired by Russia and pressed the state to use force to "neutralize" them and to liquidate the autonomous status of Crimea in the interests of national security (Tyahnybok 2008a, 2008b).

In the 2000s, the Party of Regions rose to regional dominance in Donbas and at the national level, gaining substantial representation in the national parliament (Kudelia and van Zyl 2019, 805). It politicized regional cleavages and delegitimized the central government from its power base in Donbas when it was excluded from the central government. During the periods when it was excluded from executive power during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko, the Party of Regions cooperated with the organizations oriented versus integration with Russia such as the CPU, Russkiy Blok, Russkaya Obshchina Kryma, and the PSPU to challenge the central government. It also mobilized the claims about the discrimination of Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, accused the central government of "glorification of Nazi collaborators," and framed the reorientation versus

NATO as a threat. Previously marginal political parties and organizations such as the PSPU gained political representation in Donetska, Luhanska, and Zaporizka oblasts and Crimea during the 2006 local elections.

The rise of the VO Svoboda making exclusionary claims, an overall reorientation of foreign policy following the Orange Revolution towards the EU and NATO, and Yushchenko's policies providing recognition to the "national-liberation struggle" of the 1930s–1950s set the ground for the emergence of radical organizations that rejected the very legitimacy of Ukrainian rule over Southern and Eastern Ukraine and Crimea referring to the Yushchenko government as "occupational" and legitimizing the "liberation struggle." Several such organizations that emerged in the Donbas region in opposition to the Maidan protests in 2004 demanding federalization and the elevation of the status of Russian united into Donetskaya Respublika at the end of 2005. The People's Front Sevastopol-Krym-Rossiya reviving irredentist claims of "reunification" of Crimea with Russia using legal means was created in August 2005 in Crimea. However, the Party of Regions and Russkaya Obshchina Kryma did not engage with these two radical organizations that did not allow them to gain more influence during Yushchenko's presidency.

During Yushchneko's presidency, the political opposition instrumentalized historical memories to delegitimize the central government. Radicalization of the discourses promoted by the Party of Regions during this period can be illustrated by the discourses delegitimizing the "orange government" as the rule of representatives from Galicia promoted by the party's ideologues. Dmytro Tabachnyk in an article "Galician 'Crusaders' against Ukraine" published in July 2008 depicted Galicia as an experiment by historical occupants, Poland, the Austro-Hungary and the Third Reich, to turn the region into an anti-Russian, anti-Orthodox, and ultimately anti-Ukrainian springboard for an offensive against "Big Ukraine" [Velikaya Ukraina]. He presented residents of Galicia as "loyal servants" of the "overseas empire" and NATO countries and attributed to Galicia the "burning, animal hatred of the great Ukrainian polyethnic and multilingual culture" and the goal to impose its ideas of "Bandera, SS Galicia, Russophobia, outright nationalist totalitarianism" on the rest of Ukraine (Tabachnik 2008).

For the "national-patriotic" organizations, including the VO Svoboda, with the social base in Western Ukraine, the Yanukovych government that returned to power in 2010 was illegitimate and a threat that required countermobilization. The VO Svoboda set a clear goal to remove the Yanukovych regime through a national revolution as of the beginning of Yanukovych's presidency (Tyahnybok 2011) and its members engaged in violent confrontations with the government between 2011 and 2013. While some representatives of the Party of Regions associated the "orange" government with the rule of Galicians and projected them as "loyal servants" of Western states framed as a historical and present threat, the "orange" parties projected the Yanukovych government as a rule of "donetskie" (Kudelia and van Zyl 2019, 805). Nationalist organizations also continued to use the images of Russia as a historical enemy with violent predispositions and projected the central government as a mere puppet of Russia. For example, in June 2010 the Lviv branch of the All-Ukrainian Union of Veterans held that after the election of president Yanukovych that constituted a *coup d'état* "[w]e found ourselves in a state occupied by foreigners, who try to subordinate us to the Russian empire of evil, to those Kremlin gnomes whose hands are up until elbows in the blood of Chechen, Georgian and other Caucasian patriots" (Lvivske 2010). The VO Svoboda gained representation in the local self-government bodies in Western Ukraine during the 2009 and 2010 local elections and a representation at the national level in 2012. In 2012, it was included as part of the political opposition together with two other mainstream political parties, UDAR and Batkivshchyna. The local self-government bodies in Western Ukraine opposed to central authorities became refuges from which rebellion could be organized identified in the literature (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Lindemann and Wimmer 2018) among structural factors in conflict onset.

As the Yanukovych government turned in the direction of European integration at the beginning of 2013, it was challenged by the organizations and parties supporting economic and cultural ties with Russia and the CIS countries. In September–October 2013, the CPU organized mobilizations in different cities of Ukraine in support of a national referendum on membership in the Customs Union with the CIS countries and elected members of the initiative group mandated to collect signatures for the initiation of a referendum. By November 15, 2013, the group collected 3.5 million signatures (of 3 million necessary) to organize a referendum. Smaller mobilizations were also organized by other organizations advocating closer relations with Russia. The government responded to the demands of these communities with obstruction and neglect that raised the level of discontent. Matsuzato (2016) holds that the overall level of grievances by the ethnic Russian parties in Crimea increased during the presidency of Yanukovych in comparison with the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko due to increasing levels of government repression. In addition to the protests against the signature of an Association Agreement with the EU, another central grievance raised in the mobilizations by the leftist, russkiy, Cossack, and other organizations was the opposition to the VO Svoboda and the inaction of the state in countering the threats posed by the radical organization. The CPU and other organizations claimed the right to "take adequate measures" in view of the state inaction (KPU 2013).

In summary, in the post-2004 period, the exclusion of regionally dominant political opposition from executive power became a reason of radicalization. This is in line with the findings of research that connects conflict onset to grievances linked to political and economic inter-group inequalities and political exclusion (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). Furthermore, the period of Yushchenko's presidency saw the rise to prominence of organizations such as the VO Svoboda, Donetskaya Respublika, and Sevastopol-Krym-Rossiya making radical claims. When in opposition, the Party of Regions projected political opponents as a threat by instrumentalizing memories and emotions of past conflicts, attributing to them the intention to destroy the in-group and to establish ideological domination, raising grievances about the violations of the rights of Russian-speakers and the government reorientation versus NATO. While the Party of Regions cooperated with such parties and organizations oriented toward integration with Russia as the CPU, Russkiy Blok, Russkaya Obshchina Kryma, and the PSPU, it did not make the choice to instrumentalize the organizations making most radical claims such as Donetskaya Respublika and Sevastopol-Krym-Rossiya that delegitimized the central authorities as "occupational." During Yanukovych's presidency, the VO Svoboda, which from the very beginning of Yanukovych's presidency framed the government as "occupational" and supported a national revolution to remove it, in 2012 became part of the political opposition together with other mainstream parties UDAR and Batkivshchyna. The analysis indicates that in the period prior to 2013, the use of force became legitimized by the VO Svoboda which framed Russia as an existential threat and presented some national parties and organizations as manipulated by it and by the CPU as "self-defense" legitimized by the inaction of the central authorities in confronting the threats posed by radical organizations. Also images of enemies, threat perceptions, and delegitimizing discourses were already developed before the 2013–2014 cycle of contention and the eruption of violence could be interpreted by competing parties as the natural embodiment of the already existing expectations about political opponents.

Several Milieus of Mobilization and Threat Framing prior to the Eruption of Violence on November 29–December 1, 2013

When a call for mobilizations against the government decision to suspend the signature of an Association Agreement with the EU was launched on social media on November 21, the political opposition had already called for a mobilization on November 24 in Kyiv (*Svoboda* 2013). In parallel to the unfolding protests against the government decision to suspend the signature of the agreement with the EU, the government was challenged by the organizations, political parties, and communities advocating accession to the Customs Union and demanding the maintenance of

political, social, economic, cultural and other ties with Russia and other CIS countries. The CPU continued to organize rallies throughout Southern and Eastern Ukraine and in Crimea in support of a referendum on membership in the Customs Union. In Crimea, its rallies were held together with the Russian nationalist and Cossack organizations. On November 24, *Novoross.info* reported that the action in Sevastopol included several hundreds of representatives of "left, russkiy and Cossack" organizations such as the CPU, Russkaya Obshchina Sevastopolya, veteran organizations and Cossack obshchiny that held Russian flags and Andreevskiy [St Andrew's] flags of the Russian Navy calling for unity with Russia and opposing themselves to the West as "foreign in faith, language, culture, history and traditions" (*Novoross.info* 2013b).

During the first week of protests, the government organized rallies in Kyiv, Simferopol, Kharkiv, and other cities with the slogans "For stability and prosperity" and "Building Europe in Ukraine." Furthermore, it mobilized votes in the local councils where a majority was controlled by the "party of power" and engaged its social base and allied civil society such as the organization of Crimean Tatars "Sebat" and vigilante groups [titushky]. The strategy chosen by the government was to criminalize the Maidan protesters and their demands, present them as manipulated from outside and a threat to national security, and legitimize the use of force within the limits of law to deal with what was projected as violation of law and order. A report on human rights violations by the government during the Maidan protests by twelve human rights protection organizations counted 77 court decisions from November 30, 2013 till February 22, 2014 banning or restricting peaceful protests in Kyiv and in regions, 45 of which concerned the Euromaidans (Matviychuk 2015, 37). Vitaliy Zakharchenko, Minister of the Interior, made a statement already after the first clashes between the protesters and the law enforcement officers on November 24 that force could be used by the state in case of the violation of law by protesters such as blocking of streets, the destruction of property, or a refusal to obey a court order (International Advisory Panel 2015, 10).

During the early stages in mobilization, some organizations advocating unity with Russia based in Crimea used the window of opportunity opened by the pro-government mobilizations and initially joined such rallies. However, they noted the difference between the pro-Party of Regions protesters and russkiy organizations in terms of the attitude to the unity with Russia. A representative of the Russkiy Blok party in Crimea (represented in the Sevastopol City Council), Yuriy Pershikov, mentioned that while the protesters supporting the Party of Regions avoided to talk about integration with Russia at the pro-government action on November 24 in Simferopol, supporters of the Russkiy Blok were for "unity with our great Motherland" and held that Ukraine was part of Russia temporarily separated from the latter (*Novoross.info* 2013a).

Qualitative data analyzed in this article allows to examine the ways in which the opposition leveraged popular mobilizations and its factions in local self-government bodies for the delegitimization of the existing political order and for the construction of alternative bases of legitimacy. According to Kotelyak (Interview with Lidiya Kotelyak 2021), the key decisions in the Rada Maidanu were taken by a small group [kistyak] consisting of Stepan Kubiv, Andriy Parubiy, Serhiy Pashynskyi, Arsen Avakov, Oleksandr Turchynov, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk. A coordinating meeting of the Rada Maidanu took place every evening on the 8th floor of the Trade Union building during which different groups received instructions. Kotelyak made part of the group that was responsible for feeding, lodging, clothing, and hygiene of the Maidan protesters and served as the co-commandant of Zhovtvenyi palats, one of buildings captured by the protesters, where 3,000 protesters were lodged for some time before being expelled by the Berkut special forces (Interview with Lidiya Kotelyak 2021).

A way in which the political opposition leveraged popular mobilizations protesting the government decision to suspend the agreement with the EU was to introduce the practice of regular Narodne Viche (alluding to historical experiences of direct democracy) that adopted resolutions speaking "in the name of the people" and claimed an alternative basis of legitimacy coming directly from the will of the people who had gathered on maidans of the country. The first resolution "For European Ukraine!", the text of which was prepared by the opposition, was adopted at the end of the

march that gathered between 50,000 and 100,000 participants on November 24. The resolution spoke on behalf of " … the citizens who gathered at the Viche on the European Square in Kyiv, guided by the provisions of Article 5 of the Constitution of Ukraine, according to which the only source of power in Ukraine is the people" (*Klichko.org* 2013).

Furthermore, the opposition also used discursive means and references to historical images and memories to delegitimize and criminalize the government drawn from the already established discourses of the "national-patriotic" organizations. It mobilized images of Russia as a historical and present threat to Ukrainian statehood and then delegitimized the Yanukovych government as a puppet of Russia. The first Viche resolution qualified the government decision as "illegal" that made the government "an accomplice to a crime against the Ukrainian people" and demanded the resignation of the government for betraying national interests. It described the Yanukovych regime as "criminal," "anti-Ukrainian," and "anti-people" [antynarodnyi]. The opposition misrepresented the suspension of the signature of the Association Agreement with the EU as the intention of the Azarov government to join the Customs Union and attributed the meaning of a return to the "Soviet empire:" " … a criminal refusal to sign the agreement fulfilled the Kremlin's order and began the turn of our state into the past, towards the customs union and the restoration of the Soviet empire" (*Klichko.org* 2013).

Another key resource leveraged by the opposition was the opposition factions in the bodies of local self-government. In the next few days after the adoption of the resolution in Kyiv, the opposition factions in the local councils in the power base of the opposition (most importantly the VO Svoboda factions) in Ivano-Frankivska, Lvivska, and Ternopilka oblasts mobilized to adopt statements supporting the demands of the Kyiv resolution (tv4.te.ua 2013; *Zik* 2013; *Volya.if.ua* 2013). Furthermore, the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast Council also adopted an appeal to the European institutions on November 26 that asked for the support of the European states against the Russian threat and considering that the failure to provide such support " … could inspire Moscow to take other unpredictable actions. The example of Georgia, which has lost part of its territories, clearly shows that the Kremlin has no moral limits." To reinforce the threat perception, the council appeal listed all historical grievances caused by the imperial Russia and the Soviet Union to the Ukrainian people and the threatening steps taken by Russia in the months preceding the appeal (Snyatynska 2013).

While the opposition mobilized historical memories representing Russia as an existential threat, organizations supporting unity with Russia mobilized images of Western states and their geopolitical alliances as a threat, referring to the past conflicts between Russia and Western states and presenting the Western integration projects as imperial and colonial. Already at that moment some Russian nationalist and leftist organizations started to pool their resources and create overarching coordination structures. On November 28, Russkiy Blok and Russkoye Dvizheniye Kryma issued a call for the creation of a broad coalition of "left-patriotic, russkiy and pro-Russian forces" in "union with the Russian political forces, civil society of Russia [obshchestnennost], [and] the leadership of the Russian Federation" to confront the efforts of the international alliance of "anti-russkiy and russophobic forces" using as cover the Ukrainian nationalists and the Ukrainian bureaucracy to separate Ukraine from "fraternal Russia in the interests of the Western imperialist powers" (*Novoross.info* 2013c).

The Choice to Provide Meaning to Violence and the Beginning of Competing Militia Mobilizations

During the night of November 29–30, the riot police "Berkut" carried out an operation to remove the protesters from the Maidan square using force. During the day of December 1, further clashes between protesters and the riot police and internal forces took place next to the building of the Presidential Administration and protesters occupied the buildings of the Kyiv City State Administration and the Trade Union building using them as the protest headquarters. According to the

submission to the International Advisory Panel (2015, 12) by the Prosecutor General Office, during the violent dispersal of the protesters on 30 November, between 60 and 91 persons were injured and up to 10 persons were hospitalized. Other submissions also reported that 35 protesters were detained, and 12 law enforcement officers were injured (International Advisory Panel 2015, 12). As a result of clashes next to the Presidential Administration on Bankova street on December 1, according to different reports, between 185 and 190 persons sought medical assistance and more than hundred had been hospitalized. The number of hospitalized law enforcement officers was put between 76 and 126 (International Advisory Panel 2015, 13–14).

The use of force by the government to disperse the protests had a major backfire effect. Surveys of Maidan participants in Kyiv between December 2013 and February 2014 showed that the most important reason that incentivized individuals to join the protest movement was the "brutal repressions of the authorities against protest participants" (*KIIS* 2014a). What, however, remains little understood is that the effects of violence had different meaning for different communities. While the political opposition fully attributed violence to the government, used this attribution to delegitimize it and advanced the narrative that the protests were fully peaceful, the government, the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC, and other organizations supporting unity with Russia fully attributed violence escalation to the opposition and radical groups present at Maidan. The voices of political actors who held that violence was committed by both sides and that it was necessary to immediately search for a political settlement to the crisis remained unheard. The article identifies the choice by rival groups to provide meaning to violence in conditions of inability to reach compromises and use it to delegitimize the rivals as the first turning point in conflict escalation.

The Narodne Viche convened by the opposition on December 1 in Kyiv adopted a resolution that held that Yanukovych had no more "legitimate and moral right to be called the head of state and perform his duties." The resolution presented the use of force against "defenseless children" as a declaration of war by the Yanukovych regime against its own people and claimed that the protests were peaceful. Furthermore, it declared that citizens take power into their own hands and outlaw the Yanukovych regime. Then, in response to the "criminal actions of the authorities," the resolution, speaking on behalf the people of Ukraine, declared that "we, the people of Ukraine, the participants of the Narodne Viche, decided" to announce the total mobilization of all opposition forces and the patriotic public and call for an action of public disobedience and to support the creation of the National Resistance Headquarters by the opposition political parties Batkivshchyna, Svoboda, and UDAR as "as the only alternative to the criminal authorities and to organize resistance to the criminal regime throughout Ukraine" (Stryiska 2013). As earlier, the December 1 resolution was supported by the opposition factions in the three Western oblast councils declaring the protests peaceful and condemning the use of violence by the government.

In addition to the political opposition that chose to instrumentalize violence to delegitimize the incumbent government, a similar choice to instrumentalize violence was made by another mainstream actor – the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC. The latter fully attributed violence and violence-escalation intentions to the opposition and radical groups present at the Maidan protests and called upon the central authorities to introduce a state of emergency. The position taken by the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC was notably more radical than that of the government and the social base supporting it. In the appeal to President Yanukovych of December 2, 2013, the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC interpreted the events in Kyiv as attempts by the "the bankrupt political forces that profess extreme nationalism that had already crossed the line that separates it from Nazism" to achieve a revanche in an anti-constitutional way and called upon president Yanukovych to take harsh measures, if necessary, introduce a state of emergency, to stop "the rampant lawlessness and anarchy." The Verkhovna Rada of the ARC delegitimized the Maidan protesters for their disrespect for the memory of the Great Patriotic War and attributed to them "bestial hatred:" "It is they who mock the sacred feelings of the veterans of the Great Patriotic War and their descendants, blasphemously distorting the words of the truly people's song 'Victory Day'. It is they who again

introduce into political circulation the bestial hatred for everything that constitutes the civilizational link between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia" (Press-tsentr 2013).

Following the use of force by the riot police "Berkut" to disperse the Euromaidan protesters, Yanukovych used reconciliatory language and announced that the government would lead an impartial investigation of the incident and bring to justice those found guilty. At the same time, the government continued the mobilization of local self-government bodies and rallies in Southern and Eastern Ukraine that framed the Maidan protests as "illegal riots" and "violations of public order." In early December, appeals condemning the actions of the opposition for the destabilization of the situation and calling upon the government to ensure stability were adopted in the power base of the party of power by the Kharkiv, Kirovohrad, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Councils.

The attribution of escalating mutual violence solely to the rival group contributed to rising inter-group threat perception, competing militia mobilizations, and the spread of mutually delegitimizing discourses. Nationalist organizations issued calls for the creation of the "people's militia" units [zahony narodnoyi militsiyi] on December 1 for the purpose of protection of protesters, prevention of provocations, and protection from "titushky" (*MNK* 2013a). On December 5, Molodizhnyi Natsionalistychnyi Konhres, one of initiators of samooborona [self-defense] mobilization, reported that there were already 500 members in samooborona and launched the slogan "Join us, the revolution needs soldiers!" (*MNK* 2013b). The number of mobilized militias at that point was already greater than the overall number of militias mobilized during the Orange Revolution. According to a participant of both 2004 and 2013–2014 pro-Maidan militia mobilizations, the Spilka Viyskovykh Ukrayiny (SVU) [the Association of the Military of Ukraine], mobilized mostly from the veterans of the 95th Zhytomyr brigade for patrolling, protection, and ensuring law and order during the 2004 Maidan protests, counted some 300 persons (Interview with a participant of both the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the 2013–2014 period militia mobilizations 2021). In December 2013 and the first half of January 2014, various self-organized groups assured protection of the Kyiv State Administration and other buildings captured by the protesters and of the barricaded territory. Initially, they included the Afghan group, Spilna Sprava, Spilka Ofitseriv, and a group comprising some former SVU members. Later, the coordination of various groups was ensured through the daily meeting of heads of units [sotnyky] organized by Andriy Parubiy. The state police and other security bodies had no access to the barricaded territory but the Maidan militia coordinated some actions with the bodies of state protection and other security bodies (ibid).

On the same day, on December 1, some organizations supporting unity with Russia announced the intention to create militias in opposition to the Maidan mobilizations. Vadym Kolesnichenko, a member of the Party of Regions and the chairman of the All-Ukrainian Coordination Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots in Ukraine, issued a statement after the violent clashes in Kyiv that focused only on violence by the Maidan protesters against the state and described the Maidan protests as attempts by "right-wing, neo-Nazi elements" to come to power using force. He then called for the creation of "people's detachments for the protection of the constitutional order and social stability" that was supported by regional organizations of "Russian compatriots" in Odesa, Mykolayiv, Kherson, and Kirovohrad oblasts (*Rus-ua.info* 2013; *Edinaya-odessa* 2013).

The Perception of Emerging Opportunities by the Milieus Supporting Unity with Russia

In December 2013 and the first half of January 2014, the government showed that it did not intend to make any compromises and that it aimed to resolve the crisis with the use of force and repression. During the night of December 11, the law enforcement bodies attempted to dismantle the barricades and re-occupy the building of the Kyiv City Administration. During the operation, up to 40 persons, including law enforcement officers, had been injured and up to 15 had been hospitalized (International Advisory Panel 2015, 15).

Discursive delegitimization of the Yanukovych government by the opposition and calls for the creation of nation-wide resistance did not produce any concessions from the government. The

resolution of Narodne Viche of December 22 spoke on behalf of millions of people from all over Ukraine who had participated in a "peaceful uprising [myrne povstannya]" against the Yanukovych regime "in the struggle for their rights and freedoms, for a decent European future for their children and for the whole of Ukraine." It contrasted the Euromaidan protesters "choosing exclusively peaceful and nonviolent methods of struggle" to "a heavily armed criminal bandit regime" and called for a "national campaign" starting at the Maidan as a place of resistance "for the purification of Ukraine from the regime of criminal occupants." It also tasked the newly created Council of the VO Maidan with the organization of resistance to the regime in all regions and coordination of the protest movement (Stelmakh 2013). The inability of the opposition to obtain any concessions from the government led to radicalization of moods at Maidan and the foregrounding of more radical voices legitimizing the use of force (Kudelia 2018).

During this period of a stalemate between the government and the opposition, the organizations and institutions supporting unity with Russia pondered different scenarios in the development of the contestation and discussed emerging opportunities for advancing their own community goals. In December 2013, they perceived the potential violation of law by the opposition in taking down the Yanukovych government as an emerging opportunity. Sergey Kazhanov (2013), the editor of *ForPost*, a news portal based in Sevastopol, envisioned three scenarios in the development of events in Kyiv in early December 2013: a compromise between Yanukovych, oligarchs, and the "fifth column" of Europe; retention of power by Yanukovych; and a self-removal of Yanukovych delegitimized as a "criminal regime" and the establishment of a "temporary government." The last scenario constituted for Kazhanov a *coup d'état*. In the latter case, Kazhanov envisioned a legal vacuum of power when regional administrations and security forces appointed by Kyiv would be outlawed and the bodies of local self-government would remain the only legitimate bodies. According to him, the situation could provide an opportunity for convening of a citizens' meeting [obshchegorodskoye sobraniye] to launch a referendum on self-determination. He invited Sevastopol residents to debate on the *ForPost* portal the local actions in case of a "*coup d'état*" scenario. A similar understanding of the emerging opportunity was mentioned by Aleksey Chalyi who was "elected" "the people's mayor" of Sevastopol by a gathering of local residents on February 23, 2014. He recollected discussions during this period about the only scenario in which the russkiy parties and organizations could take power in Crimea being if the central government in Kyiv would be removed in an unlawful way (Petukhova 2019).

In his account of the events of 2013–2014, Sergey Tsekov, member of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC and chairman of Russkya Obshchina, held that already in December 2013 the presidium started to build leverage with Russia: "We did not know the opinion of Russia itself, so starting in December 2013, using any excuse, we went to Moscow, trying to feel the mood of the Russian leadership. We met with officials from the Presidential Administration, the Government, the State Duma, and other structures. They communicated with us either together, or only with V. Konstantinov. There was no clarity on how Russia would behave if Crimea asked for its protection. Our questions about whether Russia would support us were answered evasively, while trying to find out how ready we were for decisive action. Today it is known that the trips to Moscow had a positive result. The leadership of the Russian Federation has formed the opinion that the Crimean parliament can be relied on" (Yevtyushkin 2018, 55–56).

Another important development during this period was that with the continuation of protests in Kyiv, some leftist, russkiy, and Cossack organizations began to debate if they should continue supporting the government or pursue their own agenda, including integration with Russia (Novoross.info 2013d; Sevastopol-news.com 2013). Some organizations started to claim that their support for the government was conditional on its ability to suppress the radical protesters making part of the Maidan protests. In mid-December, a coordination meeting of several leftist, russkiy, and Cossack parties and organizations was organized by the CPU in Simferopol that discussed if the organizations should support the government or consider the struggle between the authorities and the opposition as a "foreign war" and pursue Crimea's integration into the Customs Union and

"reunion" with Russia (*Novoross.info* 2013e). At a meeting in Simferopol of leftist, russkiy, and Cossack parties and organizations on December 17, the creation of a coordination council of organizations supporting "the restoration of historical union between Ukraine and Russia" was announced. The resolution of the meeting called upon President Yanukovych to join the Customs Union, restore order in Kyiv, prohibit entry into the country of official representatives of the EU and the United States "who support the anti-state actions of the Ukrainian opposition," federalization of Ukraine, the ban of the Svoboda party as a "neo-Nazi, pro-Fascist political organization," and demanded that those involved in the demolition of the Lenin monument in Kyiv be brought to criminal responsibility. The resolution called for a common fight against "the forces of Ukrainian nationalism, separatism, nationalism and neo-fascism" (*Novoross.info* 2013f). A rally on December 14 in Odesa organized by the CPU and the PSPU claimed by organizers to have some 5,000 participants advanced the demands of the entry of Ukraine into the Customs Union and used the slogans of resistance to evrokolonizatsiya [European colonialism] (*Vitrenko.org* 2013).

The Eruption of Violence at the End of January 2014, Growing Mutual Delegitimization, and Legitimization of the Use of Force on the Fringes

In the first half of January 2014, the government continued to criminalize the protests by securing a court decision on January 6 to ban protests in Kyiv from January 8 till March 8, 2014 (*Jurliga* 2014) and a series of laws of January 16 restricting various forms of protest and mobilizations and introducing criminal and administrative responsibility for publicly denying or justifying the crimes of fascism, as well as strengthening responsibility for desecrating or destroying monuments to Soviet soldiers.

While some pro-Russian parties in Crimea such as Russkoye Yedinstvo welcomed the January 16 laws as "reasonable and appropriate" to ensure the security of citizens given the "attempts of nationalist, pro-Western forces to destabilize the political and socio-economic situation in Ukraine" (Politsovet Politicheskoy Partii 'Russkoye Yedinstvo' 2014), the opposition leveraged the laws to legitimize the build-up of a parallel state structure. The opposition announced that the January 16 laws constituted a *coup d'état* and in fact liquidated democracy in Ukraine. It issued a Plan of Action of the Opposition that was approved by the Viche in Kyiv on January 19. The viche decided to form a Narodna Rada [People's Council] as an association of members of the opposition factions of the Batkivshchyna, Svoboda, UDAR, and independent deputies and, after confirming the powers of Rada by the Ukrainian people, to form the entire vertical of power, starting with the government of people's trust, which should receive support on the Maidan. It then decided on the holding an all-Ukrainian popular vote on several issues including a vote of confidence to President Yanukovych, confirmation of powers and legitimacy of Narodna Rada, and the return to the 2004 constitution. Finally, it appealed to local self-government bodies regarding "the creation of municipal police units and people's self-defense units (public associations for participation in the protection of public order) in order to ensure the implementation of the people's will" (*News. liga.net* 2014).

The violent clashes between protesters and law enforcement bodies on 19–22 January, 2014, resulting in four victims among the protesters (UNHRMMU 2019), became another defining moment. Between January 19 and 24, 285 police officers had requested medical assistance and 104 of them had been hospitalized (International Advisory Panel 2015, 18). Both the government and the opposition blamed the initiation of violence on each other. In a joint statement on January 22, UDAR, Batkivshchyna, and the VO Svoboda fully put the blame for violence on January 19–22 on the government for its unwillingness to listen to the "just" demands of the people and continued to frame the Maidan protests as peaceful: " … Four gunshot wounds to the head and neck of one of the victims are not self-defense, but deliberate shooting of peaceful civilians [myrnykh hromadyan]. The bloody murderer Zakharchenko is personally responsible for this act of dictatorial terror against citizens…. " (*Klichko.org* 2014). On January 22, a constitutive assembly of Narodna Rada

presented the use of force by the government as a deliberate extermination campaign against the Ukrainian people: "Yanukovych crossed the red line by committing crimes against his own citizens" and declared that the government put itself beyond the law by drowning "Kyiv in blood, unleashing real terror against Ukrainians." Furthermore, it presented the Yanukovych government as "occupational" and acting in the interests of Russia: "an occupational regime which acts in the interests of one of the neighboring states and eliminates the independence of Ukraine" (Narodna Rada 2014).

The government attributed the escalation of violence on January 19–22 to the opposition. In his statement to the Ukrainian people on January 20, Yanukovych called for dialogue and compromise, but at the same time claimed that the confrontation was provoked by "those who want to fight for power at the cost of human blood" and held that the fact that "peaceful actions turn into mass riots, accompanied by pogroms and arson, the use of violence" posed a threat not only to Kyiv but to the whole of Ukraine (President of Ukraine 2014). The key approaches to the framing of events by the government were reproduced in voted statements by local self-government bodies in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. The Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Kirovohrad Oblast Councils and the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mariupol City Councils adopted appeals on January 22–24 that held that protests were not peaceful and constituted a *coup d'état* attempt or a forceful overthrow of the legitimate government and blamed the initiation of violence on "radicals and extremists" and the opposition. Furthermore, the local authorities in Southern and Eastern Ukraine continued to mobilize rallies in support of the government against "extremism, lawlessness and the division of society."

In its appeal to the President of Ukraine of January 20, the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC underlined that the protests were not peaceful and incited by the opposition and called upon the president to take "tough measures against the instigators and direct participants of mass riots," including the application of the January 16 laws, and ban the VO Svoboda to "prevent the armed seizure of power by violent extremists" (Prezydium 2014a). While the opposition contended that the government had crossed the red line, the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC in its statement of January 22 held that opposition "crossed the acceptable line" and provoked bloodshed for the "power ambitions of a handful of political provocateurs: Klitschko, Yatsenyuk, Tyahnybok." It held that the city center was captured by "violent extremists" who were the followers of "the Nazi henchman Stepan Bandera" and used violent methods of struggle as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in the past. The Crimean parliament accused the opposition of advancing "initially unacceptable and absolutely illegal demands" and depicted grim implications for Crimea and Crimeans in case of power capture by "extremists and neo-Nazis:" "the Crimea and the Crimeans will face the threat of violent Maidanization and the loss of all the gains of the autonomy and its status. We will be forced to renounce the centuries-old common history with Russia, forget the Russian language, live with the labels 'zhid', 'moskal, 'chuzhynets' [alien] and betray under Nazi slogans the feat of our fathers and grandfathers who defeated fascism" (Verkhovna 2014).

Another important development during this period was the legitimization of the use of force against the radical Maidan protesters and the announcement of paramilitary mobilizations by a number of organizations supporting unity with Russia and growing dehumanization that is shown by Bar-Tal and Hammack (2012) and Bar-Tal (2013) to be a key practice enabling inter-group violence. The party Russkoye Yedinstvo and Cossack organizations of Crimea made a common statement on January 21 that focused on violence committed by the "militant nationalistic fanatics" framed as terrorists and claimed that by using force the latter "placed themselves outside the law and should be considered as socially dangerous elements and state criminals." It attributed the goal of the escalation of a civil war to the opposition and radical groups and of preventing Ukraine from "the historically predetermined path to rapprochement with Russia and other member states of the Customs Union." They called upon the president "to take the toughest measures against violators of public order, without stopping before the use of force" and announced full mobilization to create

detachments of narodnaya druzhyna and the right to use force to defend the constructional order against the radicals (Politsovet Politicheskoy Partii 'Russkoye Yedinstvo,' Kazachikh Organizatsiy i Obshchin Kryma 2014). Several other parties and organizations declared the creation of self-defense units including the CPU, the Russkiy Blok party, and Sebat. These developments represent another turning point in conflict escalation when the goals of mobilization changed from the achievement of political demands to the defeat of groups framed as a threat and legitimization of the use of force against them.

The Opening of the "Second Front," a Double Loss of State Legitimacy and Attempts to Find a Political Solution to the Crisis

At the end of January, the existing political order disintegrated on multiple fronts. The opposition established control over the local state administrations in 10 oblasts, and local self-government bodies in several oblasts took decisions on the withdrawal of powers of local state administrations and on the creation of samoorobona units. The Verkhovna Rada of the ARC started a direct confrontation raising the question of the peninsula status, and multiple organizations declared their break with the government for its inability to rein in the escalating chaos and began to create militias as a means of self-defense against the radical Maidan groups.

The VO Svoboda held that it was its idea to open "the second front" of the revolution and start the seizure of oblast state administrations at the end of January and it was in most cases the party that carried out the seizures and created local Narodni rady [people's councils] as "bodies of direct democracy" [orhany pryamoho narodovladdya] (*Svoboda* 2014d). Just in a few days starting on 23 January the protesters seized local state administrations in 10 regions. Violent confrontations with the police took place in Sumska, Cherkaska, Mykolayivska, Dnipropetrovska and Zaporizka oblasts. The VO Svoboda claimed that it was the "creation of structures not subordinate to the Presidential Administration" that constrained the government to make concessions in negotiations with the opposition (*Svoboda* 2014a).

On January 25–26, the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil Oblast Councils took decisions "on the recognition of the Narodna Rada of Ukraine as a collegial body authorized to represent the interests of the people of Ukraine," referring to the authority granted by the decision of the Vsenarodni zbory hromadyan [National assembly of citizens] that took place on January 19, 2014 on the Independence Square in Kyiv. They made the decision to withdraw powers of the regional state administrations and give these powers to the executive committees of oblast councils. They also recommended local councils of the region to adopt similar decisions on the assumption of the delegated powers of the local state authorities (Ivano-Frankivska 2014; *Tyzhden* 2014). The three oblast councils also took decisions on the creation of detachments of narodna samooborona as organs of municipal druzhyna of the oblast councils.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, by mid-February more than 50 decisions by local self-government bodies had been made on the creation of local people's councils in Volynska, Zhytomyrska, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska, Lvivska, Ternopilska, Rivenska, and Chernivetska oblasts. Also there had been 28 decisions on the creation of narodna samooborona by local councils as well as other decisions on the termination of activities of political parties. The local prosecutor's offices submitted lawsuits to the courts to annul these decisions of local self-government bodies that were adopted in violation of the law (Karpinska 2014). However, samooborona detachments continued to expand notwithstanding the court decisions. On February 7, the Maidan samooborona held that it had 12,000 members and stated the intention to create samooborona structures throughout Ukraine and increase the number of samoorobona members to 30,000–40,000 and thus create a "revolutionary army" (*MNK* 2014). While there were ongoing efforts to reach a political settlement between the government and the opposition, on February 11, Andriy Parubiy, Maidan samooborona commander, signed the first order on the organization of Maidan samooborona that set the goal to "resist the current criminal regime until its complete removal" (Samooborona Maidanu 2014).

The Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC responded to the opposition actions by stating on January 27 that an "an unconstitutional coup" took place in 10 regions of Ukraine and the legitimate government was forcibly removed from the exercise of power that posed a threat to the status of autonomy and the Constitution of the ARC. It decided to ban on the territory of the ARC the activities and symbols of the VO Svoboda and other radical formations (Prezydium 2014b). The presidium of the Crimean parliament made a further move on February 4. During the discussion by the presidium of the "current political situation," a member of parliament from the Party of Regions, Vladimir Klychnikov, advocated for the organization of a Crimean-wide public opinion poll on the status of Crimea and the adoption of an appeal to "the President and the Legislative Assembly of the Russian Federation to act as guarantor of the inviolability of the status of the Crimean autonomy and the inviolability of the rights and freedoms of our citizens." Klychnikov framed the threats as a capture of power by the nationalist-fascist groups that aimed to liquidate the Crimean autonomy and threatened the local historical memories and culture (Press-tsentr 2014).

At the end of January, several russkiy, Cossack, and other organizations announced an open break with the government which for them lost legitimacy for its inability to stand up to the threat of radicalism and contemplated alternative political-administrative arrangements in case of government change in Kyiv. On January 25, 12 organizations promoting unity with Russia created a Sevastopol Coordination Council in "connection with the real threat of a *coup d'état* and a violent seizure of power in Ukraine." The organizations declared that "In the event of a *coup d'état* and a violent seizure of power, Sevastopol, using its right to self-determination, leaves the legal field of Ukraine" and announced the creation of "youth detachments under the leadership of retired officers" to "maintain public order and prevent provocations" and preparation of a Sevastopol People's Veche [Sevastopolskogo Narodnogo Veche]. It also came out with an appeal to the regional, city, and district councils of deputies of the South-East and Central Ukraine on the creation of a Federal State of Malorossiya with the orientation toward Russia (*New-sebastopol.com* 2014). During its first press conference on January 29, the spokespersons of the Sevastopol Coordination Council declared that they would not defend the government and in case of "a coup" in Ukraine would resist the establishment of a "pro-fascist" rule in the city (*Sevastopol.su* 2014).

In Donetsk, on January 25, according to a participant of these events, representatives of Donetskaya Respublika and Patria from Russia organized a coordination meeting in which they claimed almost all Russian [russkiye] organizations of Donbas took part. They rejected the legitimacy of all authorities, both the political opposition and the Party of Regions, and declared that they opposed the vision of a "New Ukraine" that for them included the "gay-model of Klychko," "Pravyi Sektor," and the party "Svoboda," "Spilna sprava" or acting official authorities that promoted European integration (Lyapin 2014). Furthermore, they noted the creation of "the resistance movement" in opposition to the supporters of European integration in Crimea, Odesa, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhya, and all Left-Bank Ukraine, and declared the need to create a similar movement in Donetsk. The coordinating council of movements and associations of Russia and Ukraine that was created defined as its goal the defense of the "Russkiy krai" and "Russkiy narod of Novorossiya" against "banderovites" framed as "new occupants" and declared the goal to create a united movement of resistance of the South-Eastern regions by combining self-defense units in different regions of Ukraine (Lyapin 2014).

Some local state administrations and councils in Southern and Eastern Ukraine loyal to the government started to create various types of formations for the "protection of public order" together with law enforcement bodies. In addition to the involvement of public organizations and labor collectives [trudovyye kollektivy], the Kharkiv State Administration also involved Cossack organizations (Kharkivoda.gov.ua 2014a, 2014b). At the same time, confronted by multiple challenges, the government agreed to the creation of a working group with the representatives of the opposition to find a political solution to the crisis. At the end of January, it made some concessions such as the dismissal of the Azarov government, the annulment of the January 16 laws,

an amnesty law for the protesters (that came into force on February 17), and the beginning of the process of constitutional reform. However, the discussions of power-sharing between the government and the opposition remained inconclusive. At the same time, the government did not open dialogue to address the demands of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC, russkiy, and other organizations. The Head of the Council of Ministers of Crimea Anatoliy Mogilev opposed efforts by russkiy and Cossack organizations to create militia organizations in Crimea (*Kvzn.zp.ua* 2014), and the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) opened criminal proceedings against the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC qualifying its actions as "an attack on the territorial integrity of Ukraine."

In the first half of February, the government and the opposition reached compromises on the unblocking of the Kyiv State Administration and other administrations captured by the protesters in Western and Central Ukraine. The VO Svoboda held that out of 2,000 amnestied protesters, 600 were members of the VO Svoboda. The compromise was endorsed by all members of the Rada Maidanu on February 11 and 13. The VO Svoboda maintained that the position of the religious leaders and the international community was decisive in the acceptance of the compromise. In a statement to justify its support for the compromise, the VO Svoboda held that " … the resolution of the issue without a 'violent confrontation' [vidkrytykh boyiv] with stones and Molotov cocktails [is] not weakness or a manifestation of fear by the opposition leaders, but the ironclad requirement of the EU and the US" (*Svoboda* 2014b). During the Viche on February 16, the leaders of the opposition called upon protesters to convene on February 18 for a "peaceful offensive" [myrnyi nastup] to walk from the Maidan to the building of the parliament to compel the parliament to return to the 2004 constitution.

The Escalation of Violence on February 18–20 and Growing Legitimization of the Use of Force

The "peaceful offensive" organized by the opposition on February 18 ended in major clashes between the protesters and law enforcement bodies that led to a quick escalation of violence. On February 18, 11 protesters were killed or died, one person who did not participate in protests died in fire, and four law enforcement officers were shot and killed (UNHRMMU 2019, 7) and more than 1,000 persons were injured (International Advisory Panel 2015, 18). During the "anti-terrorist operation" on February 18–19 in Kyiv, 17 protesters and five law enforcement officers were killed and on February 20, 49 protesters and four law enforcement officers were killed (UNHRMMU 2019, 12). On February 19, two protesters were killed in Khmelnytskyi (UNHRMMU 2019, 11). On February 20, according to the Prosecutor General Office, 90 persons received firearm injuries (International Advisory Panel 2015, 19). According to the Prosecutor General Office, 992 law enforcement officers sought medical assistance, including 280 officers with firearm injuries (International Advisory Panel 2015, 22).

The opposition and the government blamed each other for the initiation of violence on February 18. Pravyi Sektor, a radical organization that emerged during the protests, posted a message on social media V Kontakte at 1:14pm on February 18 calling for an armed mobilization: "There is confirmed information about the high probability of dispersal of the Maidan with the help of armored vehicles and firearms. In this regard, we call on all owners of firearms to gather on the Maidan and form detachments to protect people from the servants of the criminal authorities" (*Ukrayinska Pravda* 2014). On the same day, in response to the use of weapons by the government against the protesters, the VO Svoboda called for "a general mobilization of the Ukrainian people 'to fight back against the bandit authorities'" (*Svoboda* 2014c). The VO Svoboda continued to claim that the Maidan protesters were peaceful and reported only victims among the protesters.

The working group on the settlement of the political crisis accused the opposition of the violation of the achieved agreements on the regulation of the conflict (Kharkivoda.gov.ua 2014c). The head of the SBU Oleksandr Yakymenko and the acting Minister of the Interior Vitaliy Zakharchenko issued a joint statement on February 18 in which they fully attributed the initiation of violence to radical

protesters guided by the opposition: "Extremists from the opposition have crossed the line – they kill innocent people on the streets of the capital of Ukraine, mistreat women, burn and blow up buildings and cars." They called upon the opposition leaders to calm the protesters, stop the armed confrontation and return to the negotiation table before the deadline of 6:00pm and otherwise threatened "tough actions" [zhorstki diyi] "to restore order by all means provided for by law" (Kmu. gov.ua 2014). In the evening on the same day, the security forces started the operation to "clean up" [zachistka] the Maidan. The day after, on February 19, the SBU noted the re-seizure of local authorities buildings, seizures of the buildings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, security services, the prosecutor's offices and military units, ammunition depots, and the capture of some 1,500 firearms and 100 thousand rounds of ammunition by the protesters in some regions. It announced the launch of an "anti-terrorist operation" considering the use of violence by "radical and extremists groups" as acts of terrorism (*061.ua* 2014). Legitimization of the use of force by the central state authorities against the groups framed as a threat represents another turning point in conflict escalation.

The local self-government bodies in Western Ukraine framed violence similarly to the opposition. The executive committee of the Lviv Oblast Council declared on February 19 that "The regime launched open hostilities against the people. Law enforcement units and armed 'titushki' were sent to massacre [na rozpravu] the Maidan activists" (*Zik* 2014). After delegitimizing the government for the use of force, the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil councils declared that they subordinated the regional law enforcement bodies to the councils (*Zik* 2014; Ivano-Frankivska 2014; Ternopilcity.gov.ua 2014). The executive committee of the Lviv Oblast Council and of the Narodna Rada declared that it "assumes full responsibility for the fate of the region and its citizens" and subordinates all bodies of executive power including the district police departments most of which, it claimed, had already sided "with the Ukrainian people" (*Zik* 2014). After the eruption of violence on February 18–20, local maidan councils started to put pressure on local heads of state administrations and heads of local councils from the Party of Regions to handover their responsibilities to the representatives of the maidan councils that in most cases included members of the political opposition. The regional-level transfer of power to the representatives of the Maidan remains a little investigated topic in research.

The loss of legitimacy, however, was regionally bounded. The local self-government bodies and local state administrations in Southern and Eastern Ukraine supporting government adopted statements that endorsed the use of force by the government and entirely put the blame for the escalation of violence on the "radical protesters" and the opposition and called on government to take the necessary measures to ensure order and stop violence. Such statements were adopted by the presidium of the Dnipropetrovska Oblast Council, all rayon and city councils of Dnipropetrovska oblast, the presidium of the Khersonska Oblast Council, the Zaporizka Oblast Council (which however declined to include the proposal to introduce a state of emergency), the presidiums of the Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk Oblast Councils, and the executive committee of the Donetsk City Council. The presidiums of the Luhanska and Khersonska Oblast Councils also demanded the introduction of a state of emergency. The presidium of the Luhansk Oblast Council demanded the president "to take the toughest measures against those who have actually gone to war on our country" and introduce a state of emergency. While in the January statement it still considered a peaceful resolution of the conflict, now it held that "The time for peace talks is over — there are no negotiations with terrorists and extremists!" The council also announced the initiation of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of Local Councils and demanded a national referendum and federalization (Prezidium 2014). The government actions were also supported by the heads of the Mykolayiv, Poltava, Odesa, and Kharkiv State Administrations who condemned the actions of the protesters framed as "radicals" and "terrorists."

On February 22, the Party of Regions organized the Congress of Deputies of the South-Eastern Regions of Ukraine, the ARC, and the City of Sevastopol in Kharkiv. Similar to the local self-government bodies resolutions in Western Ukraine days earlier, the resolution of the congress

announced that the local self-government bodies take power. While in general most speakers addressing the congress refrained from making statements about the legitimacy of the new government in Kyiv, Oleg Tsarev held that a *coup d'état* took place in Kyiv and the new authorities failed the core function of the state to provide security against paramilitary forces (Kharkivoda.gov. ua 2014d).

In Crimea, on February 18, the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC issued an appeal to the president in which it fully attributed violence to the radical protesters: "Militants from Svoboda, Right Sector and other extremist organizations have declared a general mobilization and are calling on people with firearms to go to the barricades. There are already the first victims of their criminal acts … These are no longer peaceful protests, which is constantly repeated by opposition leaders and biased media, and not even mass riots. This is the beginning of a civil war, the threat of which the Crimean parliament has repeatedly warned about." It explained the escalation of violence as the result of concessions and weakness of the government and called upon the president to take "extraordinary measures" to stop conflict escalation, otherwise, it reserved "the right to call on residents of the autonomy to protect civil peace and tranquility of the peninsula" (Prezydium 2014c).

The Verkhovna Rada of the ARC and its presidium strategically calculated the timing of the announcement about the legitimacy of the new authorities in Kyiv. They did not make any statements during the period of February 21–26 to avoid any counteracting moves by the organizations of Crimean Tatars and the new government in Kyiv. The statement issued by the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC on February 24 welcomed the stop of bloodshed and the return of political processes from the streets to the institution of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. It stated that it was important that the members of parliament did not trespass the line beyond which their decisions could be considered illegitimate, but did not express its attitude to the new government in Kyiv (Prezydium 2014d).

On February 23, Russkoye Yedinstvo announced the mobilization of Crimeans and the registration and formation of detachments of narodnyye druzhyny [people's detachments] to "defend the Crimean autonomy" in front of the building of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC in Simferopol. The organizers claimed that more than 2,000 persons enrolled in the detachments on that day constituting ten companies [rota]. Addressing the gathering, Sergey Aksenov indicated the violations of law committed by the Maidan protesters and local self-government bodies in Western Ukraine and reserved the right to the same actions. He demanded the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to assess the legality of the creation of illegal armed groups in Kyiv and Western Ukraine and the seizure of power in Western Ukraine by self-nominated "narodnyye veche." In case these demands were not met, he stated that "the Crimeans will have the right to take adequate actions in terms of the formation of government bodies" (*Press-sluzhba* 2014).

The rally in Sevastopol on February 23 called the "Miting narodnoy voli," which gathered some 20,000 participants, adopted a resolution that defined the change of government in Kyiv as a *coup d'état* and expressed the nonconfidence in the city state administration. Aleksey Chalyi was "elected" by the rally as the "people's mayor." Addressing the rally, he framed the grievances in terms of physical assaults (pogroms, criminal prosecutions) and violations in the area of culture and historical memory: "we are being driven into the framework of second-class people, who will be forbidden to have the same right to history and the Russian language that we have by right of birth" (*Krymskaya Pradva* 2014a). Similar to mobilizations organized by Russkoye Yedinstvo on February 23 in Simferopol, the "miting narodnoy voli" started the organization of narodnaya samooborona that assisted in the capture of political and security institutions in Sevastopol.

The Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC issued a statement on the "unconstitutional *coup d'état*" in Kyiv only after the armed "green men" captured the buildings of the Council of Ministers and the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC during the night of February 26 to 27. It framed the clashes between the "narodnoye opolcheniye" [people's detachments] and other russkiy organizations and the organizations supporting the new government in Kyiv (Mejlis and other

organizations) on February 26 next to the Crimean parliament as a manifestation of the "rampant political extremism and violence that has engulfed the country" and used this as a pretext to announce that the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC "assumes full responsibility for the fate of the Crimea" and aimed to organize a nationwide referendum on the status and powers of the autonomy (*Krymskaya Pravda* 2014b).

Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis undertaken in the article shows that a number of structural conditions linked in the literature to violent conflict onset were in place before the 2013–2014 cycle of contention. However, while structural conditions played a role, the article suggests that conflict escalation is a nonlinear and agency-driven process evolving through mutually-influencing choices and actions of the competing parties that can either drive escalation or lead to deradicalization if parties achieve compromises and are able to sustain them.

Without leverage to extract compromises from the government between November 2013 and January 2014, the political opposition took actions to delegitimize the existing political order and construct new bases of legitimacy. It leveraged mass mobilizations to organize narodne viche to claim authority coming directly from the will of the people gathered on the maidans throughout the country, challenged the state monopoly on violence through the creation of militia groups, created parallel state structures such as Narodna Rada and the Euromaidan councils controlled by the opposition, and envisioned a popular vote to legitimize the parallel state structure. Opposition factions in some local self-government bodies adopted resolutions supporting the opposition claims, recognized Narodna Rada, subordinated the local executive bodies and the law enforcement bodies, created municipal militia and ultimately declared seizure of power. The opposition embraced the narrative of illegitimacy of the government framed as "occupational," earlier advanced by the VO Svoboda, and legitimized the creation of militia units as self-defense.

The evolution of the modes of contention and radicalization in the interaction between the government and the political opposition opened opportunities for institutions, organizations, and individuals supporting economic, political, and cultural unity with Russia and opposing the visions of political community of radical groups making part of the Maidan coalition. During the contention, they escalated their demands, radicalized their visions of political community, and built leverage with Russia. The Verkhovna Rada of the ARC and other organizations advocating unity with Russia made public statements to note disruptive actions by the opposition and claimed a similar right to legitimize power capture through a popular gathering and illegitimacy of the central authorities as well as to create militia units.

The key contribution made by the article is the study of the evolution of narratives and discursive practices that enabled inter-group violence from 2004 till February 2014. Prior to 2013, the images of enemies, threat perceptions, and delegitimizing discourses were already developed, and the eruption of violence could be interpreted as the natural embodiment of the already existing expectations about political opponents. During this period, the use of force became legitimized by the VO Svoboda, which framed Russia as an existential threat and presented some national parties and organizations as manipulated by it. The CPU legitimized the use of force as "self-defense" given the inaction of the central authorities in confronting the threats of posed by radical organizations.

During the Maidan protests, before the eruption of violent clashes between the government and protesters on November 29–December 1, 2013, the opposition and the groups supporting unity with Russia constructed the opposed geopolitical threat images and connected rival groups to these larger geopolitical threats. The opposition leveraged the image of Russia framed as an imperial threat and the Eurasian integration project as a recreation of the "Soviet empire," then presented the Yanukovych government as a mere puppet and loyal servant of Russia. The organizations supporting unity with Russia depicted the European integration project as imperial, colonial,

and enslaving, and referred to the memories of past conflicts between Russia, the Soviet Union, and western countries, portraying the Maidan protesters as the "fifth column" of the West. As of the very beginning of the Maidan protests, the Yanukovych government declared its readiness to use force "within the limits of law" against the actions of the protesters that it defined as violations of law.

The first transformative moment after the eruption of violence was the choice made by competing parties – both by the opposition and the organizations supporting unity with Russia – to provide meaning to violence and use it for the delegitimization of political rivals in the context of inability to achieve group goals and obtain concessions from the government. While the opposition fully attributed violence to the government, the organizations supporting unity with Russia attributed it solely to the opposition and its radical flank. The use of the attribution of violence as a means of delegitimization led to the rising inter-group threat perception, competing militia mobilizations, and the spread of mutually delegitimizing discourses.

The second transformative moment was the change of mobilization goals from the achievement of political goals such as regime change, preservation of power, or unity with Russia to the defeat of groups framed as a threat and wide political and societal legitimization of the use of force. At this moment, the rival groups were placed outside the realms where norms apply and were attributed "bestial hatred" and the intention to exterminate the in-group, and the use of force was presented as the only way to stop violence escalation. The party Russkoye Yedinstvo and Cossack organizations of Crimea fully attributed violence escalation at the end of January to the opposition and radical groups making part of the Maidan coalition and legitimized the use of force to deal with the threat. A turning point in the radicalization of groups supporting unity with Russia was at the end of January 2014, when some groups declared that both the political opposition and the government lost legitimacy and articulated the narratives of "liberation" and "resistance." Furthermore, while initial demands concerned the entry into the Customs Union with Russia, in January-February 2014 a variety of groups defined new political configurations aimed to preserve unity with Russia such as a federal state of Malorossiya, "Novorossiya," or "russkiy krai." The article also shows that the key factors motivating the mobilizations of these groups were primarily linked to the opposition to the vision of political community promoted by the nationalist organizations, such as the VO Svoboda, and to the threats they saw posed by the pro-Maidan militia groups.

After the eruption of violence on February 18 that the government and the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC blamed on the opposition and the Maidan coalition on the government, the use of force became widely legitimized. The Verkhovna Rada of the ARC called upon the government to take "extraordinary measures" against "extremist organizations," the Yanukovych government and its supporting base in Eastern Ukraine legitimized the use of force against Maidan groups framed as "extremists" and "terrorists," and the Pravyi Sektor and other organizations called for an armed mobilization against the "criminal authorities." During this phase of conflict escalation, historical memories were leveraged by rival groups to interpret ongoing violence as the direct continuation of past violence and behaviors of rival groups and claim that this behavior could be expected in the current situation.

The ultimate fractioning of the political order at the end of February 2014 involved three declarations of seizure of power: first by the Lviv Oblast Council, then the Congress of Deputies of the South-Eastern Regions of Ukraine, of the ARC and the City of Sevastopol in Kharkiv and the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC. While for the Lviv council the threat was the regime of Yanukovuch that started a "massacre of its own people" and lost legitimacy, for the Kharkiv congress and the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC these were the radical nationalists and supporting them political opposition framed as the main perpetrators of violence in Kyiv and as a threat to the rest of Ukraine and the illegitimacy of the new government that came to power in February 2014.

Sociological surveys show that conflict escalation during the period from November 2013 till February 2014 translated into the support for armed resistance among the Maidan protesters and a wide support for the use of force against the Maidan protesters by the government in Donetska, Luhanska, and Kharkivska oblasts. Surveys between December 2013 and February 2014 showed a

considerable increase of support for the creation of armed formations independent from the state authorities (from 15% in December to 50.4% in February) and the dissipation of the readiness to accept compromises among Maidan participants in Kyiv (*KIIS* 2014a). A survey in February 2014 showed substantial regional differences in the attribution of blame for violence escalation. While in the western region 80.3% blamed the government and 10% the opposition for the escalation of violence, in the eastern region 22.8% blamed the government and 67.9% the opposition (*KIIS* 2014b). A survey undertaken in eight southern and eastern regions in April 2014 showed that the highest support for the use of force by Viktor Yanukoyvych to disperse the Maidan was in Donetska (48% of definitely agree and rather agree answers), Luhanska (45.9%), and Kharkivska oblasts (35.6%) (*KIIS* 2014c). The legitimization of the use of force by the government was lower in all other surveyed oblasts.

Narratives, however, have to be seen as a function of ongoing political processes and group needs. After the achievement of a political agreement between the government and the opposition at the end of January, the VO Svoboda advanced narratives legitimizing compromise with examples drawn from history. The Yanukovych government started to promote the narratives of reconciliation soon after an agreement mediated by external actors was concluded on February 21. Both the government and the opposition changed narratives after the failure to sustain the achieved agreements, the breach of which was blamed on the opposite side.

The cycle of contention in 2013–2014 ended not in a compromise but delegitimization and exclusion of former political rivals creating new grievances. As argued by Bar-Tal (2013, 113), a cycle of contention that ends in a full victory of one side and suppression of the demands and needs of the rival side leads to the reactivation of conflict until the basic needs of all sides are met. The narrative of the opposition developed during contention presenting the Maidan protests as fully peaceful and putting all blame for violence escalation on the government became the dominant narrative legitimizing the post-Maidan political order. The narratives putting all blame for violence on the opposition and radical groups making part of the Maidan became instrumentalized in the annexation of Crimea and the anti-government protests in the post-February 2014 period. Addressing the political and social effects of violence also becomes a key task for peacebuilding and conflict transformation work. This requires addressing the underlying grievances and transforming the delegitimizing and exclusionary narratives developed in the framework of escalating contention that become locked-in by the reconfigured centers of authority and then diffused within the population.

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Interviews

Interview with Lidiya Kotelyak, Member of Parliament of the 7th convocation, July 9, 2021, Lviv.

Interview with a participant of both the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the 2013-2014 period militia mobilizations, July 21, 2021.