

UDC 94(477):327.5(477:470+571)"1991/2014"
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.35.332676

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Bibliographic Description of the Article: Zabolotniuk, V., & Kotylevsky, O. (2025). "Peaceful" expansion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine (1991 – 2014). *Skhidnoievropeiskiy Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 35, 177–194. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.35.332676

**"PEACEFUL" EXPANSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN UKRAINE
(1991 – 2014)**

Abstract. *The purpose of the research* is to study and elucidate the process of Russia's territorial expansion in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014 and the role of the pro-Russian political and public agents of influence in it. *The research methodology* is based on the general scientific principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. There have been used general scientific methods: analysis, synthesis, periodization and the others, as well as special methods of historical research: historical genetic, historical systemic, historical comparative. *The scientific novelty* of the obtained results consists in the comprehensive analysis of the process of the so-called "peaceful" expansion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014, without use of the armed force. Taking into consideration some separate examples, it has been proved that the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has historical roots from the beginning of its declaration of independence in 1991. The relations between Russia and Ukraine, as two sovereign states, during this period were not good-neighbourly, but were accompanied by constant territorial claims on the part of the Russian Federation, as open, and veiled, through the

pro-Russian political parties, separatist movements, religious organizations, and other political and public agents of influence. **Conclusions.** The Russian aggression against Ukraine began in 1991 after its independence. The main goal of the Russian “peaceful” expansion was the destruction of sovereign and independent Ukraine or, in the event of its unreachability, keeping it under its control within a single “union” space. In order to achieve this goal, Russia imposed political, economic, religious, cultural, informational, military and other pressure with the wide use of technologies of subversion, blackmail, lies, intimidation, provocations, etc. Russia masked its own participation in destructive processes in Ukraine and carried out expansion through various pro-Russian political parties and organizations, representatives of criminal oligarchic groups, separatist movements, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and some of its ministers, pro-Russian media and other agents of influence, who operated under Russian special services management. In 1991 – 2014, during the Russian expansion in Ukraine, there were distinguished two conditional stages. The first stage, from August 26, 1991 to September 29, 2003, from the right of the Russian raising the issue on revising the state borders of the postsoviet republics, if they do not coexist within the unified space of the Union. It was considered to be the biggest crisis in the Russo-Ukrainian relations at the time, when Russia resorted to the use of force against Ukraine before the conflict had broken out regarding Kosa Tuzla Island. The second stage took place from September 29, 2003 to February 20, 2014, which began with the conflict around Kosa Tuzla Island, ended with the termination of the so-called “peaceful” expansion after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, and then the beginning of the Ukrainian Crimea and Sevastopol occupation. There are several cites on the separate provisions of regulatory legal acts of Russia and Ukraine in the article, which strengthens the author’s argumentation and outcomes on a chosen topic.

Key words: Russian Federation, Ukraine, hybrid warfare, Russo-Ukrainian war, expansion, territorial expansion, agents of influence, separatism, occupation of Crimea, self-proclaimed organizations “DPR” and “LPR”.

“МИРНА” ЕКСПАНСІЯ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ В УКРАЇНІ (1991 – 2014)

Анотація. Мета дослідження – дослідити та розкрити процес територіальної експансії Росії в Україні у 1991 – 2014 рр. і роль у ньому проросійських політичних і громадських агентів впливу. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на загальнонаукових принципах історизму, об’єктивності та системності. У роботі використані загальнонаукові методи: аналізу, синтезу, періодизації, реконструкції та інші, а також спеціальні методи історичного дослідження: історико-генетичний, історико-системний, історико-порівняльний. **Наукова новизна** одержаних результатів полягає у комплексному аналізі процесу так званої “мирної”, без використання збройної сили, експансії Росії в Україні у 1991 – 2014 рр. Окреслено основні її етапи у визначених хронологічних межах. На окремих прикладах доведено, що війна Росії проти України має історичні корені від початку проголошення нею незалежності у 1991 р. Відносини між двома суверенними державами не були добросусідськими, а супроводжувалися постійними територіальними претензіями з боку Росії як відкритими, так і завуальованими, через проросійські політичні партії, сепаратистські рухи, релігійні організації та інших політичних і громадських агентів впливу. **Висновки.** Агресія Росії проти України розпочалася у 1991 р. відразу з відродженням нею незалежності. Основною метою “мирної” експансії Росії було знищення суверенної і незалежної України або, у разі її недосяжності, утримання її під своїм контролем у межах єдиного “союзного” простору. Для досягнення цієї мети Росія здійснювала політичний, економічний, релігійний, культурний, інформаційний, військовий тощо тиск із широким використанням технологій підривної діяльності, шантажу, брехні, залякування, провокацій тощо. Росія маскувала власну участь у деструктивних процесах в Україні та здійснювала експансію через різноманітні проросійські політичні партії і громадські організації, регіональні еліти, представників кримінально-олігархічного капіталу, сепаратистські рухи, Українську православну церкву (Московського патріархату) та окремих її служителів, проросійські мас-медіа та інших агентів впливу, які діяли під керівництвом російських спецслужб. У процесі експансії Росії в Україні у 1991 – 2014 рр. виокремлено два умовні етапи. Перший, 26 серпня 1991 р. – 29 вересня 2003 р., від першого оголошення російською владою права Росії порушувати питання перегляду державних кордонів колишніх республік СРСР, якщо вони не будуть

співіснувати у межах єдиного союзного простору та до початку конфлікту навколо о. Коса Тузла – найбільшої на той час кризи в українсько-російських відносинах, коли Росія вперше вдалася до застосування силових засобів проти України. Другий, 29 вересня 2003 р. – 20 лютого 2014 р., починається із конфлікту навколо о. Коса Тузла, та закінчується припиненням так званої "мирної" експансії після Революції гідності 2014 р., початком окупації українського Криму та м. Севастополь. У роботі процитовано окремі положення нормативно-правових актів Росії та України, що посилює авторську аргументацію та висновки із обраної теми.

Ключові слова: Російська Федерація, Україна, гібридна війна, російсько-українська війна, експансія, територіальна експансія, агенти впливу, сепаратизм, окупація Криму, квазіутворення "ДНР" та "ЛНР".

Problem Statement. Taking into consideration the experience of state formation in Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR, the independence gained by our state in 1991 was considered by the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as Russia) as a geopolitical or economic crisis. The restoration of control over the territories of the republics of the former USSR, primarily over Ukraine, at any cost, was supposed to increase Russia's economic potential, as well as political, demographic, military and other resources. Accordingly, the Russian-Ukrainian relations between the two sovereign states were not good-neighbourly, but were determined by constant territorial claims on the part of Russia. The aggressor country occupied the Crimea and part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014 applying "hybrid" forms of action, and on February 24, 2022, Russia started the war against Ukraine (Akt proголoshennya nezalezhnosti, 1991; Gorbulin, 2016; Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, pp. 46–67; Kreml', 2014; Popov, 2009; Haldej, 2018; Analitik, 2013). According to O. Onyshchuk, Russia promoted its expansionist imperial policy and masked its own participation in destructive processes in Ukraine owing to various pro-Russian political parties, movements, and other political and public agents of influence, who operated under the leadership of the Russian special services (Sauer, & Pjotr, 2022). Analysts of the Marek Karp Center for Oriental Studies also wrote partly about the causes of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war. The corresponding analysis was carried out (Ilnytskyi, & Telvak, 2023; Ilnytskyi, & Telvak, 2024). Taking into consideration the fact that ensuring national security and countering an aggressor country require generalization of this experience, the issues under analysis are relevant and promising for the scientific research.

Review of Research and Publications. Due to Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014 there was a drastic need regarding a critical rethinking of the Russian-Ukrainian relations, which began to form since the revival of Ukraine's independence in 1991, as well as, as V. Tkachenko noted, a scientific understanding of one's own identity (Tkachenko, 2017, p. 135). According to the reviewed literature on Russia's expansion in Ukraine, it was revealed that this issue was studied mainly in numerous works by the Ukrainian scholars, who covered its individual aspects from different points of view. There were made attempts by I. Furman and O. Duz-Kryatchenko to elucidate the process of the Russian expansion in Ukraine in various spheres during the period of 1991 – 2014 (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019), V. Hrytsiuk and O. Lysenko (Hrytsiuk, & Lysenko, 2023), M. Haliv and R. Burdyak (Haliv, & Burdyak, 2025). O. Nashyvochnikov and O. Pashkova studied the expansion in the cultural sphere fragmentarily (Nashyvoshnikov, & Pashkova, 2020). There were the following scholars, who covered the expansion in the territorial sphere S. Plokhly (Plokhly, 2023), S. Alejnikova (Alejnikova, 2017), O. Lyubovec (Lyubovec, 2023), A. Haldej (Haldej,

2018), I. Golod (Golod, 2011), O. Jankovskij (Jankovskij, 2016), in the economic sphere – B. Sikora (Sikora, 2002), in the humanitarian sphere – M. Zhulynskiy (Zhulynskiy, 2019), in the information sphere – M. Pashkov (Pashkov, 2017), A. Pecherskyi (Pecherskyi, 2022) and the others. The works written by S. Adamovych (Adamovych, 2007), D. Kazanskyi and M. Vorotyntseva (Kazanskyi, & Vorotyntseva, 2020), O. Nykonorov (Nykonorov, 2015), V. Soldatenko (Soldatenko, 2011) and the others were devoted to the issue on separatism. In general, the issue on the Russian expansion in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014 has not been covered sufficiently, which made it relevant for the further scientific research. In order to cover it objectively, the author analyzed a number of regulatory legal acts of Russia and Ukraine regarding the Russian-Ukrainian relations and provides individual quotes from them.

The purpose of the research is to elucidate the process of Russia's territorial expansion in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014 and the role of the pro-Russian political and public agents of influence in it. By the term “agent of influence”, the author understood individuals and organizations (the political parties, movements, public organizations, etc.) that act on behalf of or in the interests (political, economic, cultural, informational, and other) of foreign states or foreign political organizations on the territory of another state, influence its policy, and were guided in their activities by the foreign special services (Moshenecz, 2020; Myhalchysyn, 2022; Shveda, 2023).

Research Results. Ukraine faced numerous issues after regaining its independence in 1991 and establishing good-neighbourly relations with Russia, but there was one particular issue, which was fueling the separatist movements, primarily in eastern Ukraine and the Crimea. According to the Ukrainian scholars I. Furman and O. Duz-Kryatchenko and I. Melnychuk the goal of these destructive action (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, pp. 48) was Russia's attempt to restore control over the territories of the republics of the former USSR, in particular over Ukraine, and to keep them within the scope of its foreign policy interests in order to increase its weight and role on the world political arena radically, increase its economic, political, demographic, military and other resources, as well as stop the process of forming new sovereign states on the territory of Russia itself. It was also discussed in the decree of the President of Russia issued on September 14, 1995 No. 940 “On Approval of Strategic Course of the Russian Federation with the States – the Participants of the Commonwealth of Independent States”, in which it was noted that the priority of Russia's relations with the CIS countries should be determined primarily by the fact that the main vital Russian interests in the sphere of economy, defense, security, protection of the rights of the Russians are concentrated on the territory of the CIS, “the provision of which constitutes the basis of the country's national security... is a factor that counteracts centrifugal tendencies in Russia itself” (Ob utverzhenii, 1995).

According to the analysis of sources, on August 26 of 1991, just a couple of days after Ukraine declared independence, the press secretary of the Russian President, Pavel Voshchanov, on behalf of Boris Yeltsin, spoke about Russia's right to raise the issue of revising the borders of the former union republics, primarily Ukraine and Kazakhstan, in the event that they terminate their allied relations, literally, “if these republics become part of the union with Russia, then there is no problem. But if they leave, we must worry about the population living there, and not forget that these lands were developed by the Russians. Russia is unlikely to agree to give them up so easily” (Vladimirov, 2021; Gorbulin, 2016; Golod, 2011). Hence, this can be considered Russia's first step towards revising the borders of “brotherly” sovereign and independent states and the beginning of expansion into their

territories. This statement showed that Russia did not want to close the issue regarding borders with neighbouring states.

In the first half of 1992, Russia's territorial claims to Ukraine were expressed in a number of official regulatory and legal state documents, in particular in the resolution of the Supreme Soviet of Russia issued on May 21 of 1992 No. 2809-1 "On the legal assessment of the decisions of the highest state authorities of the RSFSR on changing the status of the Crimea, adopted in 1954", in which the resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR issued on February 5 of 1954 "On the transfer of the Crimean region from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR" was recognized as having no legal force from the moment of its adoption (O pravovoj ocenke, 1992; O prodolzhenii raboty, 1992). It was noted regarding this issue the statement of the Supreme Soviet of Russia issued on May 22 of 1992 that on the territory of the Ukrainian Crimea: "the rights of representatives of the Russian people..., other nations and nationalities historically connected with Russia are being infringed upon". At the same time, Russia was "to ensure strict observance of the rights of the entire population of Crimea" and called on Ukraine "to refrain from any actions aimed at suppressing the free expression of the will of the population of Crimea, which has, in accordance with international norms, the full right to determine its fate independently". In expressing territorial claims to Ukraine in the context of the Crimea, the Russian authorities, as can be seen from the text of the document, cynically and unreasonably took refuge in "public opinion" "which is expanding and strengthening" in Russia, as well as international law, according to which it remained "an adherent of the principle of the inviolability of borders..., and intended "to adhere strictly to the fundamental principles of the UN Charter" and other international agreements (Zajavlenie, 1992; Baskakova, 2023, p. 152). On July 9, 1993 The Supreme Council of Russia, by its resolution "On the Status of the City of Sevastopol," according to which Ukraine has no legal force and does not generate any legal consequences, declared the Russian federal status of this Ukrainian city. The document clearly stated that this "will contribute to the protection and strengthening of the Russian statehood" (Akt progoloshennya nezalezhnosti, 1991; Pro zayavu, 1993; Konstytuciya, 1978, art. 77; Pro pravonastupnyctvo, 1991, art. 5; O statute, 1993; Baskakova, 2023, p. 152). Taking into consideration certain historical parallels, we can trace that there was the similar rhetoric from Russia regarding Ukraine during the conflict on Kosa Tuzla island in 2003, on the eve of the occupation of the Ukrainian Crimea and part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, and on the eve of the full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Russia's main goal was to keep Ukraine under its control within a single "union" space by exerting the political pressure on sovereign and independent Ukraine. Moscow Mayor Yu. Luzhkov signed the agreement between the Russian capital and Ukrainian Sevastopol at the beginning of 1995, defining it as the "eleventh prefecture of Moscow" (Politychnyi proces, 2016, p. 17), and in 1995 the Russian State Duma adopted a resolution "In connection with the decision of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on the Crimea", which stated that during negotiations with Ukraine, one should proceed from the recognition of the city of Sevastopol within the administrative territorial borders of the city district as of December of 1991 as the main base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (V svjazi, 1995; Lyubovec, 2023, p. 144). Hence, Russia interfered in the internal affairs of sovereign Ukraine de facto by adopting the above-mentioned documents.

In the first half of the 1990s, the course of Russian expansion, primarily in eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, was also significantly influenced by the growth of the separatist sentiments issue among the Ukrainian political elite and the spread of the idea of a federal territorial

structure of the country, which were fueled by Russia (Kazanskyi, & Vorotynceva, 2020, pp. 5, 11; Kopylenko, 2004, p. 19). By the term “separatism”, the author understands the desire of individual population groups or political organizations to territorially separate part of a state, grant it the status of autonomy, or complete its separation and create a new state (Klyuchnyk, 2011, pp. 20–21). Thus, the local referendums were held simultaneously with the elections to the Ukrainian parliament, called by the Heads of local Regional Councils “advisory polls”, on the federalization of Ukraine and granting the Russian language official status on March 27, 1994, in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, at the initiative of the pro-Russian public organization “International Movement of Donbas” (Russian: “Интернациональное Движение Донбасса”, founded in 1990). According to the so-called Head of the “People’s Council” of the self-proclaimed “DPR” Andriy Purhin (2014 – 2015), in 2005 a co-founder of the pro-Russian separatist terrorist organization “Donetsk Republic” (SBU, 2014), “the year 1994 can be called the year of the birth of Donetsk separatism” (Tretiakova, 2014; Soobshhenie, 1994).

According to some Ukrainian scholars, in particular D. Kazanskyi, M. Vorotyntseva, S. Abramovych, there were used the following aspects: the difficult economic and criminogenic situation in the region, the Russian-speaking population, and the loss of the communication line that provided the possibility of dialogue between the central government and the regions (Tkachenko, 2017, p. 152) by the pro-Russian and communist political forces and public organizations, as well as business groups to spread Ukrainophobia and separatist ideas in Donbas in order to curb disintegration processes in the USSR. Their real goal, as subsequent events showed, was to weaken Ukraine, to tear away from it an important economically powerful industrial region [according to A. Purhin, “it was our support for statehood” (Tretiakova, 2014)]. It is no coincidence that various “internationalists” raised the issue of restoring Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic, proclaimed on February 9, 1918 by the Bolsheviks at the IV Regional Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies of Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Basin (Kazanskyi, & Vorotynceva, 2020, pp. 22–28; Adamovych, 2007; Soldatenko, 2011; Bojko, 2004, p. 79). Hence, at that time the results of the so-called referendums were foreseen: 79,69% of Donetsk residents voted “yes” on the issue of federalization; 87,16% of Donetsk residents and 90,38% of Luhansk residents supported granting the Russian language the status of a state language alongside the Ukrainian language; 88,98% of Donetsk residents and 90,91% of Luhansk residents voted for a special regional status for the Russian language; 88,72% of Donetsk residents and 90,74% of Luhansk residents voted “yes” for signing the CIS Charter, Ukraine’s full participation in the economic union and in the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS states (Tretiakova, 2014; Soobshhenie, 1994). Although the Ukrainian authorities did not recognize the results of the so-called referendums on changing the territorial structure of Ukraine and were able to ease the tension in the region, the seeds of federalization were sown. For example, in 1995, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, considering information on the political and legal situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and some legislative acts adopted there, noted that the violator of the Ukrainian legislation is primarily the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (98 deputies do not recognize the legislation of Ukraine), and some Crimean politicians are trying to destabilize the situation in the Crimea by enlisting the support of influential Russian politicians, in particular Yeltsin, Chornomyrdin, Kozyrev... Zhirinovskiy, drawing people into intrigues and confrontations, especially before the resort season, fanning passions around the Black Sea Fleet to intimidate vacationers, trying to

undermine the economy of Crimea and Ukraine. Trying to pit Ukraine against Russia on national grounds, they made unacceptable statements, in particular, we should quote, "To ask the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the President of the Russian Federation to take measures to protect the rights of compatriots living in the territory of the Republic of Crimea and who are a minority in the state of Ukraine" (Stenograma № 63, 1995, pp. 70–72, 74, 77, 89). According to S. Plokyh, at that time the crisis did not escalate into a war because Russia refused to be on the side of the Crimean separatists openly. The separation of the Crimea and Sevastopol from Ukraine could have provided a basis for the separation of autonomous entities within Russia, in particular Tatarstan, and could also have negatively affected the Russian president's attempts to improve relations with the United States in the process of Ukraine's renunciation of nuclear weapons (Plokyh, 2003, p. 77). In this context, it should be noted that on December 5 of 1994, Russia, together with the USA and Great Britain, signed the Memorandum on Security Guarantees through Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the so-called Budapest Memorandum), according to which, it undertook "to respect the independence and sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine (Article 1); to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that there will never be used weapons against Ukraine except for the purposes of self-defense or in any other way in accordance with the UN Charter (Article 2); to refrain from economic pressure aimed at subordinating to its own interests the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty, and thus, to obtain any advantages (Article 3)", etc. (Memorandum, 1994). However, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister during a three-hour press conference following the results of 2015 regarding Russia's international obligations, stated quite cynically and falsely the following on January 26 of 2016: "If you mean the Budapest Memorandum, then we did not violate it. The Budapest Memorandum has one single obligation – not to use the nuclear weapons against Ukraine. No one did this and there were no threats of using the nuclear weapons against Ukraine (Jankovskii, 2016; Lavrov, 1994). It should be noted that the text of the above-mentioned document, which contains completely different provisions than those mentioned by S. Lavrov, could be easily read. According to Oleksiy Poltorakov, an advisor to the directorate of the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine: "Russia has admitted indirectly that it does not comply with the fundamental principle of the international relations *pacta sunt servanda*: 'treaties must be fulfilled'. It has once again shown itself to be an unreliable partner, whose word cannot be trusted" (Jankovskii, 2016).

In 1998 Russia's open attempts to change the status of the Crimea and Sevastopol stopped. The parties signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, according to which the parties undertook: "to respect each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of the borders between them... to build relations with each other on the basis of the principles of mutual respect, sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force or threat of force, including economic and other means of pressure, the right of peoples to freely determine their own destiny, non-interference in internal affairs..., cooperation between states, conscientious fulfillment of the international obligations undertaken, as well as other generally recognized norms of the international law" (Dohovir pro druzhbu, 1998). There was concluded the Treaty on the Ukrainian-Russian State Border by both countries in 2003, according to which the state border line was outlined on the maps (Dohovir, 2003). In general, the bilateral Russian-Ukrainian treaties defined legally the territorial integrity of

both states and the inviolability of the current borders and settled the controversial issues at the interstate level formally.

But, taking into consideration the experience of the subsequent Russian-Ukrainian relations, Russia's desire to extend its influence on the territory of the Crimea and eastern Ukraine did not stop until their occupation in 2014 (Politychnyi proces, 2016; Lyubovec, 2023, p. 146; Kravchenko, 2019). Hence, starting from 2003, Russia's territorial expansion in Ukraine became more decisive and aggressive (Zhirohov, 2020). A vivid example was the conflict over the Ukrainian island of Kosa Tuzla (Tuzla Split) in October of 2003. Despite its small size, the island was strategically important for Ukraine and Russia. According to the former Minister of Defense of Ukraine, Army General Oleksandr Kuzmuk: "Whoever owns Tuzla Island owns the Kerch Strait, owns the water area and all the minerals that are in this water area" (V sluchae, 2018). For example, in 2003, Russia estimated its losses from paying for the transit of its ships through this route at \$16 million annually (Yurchenko, 2020).

Russia began the unauthorized construction of an embankment dam to Kosa Tuzla Island on September 29 of 2003, annexing it to its mainland, hence, disregarding the bilateral treaties and the international law. At the same time, Russia intensified its military activity in the region, exerted pressure on Ukraine on border delimitation issues in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov on terms favourable to Russia, and as subsequent events showed, tested the reaction of the Ukrainian society and the international community to the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and tried to divert Ukraine from its course towards the Euro-Atlantic integration (Malko, 2022; Do vojny, 2020; Pecherskyi, 2022). For example, the Head of the Russian Presidential Administration, Alexander Voloshyn, stated that "Russia will never leave the Kerch Strait to Ukraine. It is enough that the Crimea belongs to Ukraine nowadays, and we have barely reassured people about this. It is enough to make fun of us. We will do everything possible and impossible to defend our position. If it is necessary, we will drop a bomb there" (Glava administraciy, 2003). A similar point of view was expressed Dmitry Rogozin, Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs of the State Duma of Russia, expressed a similar point of view: "each of us, if we feel like a citizen of Russia, should have one understanding in our heads: as they say, not an inch of land for either friend or foe... squandering our own land... the Crimea, which was once given away, and now also to Tuzla, does not belong to statesmen... of course, I am going to conflict with Ukraine in order to defend Russian national interests in this region" (Tuzla, 2003).

Due to Russia's actions, which led to the greatest crisis in the Ukrainian-Russian relations at that time and the militarization of the conflict, were regarded as a direct threat to its territorial integrity by Ukraine. According to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Serhiy Kunitsyn, Ukraine withstood a serious test on maturity, defended the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and did not cede a piece of Ukrainian land to the aggressor at that time (Parlamentski sluhannya, 2003). It should be noted that Russia was eventually forced to stop the provocation without revealing the details of the above-mentioned conflict. It should be highlighted that at the same time, Russian President Vladimir Putin, as Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma recalled, pretended that he knew nothing, that this was some kind of amateur activity of Krasnodar governor [a strange position of the President of a "great" state – the author] (Do vojny, 2020).

Russia began its expansion in Ukraine more openly after the Orange Revolution of 2004, which changed radically the ruling elite and reoriented the country's foreign policy towards the Euro-Atlantic one. The Russian authorities were afraid of the "colour revolutions" that

also took place in Serbia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan (Petrenko, & Novak, 2023, p. 21), and the revolutionary experience spread to the territory of Russia, hence, certain countermeasures were taken by the Russian authorities, in particular, the scenario on “eastern Ukrainian” separatism was worked out (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, p. 48). Thus, at the end of November 2004, the pro-Russian regional elites of the eastern and southern regions representatives, who consolidated around Viktor Yanukovych, the Prime Minister of Ukraine and the Head of the pro-Russian Party of Regions at that time (Feoktistov, 2005), along with the support of Russia, made an unsuccessful attempt to federalize Ukraine by separating it into a separate South-Eastern Ukrainian Autonomous Republic with the capital in Kharkiv [PSUAR, mockingly “PiSUAR” (Grabovskyi, 2014; Kramar, 2012)] and nine regions – Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kherson regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. On November 26, Luhansk Regional Council heralded this initiative the first one at a regular session. There was considered the scenario on the republic’s secession from Ukraine in the event of Viktor Yushchenko’s victory in the presidential elections (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, pp. 52–53; Lugansk, 2004). At that time, there were held protests in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Odesa, Sevastopol and other regional centres of the Ukrainian south, east and Crimea, at which decisions were made to initiate the issue on autonomy (Vybory-2004, 2004; V Odesi, 2004; Kushnariov, 2005).

There was held the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and local councils of all levels in Severodonetsk (Luhansk region) on November 28 of 2004, which was attended by delegates from 17 regions of Ukraine, members of the Party of Regions and supporters of V. Yanukovych, as well as a delegation from Russia headed by the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov. At the Congress, on the initiative of the Head of Donetsk regional branch of the Party of Regions, Borys Kolesnikov, the idea of, let us quote, “the creation of a new Ukrainian southeastern state in the form of a federal republic” with the capital in Kharkiv was first proclaimed (Stenogramma, 2004; Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, p. 53; Kazanskyi, & Vorotynceva, 2020, pp. 94–100; Budet li, 2004). According to O. Nikonorov, the situation was close to turning Ukraine into a field of civil war (Nykonorov, 2015). The main evidence that the conflict between the Ukrainian political elites, which was fueled by Russia, could have escalated into an open armed aggression against Ukraine was the so-called “Appeal of V. F. Yanukovych, the leader of the Party of Regions to the residents of Malorosiysky and Novorossiysky regions”, which was accompanied by the Russian state symbols and anti-Ukrainian slogans: “Our goal is to save Fatherland” and “For a united and indivisible Rus’!” It openly spoke of the introduction of the so-called Russian peacekeeping troops into the territory of Ukraine, who were supposed to “cleanse... your city from the terrorists” and control certain clearly defined territories and objects, in particular routelines [a map of control of the territory of Ukraine by the Russian troops was provided – the author]. Nina Karpachova, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, a member of the Party of Regions, guaranteed “that no one would be shot just like that” in her speech (Informacijno-analitychni materialy, 2023, p. 22; Obrashchenie, 2005).

At the end of 2005 and at the beginning of 2006, the origins of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk “people’s republics” began to form. Hence, on December 6, 2005, a city organization with the name “Donetsk Republic” was officially registered in Donetsk, and on December 9, a regional organization with the same name and symbols, which became the basis of the current “DPR”. At the same time, similar organizations were registered in

other regions of south-eastern Ukraine. On February 9, 2006, the Interregional Federation of Public Organizations “Donetsk Federative Republic” was established in Donetsk. It included regional public organizations: “Donetsk Republic”, “Dnepropetrovsk Republic”, “Luhansk Republic”, “Zaporozhzhie Republic”, “Kharkiv Republic”, “Kherson Republic” (Informacijno-analitychni materialy, 2023, p. 22). At that time Ukraine showed firmness in refusing to discuss the issue of federalization of the country, which was imposed by Russia through pro-Russian political organizations and separatist movements, and was able to stop attempts to divide the country according to the federal principle.

But Russia’s attempts to split Ukraine into federal territories and “protect ethnic Russians” living in them did not stop. The April 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit was indicative in this regard, during which V. Putin, referring to an unknown “official population census”, falsely stated that in Ukraine, out of forty-five million, only 17 million Russians were discriminated [it should be noted that according to the last All-Ukrainian Population Census of 2001, the Ukrainians predominate in the national composition of the population of Ukraine (37,541,7 thousand, or 77,8%), while the number of Russians was 8,334,1 thousand, or only 17,3% (Prokilkist, 2001)]. He emphasized that “Ukraine is a very complex state in general,” which “was created during the Soviet era... received territories from Poland..., from Czechoslovakia, from Romania. And now not all border problems on the Black Sea with Romania have been resolved. So, it received huge territories from Russia in the east and south of the country... And if we also add NATO issues and other problems, it can put the very existence of statehood on the brink... But I want all of us... to understand that we also have our own interests there” (Vystuplenie, 2008). According to the newspaper “Kommersant”, at a closed meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, V. Putin, in a conversation with the US President George W. Bush, got very angry when the issue of Ukraine came up. He clearly stated that, to quote, “Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, and part, and a significant part, was given to us!... And here he very transparently hinted that if Ukraine were accepted into NATO, this state would simply cease to exist. That is, in fact, he threatened that Russia may begin to reject the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine” (Allenova, & Geda, & Novikov, 2008, p. 9; Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, pp. 54–55). Thus, the above clearly shows that the strategic goal of Russia, primarily its President V. Putin, has become the collection of “originally Russian territories”, including those internationally recognized as Ukrainian.

According to I. Furman and O. Duz-Kryatchenko, in order to achieve this goal, Russia began a “peaceful” coercion of Ukraine to “unity” in political, diplomatic, informational, propaganda, economic (“gas” and “cheese” wars), military (the issue of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, etc.), cultural, linguistic, religious, educational and other expansionist directions with the widespread use of subversive technologies. There were spread myths about the eternal unity of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples, about the so-called “triune, artificially divided the Russian people” and the Russian people-winner “in the Great Patriotic War” in the public sphere (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, p. 55; Hrytsiuk, & Lysenko, 2023; Nashyvoshnikov, & Pashkova, 2020; Zhulynskyi, 2019; Pashkov, 2017; Sikora, 2002). In 2000, with V. Putin’s coming to power, the Russian authorities, according to R. Hula and I. Perederii, became radical, openly fascist (Hula, & Perederii, 2017, pp. 166–167, 176, 180), and according to L. Yakubova – somewhat transformed taking into account the evolution of fascism/Nazism (Yakubova, 2022, p. 82) ideological direction, began to unite all the so-called “compatriots” or the Russian-speaking minorities, who remained living outside Russia after the collapse of the USSR into a “united Rusky world”. The essence

of this phenomenon is indicative in understanding, as well as Russia's territorial expansion and "gathering of lands" into a global transnational entity is the federal law "On the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Abroad" dated May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ. It declares that Russia is the legal successor of the Russian state, the Russian Republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the institution of the Russian citizenship correlates with the principle of continuity of the Russian statehood [as can be seen, Russia outlined the boundaries of its expansion along the borders of the former Russian Empire and the USSR, not caring that independent and sovereign republics already exist in these territories – *the author*]. The law stated that relations with compatriots abroad are an important direction of Russia's foreign and domestic policy, and compatriots living abroad have the right to count on Russia's support in exercising their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and preserving their identity. As subsequent events showed, under the pretext of "protecting compatriots abroad," Russia unleashed a series of wars in the post-Soviet space, in particular in Georgia, in 2008 and in Ukraine, in 2014 (O gosudarstvennoj politike, 1999; Polozhenie, 2009; Alejnikova, 2017, p. 41). As Ihor Zevelev (Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, USA) stated, "the policy towards compatriots and the concept of the "Russky World" were conceived as tools that would allow Moscow to respect post-Soviet borders simultaneously and address the concerns of those who did not perceive them as entirely legitimate... In 2014, this rhetoric and policy were aimed at other goals, in particular, justifying the annexation of sovereign territory and supporting separatists in a neighbouring country" (Zevelev, 2016).

The victory of Viktor Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential elections, the coming of the Party of Regions and the criminal oligarchic capital to virtually monopoly power in the state created favourable conditions for rapid Russian expansion in Ukraine. In the shortest possible time, Kharkiv Agreements were signed on the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine until 2042 (Pro ratyfikaciyu, 2010; Ugoda, 2010), the integration of the energy, financial, defense industrial, aviation and space sectors of Ukraine and Russia began, preparations for Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union took place, V. Yanukovych abandoned Ukraine's course towards NATO (Aleksiievets, & Aleksiievets, 2020, p. 129) and the European Union, etc. It meant for Ukraine a departure from the Euro-Atlantic course, its complete subordination to the Russian interests, and, in the long term, the loss of state sovereignty and independence, which Russia had been striving for since Ukraine gained independence (Informacijno-analitychni materialy, 2023, p. 25; Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, p. 55).

However, the protest movements in Ukraine, which went down in history as the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, prevented the implementation of Russia's plans to conquer and dismember Ukraine, forced the Russian leadership to stop its "peaceful" expansion and, contrary to all the basic principles of the international law, to begin open armed aggression, and in fact war, under the pretext of protecting "compatriots" in the Crimea and Donbas (Hrytsiuk, & Lysenko, 2023, pp. 10–12), suppressing the speeches of Kyiv "nationalists", "fascists" and the "junta" (Furman, & Duz-Kryatchenko, 2019, p. 56). Hence, these events can be considered the completion of a certain stage of Russia's expansion in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014, which resulted in the occupation/annexation of the Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

Conclusions. Russia's aggression against Ukraine began in 1991, immediately after the

restoration of the latter's independence. During the 23-year "peaceful" expansion, Russia's main goal was to destroy sovereign and independent Ukraine or, if it was unattainable, to keep it under its control within a single "union" space. Russia was interfering in the internal affairs of Ukraine, contrary to the basic principles of the international law and violating interstate treaties, exerted political, economic, religious, cultural, informational, military and other pressure with the widespread use of subversive technologies, blackmail, lies, intimidation, provocations, etc., causing significant damage to the national security of Ukraine.

In 1991 – 2014, Russia disguised its own participation in destructive processes in Ukraine and expanded through various pro-Russian political parties and public organizations, regional elites, representatives of criminal and oligarchic capital, separatist movements, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and its individual ministers, written, radio, television media, and other pro-Russian agents of influence operating under the direction of the Russian special services.

In the process of Russia's "peaceful" expansion in Ukraine in 1991 – 2014, two conditional stages were distinguished. The first stage, August 26, 1991 – September 29, 2003, from the first announcement by the Russian authorities of Russia's right to raise the issue of revising the state borders of the former republics of the USSR if they do not coexist within a single "union" space and until the beginning of the conflict around Kosa Tuzla Island – the biggest crisis in the Ukrainian-Russian relations at that time, when Russia first resorted to the use of force against Ukraine. The second stage, September 29, 2003 – February 20, 2014, began with the conflict around Kosa Tuzla Island, and ended with the cessation of the so-called "peaceful" expansion after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the beginning of the occupation of the Ukrainian Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Acknowledgments. We express sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for consultations provided during the preparation of the article for publishing.

Funding. The authors did not receive any financial assistance for the research and publication of this article.

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The article was received July 15, 2024.

Article recommended for publishing 30/05/2025.