In this research paper, the author analyzes the actions taken on behalf of the Russian government in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In particular, attention is paid to measures such as the pseudo-referendums held at the end of September 2022 in the east and south-east of Ukraine, the Kremlin's propaganda, the policy of the occupiers related to the establishment of pro-Russian administrations, control of the local population, deportation of Ukrainians, the distribution of Russian passports, the introduction of a Russian education system and other measures of Russification as well as mass violations of the fundamental principles of human rights.

In October 2022, the Russian State Duma unanimously supported the incorporation of the so-called "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" and Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions into the Russian Federation.

After the pseudo-referendums held in the four temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, on September 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed "agreements" with the representatives of the occupation regime on the acceptance of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions into Russia.

The documents were published on October 3, but it remained unclear where, in the occupants' opinion, the borders of Russia now lay in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

These actions contradict the basic principles of international law on the territorial integrity of a state and the inviolability of borders. The results of the "referendums" were not recognized by any country in the world, including the closest allies of the Kremlin such as Belarus, or even those countries that had recognized Abkhazia and the so-called "independence" of South Ossetia (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Syria, Nauru). Accordingly, the holding of pseudo-referendums is another weak attempt by Russia to impoverish Ukraine's statehood, especially since Russia lost control of a significant portion of its "newly-joined territories" as a result of bold actions on the part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Keywords: occupation, imperialism, deportation, population control, Russification.
Ніка Читадзе

ОСНОВНІ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ ІМПЕРІАЛІСТИЧНОЇ ТА ОКУПАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ РФ В УКРАЇНІ

У статті проаналізовано дії російського уряду на тимчасово окупованих українських територіях. Зокрема, приділено увагу таким заходам, як-от: псевдореферендуми, проведені наприкінці вересня 2022 р. на сході та південному сході України, кремлівська пропаганда, політика окупантів щодо створення проросійських адміністрацій, контроль над місцевим населенням, депортація українців, видача російських паспортів, запровадження російської системи освіти та інших механізмів русифікації, а також масове порушення фундаментальних принципів прав людини.

У жовтні 2022 р. Держдума РФ одноголосно підтримала входження до складу Російської Федерації т.зв. «ДНР/ЛНР», а також Запорізької та Херсонської областей. Після псевдореферендумів, проведених на зазначених тимчасово окупованих територіях України, президент РФ Володимир Путін 30 вересня 2022 р. підписав з представниками окупаційного режиму «договори» про прийняття до складу РФ Донецької, Луганської, Херсонської та Запорізької областей. Документи були опубліковані 3 жовтня, але й досі незрозуміло, де, на думку окупантів, зараз проходять кордони РФ на тимчасово окупованих територіях України.

Ці дії РФ суперечать основним принципам міжнародного права щодо територіальної цілісності держав і непорушності кордонів. Результати «референдумів» не визнала жодна країна світу, включаючи й найближчі союзники Кремля (Білорусь), і навіть країни (Венесуела, Нікарагуа, Сирія, Науру), які визнали "незалежність" Абхазії та Південної Осетії. Отже, проведення псевдореферендумів є черговою слабкою спробою РФ послабити українську державність, тим паче, що внаслідок сміливих дій ЗСУ Росія втратила контроль над значною частиною своїх "новоприєднаних територій".

Ключові слова: окупація, імперіалізм, депортація, контроль над населенням, русифікація.

Introduction

More than 10 months after Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine, as a result of the unrelenting resistance of the Ukrainian army and the unanimous support of the West, Moscow was forced to change the plan of its military operation. At the beginning of September, the Ukrainian army launched a strong counter-offensive and regained control over a large part of the temporarily occupied territories. At this stage, the Russian occupation forces are not only unable to advance but are trying to keep the territories they have managed to occupy over the course of the war. As a result of the autumn counterattacks, the Ukrainian army has almost completely liberated Kharkiv region, while heavy fighting continues in the directions of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions. It should be noted that the territory occupied by Russia in the south-east of Ukraine (Kherson and Zaporizhzhia districts) forms a land corridor that connects Russia directly with the Crimean peninsula. The maintenance of this corridor is one of the main tasks for Moscow at this stage.

After the Russian forces occupied strategically important regions near the borders with Russia, the Kremlin started the process of integrating the captured territories into the Russian Federation. Moscow has repeatedly stated that the residents of the territory controlled by Russia have the right to decide for themselves whether they want to join Russia or not. The “authorities” of the so-called “People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk”, as well as “military-civilian administrations” of newly occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia had started preparations for holding “referendums” to join Russia in the summer. However, against the background of the successful counter-offensive launched in Ukraine in September, the Kremlin’s occupation measures accelerated.
Taking into account that Russia’s military hardware resources within the framework of the "special military operation" are gradually running out, the Kremlin was faced with the need to announce a partial military mobilization across the country. On September 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization in Russia. According to the president, this decision was taken to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and ensure the security of the Russian people. In his address to the population, Putin expressed his support for "the decision of the people of Donbas" and the "liberated territories" to hold "referendums on joining the Russian Federation". At present, the main purpose off the Kremlin is to force the inclusion of the occupied territories of Ukraine into the Russian Federation "based on the results of the referendums" [1].

At the same time, legitimate questions arise: how does Russia intend to include the sovereign territory of Ukraine, and what measures is it taking on the ground to prepare for this process? Will it repeat the "Crimea scenario" or introduce something new to the occupation methodology? Observing Russia’s occupation policy shows that the Kremlin mainly uses a template with the occupied territory: military intervention at the first stage, then declaring the occupied territory an "independent state", and later, based on a pseudo-referendum, integrating it into the Russian Federation. The measures implemented in the occupied territories are identical everywhere: the creation of a pro-Russian government, the forced passporting of the population, deportation, total control of the population, transfer of the education system to the Russian model, and other attempts at Russification. Below we will discuss in detail what the Russian occupiers are doing in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, in the attempt to annex temporarily occupied parts of these regions [1].

Russia’s occupation measures include pseudo-referendums

The international community often considered a repetition of the "Crimea scenario" as one of the possibilities of incorporation by Russia the occupied territories of Ukraine. What did this scenario mean? In February 2014, Russian occupation forces captured the Crimean peninsula, after which power was transferred to a pro-Russian government. On March 11, the Supreme Council of Crimea and the City Council of Sevastopol adopted the "Declaration of Independence of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol" [2]. According to the pro-Russian Crimea’s officials, at the "referendum" held on March 16, the population supported the withdrawal from Ukraine and the creation of an "independent state of Crimea", while at the same time joining the Russian Federation as a new entity with the status of a "republic" [3]. On March 17, based on the results of the "referendum", the Supreme Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea declared the "independence of Crimea". Russian President Vladimir Putin also recognized the "independence" of Crimea on the same day, and on March 18, an agreement was signed in the Kremlin between Russia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Crimea on the annexation of Crimea to Russia [4].

Similar to Crimea, the processes were developing in the temporarily occupied Donetsk and Lugansk regions, whose "independence" had already been recognized by Moscow. It should be noted that the joining of the so-called "People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk" into the Russian Federation had been discussed for a long time in Russian political and propaganda circles. However, after the attempted annexation of Crimea, Putin was in no hurry to hold referendums there. Eight years have passed since Donetsk and Lugansk declared their "independence" and only now has this issue been on the agenda of the Kremlin. The question of joining the separatist regions was raised on February 21, 2022, at the meeting of the Russian Security Council, when the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, Sergei Naryshkin, inadvertently said that he supports "the unification of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics within Russia". Vladimir Putin then interrupted Naryshkin and pointed out that this issue was not discussed at the meeting, after which Naryshkin corrected what he said and expressed his support for the initiative to recognize the independence of the "Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics".

After Russia’s broad-scale invasion of Ukraine, the separatist de facto rulers of Donetsk and Luhansk announced that they planned to hold referendums on joining Russia, but only after "the process of liberating the territories is completed".

The above-mentioned "model" of the occupation policy was applied by the Kremlin to the temporarily occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. It will also suit so-called "civil-military administrations" formed by the occupants in the regions. As Russian Duma deputy Igor Kasyukevich said, "Kherson's inclusion in Russia will be full-fledged, similar to Crimea" [5]. It was expected, that based on the planned "referendums", the occupying forces would declare these territories "independent" and then demand their inclusion in Russia [1]. It is important to keep in mind that the current legislation of Russia considers the procedure of accession of a new subject only through an agreement with a "foreign state". Therefore, recognition of the occupied territory as an "independent state" is a key moment. The Constitution
of Russia states that "admission of a foreign state as a new subject or part of it in the Russian Federation is done by mutual agreement of the Russian Federation and this foreign state, following the international (interstate) agreement on the admission of a new subject into the Russian Federation, concluded between the Russian Federation and this foreign state" [6].

In addition, according to Russian legislation, the initiator of the proposal to join the Russian Federation must be an interested foreign state [7]. Since the Russian legislation has not yet been changed, the procedure for joining the occupied territories of Ukraine cannot be violated – declaring the so-called "military-civilian administrations" "independent", then recognizing them by Russia and beginning the process of joining Russia [1]. Because the control of these regions by the Russian occupying forces is quite fragile and unstable, Putin is in a hurry to conclude their illegal "legitimization" as quickly as possible. Moreover, this process should be completed before the military aid to Ukraine from the West strengthens further, in particular, before the Lend-Lease program signed with the USA is put into operation.

It should be noted that the Kremlin miscalculated with the plan to conquer the southern regions of Ukraine from the beginning. Moscow expected to quickly occupy the entire Donbas region as well as Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and hold referendums during the summer, but as it turned out, the Russian army was unable to complete the task and the scheduled date of the "referendum" was pushed back to September 11. Against the backdrop of Ukraine's counteroffensive operation, due to security risks, the separatists were forced to once again postpone the pseudo-referendums scheduled for September, with the slogan "Together with Russia".

On September 19, it became known that "referendums" in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions would be held on September 23–27. How the mentioned "referendums" were conducted, how people were forced to come to the "polling stations" and vote, how the number of citizens participating in the "referendums" was artificially increased, all of this is well known to the international community [1].

Who is responsible for the integration of the occupied territories?

In April, the Kremlin appointed a person trusted by Putin, namely the first deputy head of the administration of the President of Russia, Sergei Kiriyenko, as the curator of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. He is a frequent visitor to the southern regions of Ukraine and follows the implementation of the Russian occupation policy on the ground. During his visits to the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, Kiriyenko kept repeating the main message that they should prepare to join Russia. Sergey Kiriyenko is one of the prominent figures at the Kremlin, who was entrusted by Vladimir Putin with the crucial mission of integrating the occupied territories with Russia. Kiriyenko is a member of the technocratic elite who have specific political missions and are the main pillar of Putin's regime. Many technocrats in this circle started their careers during Boris Yeltsin's presidency, but they achieved serious success under Putin's presidency. Kiriyenko, like other technocrats, did not initially belong to Putin's closest circle, but he earned the special trust of the president in a specific situation. For Kiriyenko, this moment turned out to be the war with Ukraine, when the head of the Kremlin's internal political bloc successfully managed to get closer to President Putin and expand his powers [8]. It should be noted here that recently Sergey Kiriyenko is increasingly named as one of the most realistic candidates in the list of Putin's "successors".

Sergey Kiriyenko's career began in the 1990s when he first held the post of Deputy Minister of Oil and Energy of Russia, and then Minister. In 1998, during Boris Yeltsin's presidency, he held the post of Prime Minister for several months. Since 2005, he has been the head of the state corporation "Rosatom", and since 2016 he has been the first deputy head of the presidential administration. Before the start of the war with Ukraine, Kiriyenko's area of responsibility was defined purely by domestic political issues (parliamentary and presidential elections, parties, ratings, youth movements, etc.). After Russia invaded Ukraine, he was entrusted with the so-called control of both Donetsk and Luhansk. He supervised the "people's republics", as well as the captured regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, and ensured their integration with Russia [1]. The leading role of Kiriyenko in the holding of pseudo-referendums is discussed in the US State Department, where it was assumed that the fake referendums in the "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" and parts of Kharkiv were directly led by Kiriyenko [9]. Assigning this role to Kiriyenko is an indication that Putin considers the occupied lands in eastern Ukraine Russia's property already and an "internal affair".

Creation of pro-Russian administrations

The Kremlin started to integrate the temporarily occupied lands of Ukraine with Russia even before holding the pseudo-referendums. The occupying forces...
focused on introducing the Russian management system on the ground and the creation of administrative structures. Unlike Donbas, anti-Russian sentiments are quite strong in the newly occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, and the extent of voluntary cooperation with the Russian occupiers is relatively low. The local pro-Russian political forces cannot convince the public to accept the "new government", and at the same time, they are neither trusted nor respected. Accordingly, Russian military personnel and representatives of special services play an important role in local government activities. Taking into account the contrary mood of the populace, it is difficult for Moscow to role in local government activities. Taking into account the contrary mood of the populace, it is difficult for Moscow to

The management team of the "military-civilian administrative units". After the capture of Kherson region, Sergei Eliseyev, a former employee of the Russian Federal Security Service, was appointed as the pro-Russian "head of the government cabinet", and his deputies – were high-ranking Russian officials. The management team of the "military-civilian administration" is also composed of Russian cadres and pro-Russian collaborators. It should be noted that the "vertical of power" has not yet been fully established in the "military-civilian administrations" at the level of districts and cities (below regional centers), which complicates the situation for the occupiers. The Russian occupation is also hindered by the activity of local subversive groups, which periodically destroy the military infrastructure of the occupiers and captured objects.

Population control

In July, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia sent officers to create "temporary divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation" in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. They were assigned to the so-called "support of local police units" subordinate to "military-civilian administrations". The personnel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia are directly involved in the protection of public order and "combating manifestations of extremism". Russian special services identify people with anti-Russian views and carry out strict control of population. Those who refuse to cooperate with Russia and are known to be hostile to the Russians are blocked from receiving financial aid, prevented from finding employment, arrested for alleged war crimes, and even deported.

Deportation of Ukrainians

On July 15, "the military-civilian administrations" of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia issued "decrees" to punish "extremist actions" with forced deportation. The decision, which is to be implemented within 24 hours, is made by the Russian military commander. "Extremist actions" include: obstructing the work of the "military-civilian administration", discrediting the authorities and armed forces of the Russian Federation, holding public meetings without the permission of "the military-civilian administrations", publishing extremist materials, etc. [10].

The deportation of the local populace from the occupied territories of Ukraine to Russia is also taking place under the guise of humanitarian measures. The so-called deportees from the "filtration camps" are sent to 9,500 temporary accommodation centers located in 48 regions across Russia. The main resettlement destinations include internal regions such as Buryatia, Zabaikalsk, Primorsky, and Khabarovsk. According to unofficial information, a deportee is allowed to return home only if he signs a declaration that he will abide by the rules introduced by Russia on the ground [11]. According to the Ukrainian side, more than 1.2 million people, including more than 200,000 children, have been deported from the occupied territories since the Russian invasion of the country. According to Russian statistics, since February 24, 2022, more than 1.55 million people have "arrived" in Russia from Ukraine [1]. Forced deportation serves to resettle people with pro-Ukrainian views on the territory of Russia and under their direct control, which in turn helps to prevent anti-Russian sentiments in the occupied regions, as well as to increase the potential of the labor force in Russia and improve demographic indicators. On May 30, 2022, Vladimir Putin signed a decree simplifying the procedure for granting Russian citizenship to Ukrainian orphans and children deprived of parental care. This facilitated the Russian adoption of Ukrainian children and accelerated the process of adopting Ukrainian children by potential Russian parents [1].

Russian passports distribution process

Another step towards annexation is the acceleration of the distribution of Russian passports and the simplification of the procedure for granting Russian citizenship to those living in the occupied territories. The local populace is forced to obtain Russian citizenship as quickly as possible, under the pretext of receiving Russian social benefits. In May 2022, by decree of Vladimir Putin, the procedures for obtaining Russian citizenship were simplified for residents of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. According to another decree by Vladimir Putin, this time on July 11, the right to request Russian citizenship through an accelerated procedure was also granted to Ukrainian citizens permanently living in the territory of Ukraine. It should be noted that before the broad-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, 860,000 people in the so-called
incentives. The Russian occupiers are offering 10,000 rubles in exchange for receiving Russian passports, which did not turn out to be large, despite the financial incentives. The Russian occupiers are offering 10,000 rubles (≈$165) to anyone who wants a Russian passport, regardless of age. According to available data, through August 15, 30,000 Russian passport applicants were registered in Zaporizhzhia region [12], and 12,000 in Kherson region [13]. In addition, the State Inspection of Vehicles of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia has started the process of re-registering driver's licenses and license plates in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. Those with Russian citizenship are given Russian driver's licenses and vehicle license plates without any problems, while others are issued temporary documents without any Ukrainian markings. After the temporary authorization expires, local drivers will be forced to acquire Russian documents.

Implementation of the Russian education system

In the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine, great importance is attached to the reorganization of the education system on a pro-Russian model. Ukrainian teachers were given a choice – either to abandon the Ukrainian curriculum or to leave their jobs and places of residence. In Moscow, a new school program has been developed for local educational institutions, which serves to popularize the history of Russia. The authors of the program cultivate anti-fascist views, then label the current government in Kyiv as fascist. They also point out that these territories belonged to the Russian Empire in the past (Kherson and Taurida governorates). In addition, to “improve the quality of education”, individual Russian universities ‘supervise’ universities located in the occupied territories [1].

"Reconstruction" plan

The Russian occupation measures also include the post-war reconstruction of the occupied territories. According to estimates from the budget committee of the Russian State Duma, about 1.5 trillion rubles (24 billion USD) will be needed to restore these areas. These funds will come from the state budget and private investments [1]. In late May 2022, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnulin announced that the government had created a special task force to work on a plan to restore “liberated Ukrainian territories”. With the “patronage” project developed by the first deputy head of the administration of the President of Russia, Sergey Kiriyenko, 18 Russian regions will be involved in the reconstruction of the southeastern regions and municipalities of Ukraine. “Patronage” refers to the financial assistance necessary for the reconstruction of cities, as well as staffing for regional or municipal administrations. According to the plan, the Moscow region will restore the Telmanovsky and Novozavodsky districts of the so-called "Donetsk People’s Republic", St. Petersburg – Mariupol. The purpose of this project is to create an expectation that the Russian Federation will fully engage in the so-called “post-war reconstruction” of the “liberated territories” [1].

Other measures of Russification

Measures to russify the occupied territories of Ukraine also include items such as the creation of a "ruble zone" and the withdrawal of the Ukrainian hryvnia from circulation, the establishment of Moscow time, the control of information flows, the introduction of Russian telecommunication services, the replacement of the Ukrainian telephone code (+380) with the Russian telephone code (+7), and the replacement of Ukrainian signs in public spaces with Russian ones [1].

Conclusion

The main features of Russia’s occupation policy are similar in almost all the territories it has occupied so far. Accordingly, observing the processes allows us to assume that Russia was planning to repeat the “Crimea scenario” about the temporarily occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions [1]. If we draw a parallel with the occupied territories of Georgia, the steps taken by the Kremlin in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region are identical to those of Ukraine. The standard path of Russian annexation – occupation of the territory as a result of hostilities, the appointment of pro-Russian rulers on the captured lands, and recognition of the independence of the self-proclaimed republics – Georgia has already gone through this in both occupied territories. The next move was to hold a pseudo-referendum and "join Russia". Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine, in the summer of 2022, preparations were also being made to hold a “referendum” in the occupied Tskhinvali region, but the event was postponed. It seems that Moscow is leaving this issue open for now, although it is expected that it will use it as a political bargaining chip and put pressure on the Georgian government.

Almost a year after the start of the war in Ukraine, military experts note that Russia does not have the military and financial resources to implement Putin’s ambitious
geopolitical plans. However, it seems that the Kremlin does not want to share rational arguments. Having seized the southeastern part of Ukraine, Russia is trying to present a successful "special military operation" in which Moscow took care of the pro-Russian population "oppressed" by the Kyiv authorities. Putin has developed a narrative that he has a "historic mission – the process of the reunification of Russian lands" and, as he claims, "Ukraine never had statehood before the formation of the Soviet Union" [14]. While the attempted annexation of Crimea was preceded by a broad ideological campaign, now President Putin is trying to quickly collect the lands of the former Soviet Union. It is expected that the illegal inclusion of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine into the Russian Federation will limit the prospect of their return through peace negotiations, as the Kremlin considers them a de jure part of Russian territory. On the other hand, after conducting pseudo-referendums in the temporarily occupied territories, the Ukrainian authorities exclude all possibilities of negotiations with Moscow. Finally, the future borders of the temporarily occupied territories will be determined by the results of the war.

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