Inclusion Dilemmas in Peacebuilding and Dialogues in Ukraine[1]

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Abstract

This article aims to elucidate the reasons underlying the lack of inclusion of Ukrainians with "pro-Russian" political views in peacebuilding and dialogues in Ukraine. Based on an analysis of empirical data from interviews and focus-groups, we argue that the following four factors contribute to patterns of willful and unwillful exclusion during facilitated dialogues: (1) the absence of a political will and a societal agenda for inclusion of people holding "pro-Russian" political views; (2) high security risks connected with Russian hybrid warfare; (3) difficulties in identifying this group and the loss of their agency after 2014; (4) as well as the risk of their identity being transformed, thereby again de facto excluding "pro-Russian" views. By providing a first mapping of the observed factors and underlying dilemmas the article aims to raise critical awareness of these difficulties in the field. By formulating the key open questions, it seeks to stimulate honest and constructive reflection among dialogue practitioners, civil society organizations, international donors, policymakers and scholars in order to scrutinize and redesign inclusion approaches in Ukraine with the aim of better responding to the realities of the conflict and the dialogue system of this country.

Key words: mediation, dialogue, peacebuilding, dilemma, inclusion, Ukraine, Russia

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INTRODUCTION

In peacebuilding, dialogue is commonly understood as a structured exchange that aims to allow participants to learn more and understand better the views and needs of the respective "other" in order to transform the relationship, create trust between opposing groups and lay the ground for substantive agreements at the political level at a later stage (Berghof Foundation, 2019, p. 29; German Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Germany, 2017, p. 6; OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, 2014, p. 10). Based on empirical evidence, the growing consensus among scholars, practitioners and policy-makers postulates that all groups involved in and affected by a conflict and possible agreements should in some way participate in and have their interests addressed in political decision-making processes (Castillejo, 2017; Paffenholz, 2015). This shared belief in inclusivity suggests that inclusive dialogue, as one the most extensively used tool of peacebuilding, offers the rare opportunity to change patterns of political, economic or social exclusion that can be key drivers of societal conflicts. Conversely, if patterns of non-inclusion or exclusion within a society in conflict are reproduced in peacebuilding mechanisms, they might be passed down in the future society's DNA, so to speak, fueling further tensions and conflict.

With the beginning of the armed conflict in 2014[2], international peacebuilding organizations brought the concepts of dialogue and inclusive peacebuilding to Ukraine, expanding their official mandate to national peacebuilding actors as well. In 2018, the Ukrainian community of dialogue facilitators explicitly stated that "people with political views that are different from the mainstream," among other target groups, should be included in dialogues (Institute for Peace and Common Ground

[2] In 2014, the Ukrainian peninsula in the Black Sea – Crimea – was illegally annexed by the Russian Federation and two parts of the Eastern Ukrainian regions formed self-proclaimed unrecognized separatist entities, the so-called "LNR/DNR" ("Luhansk People`s Republic"/"Donetsk People`s Republic"). Around 8% of Ukrainian territory is currently not controlled by the Ukrainian government. The conflict has claimed more than 13,000 lives and caused the displacement of several million people. While two ceasefire agreements were signed in Minsk in 2015 under mediation of the OSCE and high-power diplomacy in the Normandy format, they remain unimplemented and low intensity shelling continues from both sides. More detailed explanations of the root causes and drivers of the conflict depend heavily on the respective narrative of the conflict (e.g. official Ukrainian, official Russian, geopolitical) see for instance Lazarenko, 2018.

& OSCE, 2018, p. 8). Dialogue is seen as a major tool toward inclusion, as it "enables all stakeholders to engage in resolution of a conflict, to improve relations or make decisions (as opposed to an authoritarian approach, where only authorities have decision-making power)" (Institute for Peace and Common Ground & OSCE, 2018, pp. 4, 11).

Contrary to this normative belief, empirical research found that dialogues at the civil society and grassroots (track III[3]) level in Ukraine – the focus of this article – produced a cumulative effect of non-inclusion or even exclusion of people holding "pro-Russian" political views. This is even more remarkable as many dialogue projects in Ukraine had a consistent internal logic regarding whom to include in dialogue activities, for instance women or internally displaced people (IDPs). A 2018 study of dialogues at track III in Ukraine (Kyselova, 2018) found that in 81.7% of dialogues people with "anti-Maidan," "anti-European" and "pro-Russian" political views were absent or silenced themselves. In the remaining 18.3% of dialogues, there were only a few individuals with such views included.[4] Considering that at least 17% of the Ukrainian population holds "polarized" "pro-Russian" political views according to the SCORE Index (SCORE, 2016), there is an obvious inclusion gap.

Few Ukrainian facilitators seem to be aware of or concerned about this gap and potentially problematic implications. When asked about impediments to facilitated dialogues in Ukraine in the initial empirical study with an open-ended question (Kyselova, 2018) only two dialogue facilitators (among 61 interviewees) mentioned inclusion with regards to people holding "pro-Russian" political views among other problems. At the same time most of the interviewees in the follow-up study

[3] Dialogues are an essential component of multi-track approach to diplomacy which refers to the different societal levels, so called "tracks," where peace processes can take place: Track I comprises the leadership of a country (e.g. political and/or military); track II covers leading figures in society such as religious dignitaries, intellectuals, political parties and regional power figures; track III comprises leading civil society figures at the local community level and grassroots initiatives. (German Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Germany, 2017, p. 3).

[4] Due to the question`s sensitive nature, which this article will lay out in the following sections, the researcher asked respondents whether people holding "pro-Russian" political views had taken part (at all) in the last dialogue they remembered, but not the precise number of such people. However, it became clear from the interviews that where people holding "pro-Russian" political views took part in dialogues they were only a few persons.

(2019), when asked explicitly about the relevance of inclusion, confirmed that the problem exists but is hushed up or even denied by some peace practitioners. Similarly, there is limited concern on the part of international donors and INGOs.

Before rushing to claim compliance with the normative imperative of inclusion and condemn inefficient policies of donors or negligence of dialogue facilitators, this article attempts to understand the underlying reasons for the lack of inclusion of Ukrainians with “pro-Russian” political views and thereby to raise the awareness within the peacebuilding community about this gap. By providing a first mapping of the observed factors and underlying dilemmas the article aims to raise critical awareness of these difficulties. And by pinning down the key open questions to be resolved it seeks to stimulate honest and constructive reflection among dialogue practitioners, civil society actors, international donors, policymakers and scholars on how to re-/design inclusion approaches – in Ukraine and elsewhere – that properly respond to the realities of a given conflict and dialogue system.

After briefly examining the methodological approach and challenges, the article reviews the ambivalences of the concept of inclusiveness itself and in its application to the Ukrainian context, and then proceeds to identify concrete factors that might be responsible for the discrepancy between the apparent belief in inclusion and the actual numbers of included “pro-Russian” political views. Based on empirical findings, we suggest that their inclusion is hampered by four factors that confront dialogue facilitators with real dilemmas: (1) the absence of an inclusion agenda during an ongoing armed conflict; (2) security and political manipulation risks; (3) difficulties in identifying people holding “pro-Russian” political views; (4) the capacity of dialogue to transform identities. Therefore, we argue that even where an inclusion of people holding “pro-Russian” political views into community dialogues is attempted with best intentions, it seems very difficult if not impossible to realize. However, with more targeted empirical research and the results of it translated into creative conceptual and methodological responses, those dilemmas might be much better manageable.

Methodology: Empirical Sources, Constructivist and Action Research Approach

Our primary empirical sources rely on a qualitative empirical study on patterns and risks of dialogues at the civil society and grassroots level in Ukraine in May-August 2016 and January 2017. It consisted of three focus group discussions with 21 participants and 40 in-depth interviews conducted in Berlin and different locations in Ukraine (Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, Kramatorsk/Donetsk oblast) Participants were selected through the snowball sampling technique aiming at the highest possible level of diversity. Of the interviewees, 36% belong to the professional community of mediators and dialogue facilitators; other target groups included international governmental and non-governmental organizations, donor agencies, Ukrainian government and civil society. The lists of interviewees, their demographic characteristics and the sample questions are presented in the full research report (Kyselova et al., 2017). An additional seven in-depth interviews and one focus group with nine participants were conducted in 2018-2019 in Kyiv as a follow-up study focusing on the impact and inclusivity of dialogues, addressing the same categories of actors and relying on the same sampling techniques as the main study. As secondary sources, the article uses an analysis of Ukrainian legislation and research literature to support our conclusions.

The initial as well as follow-up study followed an inductive approach in the broad sense of grounded theory as concepts and theories were constructed through systematic gathering and analysis of empirical data (instead of using a hypothetical deductive approach). Avoiding reliance on any known assumptions and theories of dialogue and peacebuilding, the researchers asked open-ended questions like “What problems with dialogues do you see in Ukraine?” that allowed them to identify impediments to peacebuilding and dialogues without imposing any particular theoretical concepts on the interviewees. The authors considered the four factors analyzed in this article to be the most meaningful ones that emerged from the interviews and focus groups, in terms of their potential to explain the societal and methodical reasons for the inclusion problem in dialogues in Ukraine. However, other factors might also be relevant and deserve detailed study, for example the project logic of donors that

pushes for less complicated and less risky projects and results in higher numbers of "technical" dialogues on political reforms rather than dialogues on the armed conflict itself (Kyselova & von Dobeneck, 2017).

The studies also employed an action research approach that aims at joint reflection and understanding of the challenges of a professional field together *with* its practitioners in order to validate findings and directly feed them back into practice. The research is grounded on actual needs and experiential knowledge and creates opportunities for practitioners to rethink and reshape their everyday practice (Kraus & Kyselova, 2018). Researchers and practitioners are seen as autonomous and independent partners whose viewpoints are shaped by their unique roles and experiences. For this study, both the research process itself (interviews, focus groups) and the research design (identification of problem to be studied) were carried out in close exchange with Ukrainian and international dialogue practitioners.

In line with inductive and action research traditions, this study relied on the Ukrainian understanding of dialogue as "a specially prepared meeting between people or groups of people facilitated by a third party with the aim of building mutual trust and/or making a joint decision" (Kyselova et al., 2017). Later, Ukrainian facilitators formalized a similar definition of dialogue in their Dialogue Standards (Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 2018, p. 5). This definition emphasizes building trust and understanding as the primary goal of dialogue, and problem solving as a possible additional goal, as well as a key role of dialogue facilitators.

Given the strictly qualitative methodology and the highly contextual approach, the findings of this study are not generalizable or expandable to other conflict contexts without further comparative studies. At the same time, we trust that the obvious potential of these findings to unfold considerable implications for inclusive dialogue as such and in other contexts will hopefully inspire further explorations.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGE: IDENTIFYING AND LABELING THE SUBJECTS OF INCLUSION

The biggest conceptual challenge of this article was to identify the part of the Ukrainian population to be included and find a precise and non-politicized denomination for them. As practicing mediators/facilitators and researchers in this field, we are very conscious of the risk of labeling: Putting political labels on groups can reproduce division lines and negative stereotypes, influence self-identity and behavior toward self-fulfilling prophecies, thereby possibly aggravating polarization (Zhurzhenko, 2014). Yet it is not possible to study an object that has no clear designation. Studies on Ukrainian identities have produced dozens of labels for people who diverge from the geopolitical European orientation of Ukraine (KIIS, 2020): For example, they may be addressed as people with Soviet, post/neo-Soviet, East Slavonic, dual (Russian-Ukrainian), or regional Donbas identity (Korostelina, 2015; Kulyk, 2018; Riabchuk, 2015). An emerging consensus among scholars is that identity in Ukraine is not an ethno-linguistic category but rather a political one that includes a wide spectrum of views amenable to change and redefinition (Riabchuk, 2015); but at the moment there are no politically neutral labels to distinguish identities in Ukraine.

Our own search for a neutral yet meaningful designation of people with identities diverging from pro-European views lead us to use “the other Ukrainians” (Kyselova & von Dobeneck, 2017) and “Ukrainians with non-mainstream views” (Kyselova, 2018). However, both of them turned out to be unsatisfactory as they encompass all aspects of “otherness” including sexual orientation, religion or national origin. For example, in the book “Our Others” (Yaremchuk, 2018) “the other Ukrainians” refers solely to minority groups living in Ukraine such as Armenians, Germans, Turks, Romanians or Swedes.

Neither were we able to completely take the lead of our interviewees with respect to the label: Those who mentioned the inclusion problem in the initial study referred to the outsider group as “*vatnyk*,” which stands for “quilted jackets” – a derogatory slang term. Our interviewees noted that

they were aware of the derogatory character of this label and never used it in public but chose to rely on it in the interviews as the handiest term. According to one interviewee of non-Ukrainian origin, "*vatnyky*" might be defined "as working class, underemployed, less educated, voting for the "Opposition Block" [political party openly supporting links with Russia]; celebrating currently unpopular Soviet holidays – Victory Day on the 9th of May, Red Army Day on the 23rd of February."[5]

Thus, in the choice between more neutral but unclear labels ("the other Ukrainians," "Ukrainians with non-mainstream views") and the more precise but derogatory label ("*vatnyk*") we opted for the middle ground – the broad term of "people holding 'pro-Russian' political views" (Ukr: "*liudy z pro-rosiyskoyu orientatsiyeyu*"). It ranges from those who would like to see their hometowns be part of Russia (e.g. pro-separatists' views), to those who firmly believe that they belong to the state of Ukraine but feel uneasy with European values, to those who hold anti-Kyiv positions out of very pragmatic considerations on security and economic survival (Zhukov, 2016). In this broad sense, this group constitutes between 13% and 34% of the Ukrainian population.[6]

Although this label may include references to linguistic or ethnic elements, it is clearly centered on the ideological component of identity and avoids an ethno-linguistic attribution, taking into account that people of any ethnicity and language group may hold these views. In practical terms this label turned out to be most recognizable by our interviewees and did not require any further definition (except the explanation suggested by the foreign interviewee cited above). Thus, using this broad category allowed us to forego the discussion on the constitutive elements of this type of identity and concentrate on the reasons for the inclusion gap. As the label still carries political connotations, we place it in quote marks in this article.

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[5] Interview with representative of international organization, May 2016, Kyiv

[6] People against Ukrainian membership in EU – 26.0%, 26.1% (KIIS, 2020; SOCIS, 2020); against membership in NATO – 31.3%, 33.6% (KIIS, 2020; SOCIS, 2020). People viewing events at the Maidan in late 2013-early 2014 as an anti-government coup – 23% (Razumkov Center, 2020a). People for membership in Eurasian Economic Union (Russia-led economic organization) – 12.7% (Razumkov Center, 2020b) people with Soviet nostalgia – 15.9% (SCORE, 2018).

Finally, we wish to stress that people holding "pro-Russian" political views should not be conflated with the inhabitants of the non-governmentally-controlled areas (NGCA) – territories currently controlled by the unrecognized republics of "LNR/DNR" – who may hold any political views. Although people from NGCA are also underrepresented in dialogues in Ukraine (Kyselova, 2018), this article focuses on the inclusion of people living in the government-controlled areas.

The following section looks at the concept of inclusion in peacebuilding and dialogue and suggests a path for addressing its ambivalences as a theoretical basis to approach the observed inclusion gap in Ukraine.

AMBIVALENCES OF INCLUSION IN PEACEBUILDING AND DIALOGUE

Inclusivity with respect to mediation, and also to any other peacebuilding intervention, "refers to the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome" (United Nations, 2012, p. 11). The concept of inclusion in peacebuilding emerged in the early years of the new century in response to "the realisation that the social, economic or political exclusion of large segments of society is a key driver of intra-state wars," prompting the field "to search for the right formula to support inclusive and participatory conflict transformation mechanisms and post-war state-society relations" (Dudouet et al., 2016, p. 3). Inherited from the development sector where inclusion already promoted the "fight against global poverty and economic inequality" (Gabay, 2012), "inclusive peace" became an emancipatory claim resulting in a policy norm for power sharing during transition processes (Donais & McCandless, 2017). Within a short time, despite difficulties of and outright resistance to its implementation (Cuhadar, 2020), inclusion was generally considered "the only realistic way for fragile states to break the dysfunctional societal and institutional patterns that hold back change" (Kaplan, 2015). A growing body of inclusive processes, namely the higher chances to implement agreements (Nilsson, 2012; Paffenholz, 2014) and to overcome root causes of conflict (Wimmer, Cederman, &

Min, 2009). This is supported by two important insights of social psychology addressed within the concept of inclusion – that all human societies are organized by in-group/out-group logics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and that there is a basic human need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

On the critical side, the first difficult aspect of inclusion as a norm is that it presupposes that inclusivity is necessary and desirable *per se*, rather than letting conflict systems decide. Of course, excluded groups most likely won't have the chance to participate in this decision exactly because they are excluded, and this is why such a norm is needed, but still: The exclusive normative preconception of inclusion is the inherent performative contradiction of this norm. This contradiction fuels and, from some non-Western perspectives, justifies resistance against it (Cuhadar, 2020). Second, empirical research has shown that inclusive processes and settlements do not automatically translate into peaceful, stable and resilient societal structures (Pospisil & Menocal, 2017, p. 556), because their impact largely depends on the concrete cultural, political and social conditions of a given conflict context (Aulin, 2019, p. 39). Translated to a post-Soviet country like Ukraine, the question arises: Can those parts of a society that do not believe in bottom-up conflict resolution and societal change be reached with inclusive approaches? Can inclusionary approaches even do harm because they might be (perceived as) ideologically biased and as a result deepen societal divides? Third, inclusion policies might fail because they implicitly reproduce the exclusionary in-group/out-group patterns they are meant to remove, e.g. by classifying certain "cultural, political, and social orders... as radically different" (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015, p. 50). For instance, even new hybrid peace approaches still rest on the state's monopoly over the use of force and the rule of law as the exclusive pathway to peace and emancipation (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015, p. 63).

A promising response to these ambivalent findings on inclusion seems to be to fully acknowledge the significant difference between abstract idea and concrete interpretation: while the idea of inclusion can be understood as a fundamental and universal human need (everybody needs to be included in some group) and the idea of inclusive dialogue processes as a basic procedural formula

(actors in a conflict system are more likely to support a solution or transformation of conflict when they are included in the making of it), the concrete applications of those ideas to specific conflict and dialogue settings (who should and can be included for which objectives into which forums) need to be spelled out in a highly context-dependent adaptive manner. In a nutshell, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater by dismissing the concept of inclusion per se; but to find the right interpretation and application of inclusion for each context is a *sine qua non* condition for its implementation.

In a technical sense, it is tempting to conceptualize inclusion and exclusion as two sides of a coin: If you do not include, you automatically exclude and vice-versa. However, inclusion usually appears to require active efforts (in order to bypass or modify a system's existing representation structure), while exclusion usually appears to require less or no efforts (as it results from existing structures). Exclusion can nonetheless be related to deliberate strategies of powerholders to bar actors from decision-making or to reproduce effects of societal and political structures, even unwittingly or unwillingly. With regard to the observed representation gap of "pro-Russian" views in dialogues in Ukraine, we assume that there are patterns of unintended non-inclusion and intended exclusion.

Inclusion in conflict interventions primarily refers to procedural or quantitative aspects, namely to the type and amount of represented groups and stakeholders within a process of mediation or dialogue (Aulin, 2019, p. 39). Recent research also emphasizes the material or qualitative aspect of inclusion, suggesting that the result of participation – the actual representation and satisfaction of interests and needs in the outcome – is even more important than the quantity of representation (Dudouet et al., 2016). However, it is clear that a certain quality of participation cannot be achieved without a certain quantity of actors physically taking part. This article proceeds on the basis of both procedural and material inclusion, as it is unclear to what extent the absence of "pro-Russian" views in dialogues results from the physical absence of people holding them or from the fact that people holding these views do not express their opinions.

With these theoretical premises in mind, the following section analyses the qualitative empirical data on the reasons for the lack of inclusion of people holding "pro-Russian" political views in peacebuilding and dialogues in Ukraine.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THE LACK OF INCLUSION OF "PRO-RUSSIAN" POLITICAL VIEWS

Factor 1: The Absence of an Inclusion Agenda During Ongoing Armed Conflict

It is important to highlight the ongoing character of the armed conflict in and around Ukraine notwithstanding ceasefires.[7] The Russian hybrid warfare currently taking place in Ukraine as a "battle for minds and hearts of Ukrainian people" conditioned cementing of the dominant narrative of the conflict in Ukraine as "Russian aggression" (Lazarenko, 2018). Among numerous laws and policies that confirm this narrative was a ruling that the Ukrainian Parliament passed in January 2018 expressly stamping the conflict as "the armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts" and the territories not controlled by the Ukrainian government as "the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts" where "armed forces of the Russian Federation and occupational administration of the Russian Federation have established and currently maintain general control" (Article 1).[8] Consequently, the inclusion of people holding "pro-Russian" political views in peacebuilding and conflict resolution was out of the question to the Poroshenko administration (2014-2019). Furthermore, during this period, the mass media and political discourse contributed to and manipulated political polarization along the contact line and political constituencies through discourses equating patriotism with an anti-Russian attitude and "peace" with treason to Russia ("*zrada*") (Kyselova, 2019, pp. 14–15).

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[7] OSCE Special Monitoring Mission for Ukraine, regular monitoring reports, https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine

[8] The Law of Ukraine "On the State Policy on Safeguarding State Sovereignty of Ukraine at the Temporary Occupied Territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts," 18 January 2018, available at https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2268-19

Following domestic Ukrainian politics as well as power-politics at the geopolitical level, major international organizations working in Ukraine – although informally denouncing many measures of the Ukrainian government – do not openly admit a problem of inclusion in terms of political diversity. For example, the UN/EU/World Bank "Ukraine Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment" stated the need for reconciliation and the inclusion of women, youth and elderly people, but did not mention people holding "pro-Russian" political views (United Nations Ukraine et al., 2015, p. 106). Although well aware of the problem, as confirmed by our interviews, internationals shy away from dealing with this "Pandora's box":

> You know, [international organizations] work with the government and we are constrained by the politics. We cannot do even an advocacy campaign for inclusion of pro-Russians until we have a political climate when these discussions are tolerated by the government. If, for example, the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs opens up this Pandora's box, we will start doing it immediately, but we cannot open this box ourselves.[9]

Nor is an inclusion of "pro-Russian" political views unambiguously supported by local Ukrainian civil society. There has been no "societal mobilization for peace" in Ukraine; rather, there has been a "societal mobilization for war" with a distinctive new movement of volunteers to aid the Ukrainian Army (Hunter, 2018; Zarembo, 2017). In the absence of a nationwide inclusion agenda and within polarized discourses, those scattered civil society groups that dare to include people with "pro-Russian" political views, residents of NGCA or Russian citizens meet vigorous rebuff from more "mainstream" civil society (Kyselova, 2019: 14-15).

For dialogue, the consequence of equating "peace" with "treason" and forming a big "pro-Russian" out-group could not be worse, as one Ukrainian dialogue facilitator notes:

> The enemy – *vatnyk* [the derogatory slang word for pro-Russian orientation] – is not perceived as a party to talk to. What dialogue? You need to destroy and kill them. If someone like a *vatnyk* was taking part in the dialogue, then people believe that letting him in was a mistake of SBU [Ukrainian Security Service].[10]

[9] Interview with representative of international organization working in Ukraine, August 2019, Kyiv
[10] Interview with Ukrainian dialogue facilitator, August 2018, Kyiv

Thus, in its extreme form, the militarized narrative of the conflict as “Russian aggression” (Lazarenko, 2018) denies any possibility of dialogue with NGCA residents or the people holding “pro-Russian” political views inside the controlled territories. Within the ongoing armed struggle, polarized mass media discourse and the dominant militarized conflict narrative, it is enormously difficult to talk about inclusive society. Although President Zelensky, who was elected in May 2019, is changing the discourse towards a more positive attitude to IDP’s and the residents of NGCA, this so far does not relate to those Ukrainians with “pro-Russian” views living at GCA.

Factor 2: Security and Political Manipulation Risks

But even if we assume that political will for inclusion of people holding “pro-Russian” political views would eventually arise, dialogues are still prone to high security risks. Ongoing armed violence nourishes “high levels of insecurity stemming from the Russia-fuelled conflict in the Donbas region” and “weak information security alongside susceptibility to Russian disinformation” (Boulegue et al., 2018: 2). Russia uses state television and an army of social media trolls to create confusion, spread conspiracy theories, fake opinion polls, demoralize states and civil society and manipulate opinion in Ukraine (Rațiu & Munteanu, 2018). This leads *inter alia* to the rise of extremist right-wing movements (Likhachev, 2018). Empirical evidence suggests that members of right-wing groups came to conflict-related dialogue sessions and threatened participants:

> We organized a series of public town hall style events across Ukraine in 2017-18. In Ivano-Frankivsk event, with the word «reintegration» in the title, and some IDPs taking part, a group of Right Sector activists turned up in masks with the intention to break up the event. Luckily, we had skillful facilitators who were able to de-escalate the situation and to engage these people in the discussion.[11]

[11] Interview with representative of international organization working in Ukraine, September 2019, Kyiv

Within this atmosphere of insecurity, dialogue participants who identify as part of a minority in dialogue "are afraid to show up and do not have the courage to express their opinions… in dialogues" (Kyselova, 2018, p. 14). Clearly, direct physical security before, during and after the dialogue remains a challenge.

A more subtle yet much more serious risk is connected to the fear of Ukrainian dialogue facilitators being used and manipulated by Russia in a complex hybrid warfare scenario. One dialogue facilitator hypothesized that if people holding "pro-Russian" views are empowered by international donors and Ukrainian civil society similar to other marginalized groups, the "Kremlin" could use them to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and the pro-European position.[12]

Indeed, research suggests that civil society has been used by the Russian government as a part of the Russian soft power abroad (Wilson, 2015) and as a weapon in the hybrid warfare in Ukraine. According to Zhukov, "the pre-existing network of Russian nationalist groups in the Donbas helped the rebels solve many of the start-up collective action problems associated with mounting a rebellion" (Zhukov, 2016, p. 8). In the Chatham House study of Russian proxies, Lutsevych identified and analyzed dozens of Kremlin-related government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) – from charities and youth groups to veterans' organizations and cultural centers (Lutsevych, 2016). She has demonstrated how Russia has used these groups in Ukraine to promote the Russian language and historical narrative, to subvert Ukrainian nation-building and European integration, to instigate a parallel discourse on human rights, elections and democracy and to "prepare the ground for separatism," for example "by mobilizing civilians to prevent the movement of Ukrainian military forces, or by recruiting them into local 'self-defence' units…" (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 37).

Given that the link between security risks and peacebuilding in Ukraine has not yet been studied, it remains unclear whether or to what extent the high security risks should preclude the inclusion

[12] Interview with Ukrainian dialogue facilitator, March 2019, Kyiv

of people holding "pro-Russian" political views in dialogues and peacebuilding. In any case, they pose serious challenges.

Factor 3: The Hardly Identifiable "Other"

Even if the security problems were resolved to some extent, it would be still a big challenge to identify those with "pro-Russian" political views. First, this group of people is defined by values and beliefs that are self-constructed and therefore amenable to change and self-reconstruction, even more so as the evidently shifting ethnic identities in Ukraine. Polese and Wylegala in their ethnographic research of Russian and Ukrainian identities in Odessa and Lviv were struck by the frequency and spontaneity of Russian-Ukrainian conversions (Polese & Wylegala, 2008, p. 805). Indeed, a Ukrainian may become Russian and vice-versa overnight; one does not need to change religion, language or formal documents to shift ethnic identities, let alone political and ideological convictions. This leads to the possibility of identity shifts of people in large numbers (Kulyk, 2019; Onuch, Hale, & Sasse, 2018; Sasse & Lackner, 2018). The apparent confusion caused by the identity shifts was well captured by an interviewed dialogue facilitator:

> It is unclear at all what the indicators of "who is who" are. For example, people can be ethnically Russian or be believers of the Moscow Patriarchate but at the same time help the Ukrainian Army or even serve in the Ukrainian military.[13]

Difficulties in identification of people holding "pro-Russian" political views are further exacerbated by their loss of agency after 2014. Although several "pro-Russian" political parties (*Vidrodjennia, Opozitsiyna Platforma "Za Zhyttia",*) are functioning within the political realm, and have gained more than 10% of votes in the 2019 Parliamentary elections, the extent to which they (or any political party in Ukraine for that matter) represent popular interests is unclear. At the civil society and people-to-people level, organizations that can legitimately represent the "pro-Russian" population vanished after 2014. In light of the serious security risks emanating from Russia, in 2015

[13] Interview with Ukrainian dialogue facilitator, August 2018, Kyiv

Ukraine's National Security Council imposed sanctions on 12 Russian associations, Cossack groups and religious charities, and banned their activity in Ukraine; in 2017, the same measures were adopted against 460 organizations comprising Russian commercial entities, state TV channels, military companies and various Russia-funded GONGOs and groups linked to separatists in the east and Crimea (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 41). Thus, people holding "pro-Russian" political views have lost their agency after 2014. This can be seen as a structural exclusion of the pro-Russian population – a problem well recognized by the interviewees in the follow-up study:

> It is very difficult with pro-Russians. In any case, we first need to identify them, but we cannot do this. We know from SCORE that these people exist (because SCORE is a confidential big data study) but when we come to work in local communities, we do not even know who and where they are. They are silent about their political views, they may complain about the central Government, but they do not talk openly about their views. It is impossible to bring them together as a group. In order for us to empower them, i.e. to train them, to offer opportunities, skills etc., they need to be somehow organized. And they are not.[14]

In a nutshell, the complex, flexible and shifting nature of identities in Ukraine and the loss of agency of Ukrainians holding "pro-Russian" political views condition the asymmetry between them and mainstream pro-Ukrainian population (Milakovsky, 2016) and make their inclusion extremely challenging.

Factor 4: Capacity of Dialogue to Transform Identities

Finally, even in cases where it is possible to identify actors with "pro-Russian" orientations and include them in dialogues in a procedural sense, "pro-Russian" views might still not be represented in a material sense. They may remain silent because of the dominance of "mainstream" voices or security fears (factor 2). In addition, there might be another reason related to the dialogue's capacity to transform identities. Even if we only scratched the surface of our understanding of identity transfor-

[14] Interview with representative of international organization working in Ukraine, August 2019, Kyiv

mations in the Ukrainian context, we deem the findings from the primary data pointing to the possibility of such changes worth sharing, with the explicit caveat that all interpretations are still hypothetical.

Although some Ukrainian facilitators interviewed in the follow-up study (2019) denied it,[15] others in the same set of interviews provided accounts of identity change. Concretely, the study collected two cases in which a kind of “pro-Russian” or Donbas regional identity of people who took part in professionally facilitated dialogues transformed into a kind of “inclusive civic identity” (K. Korostelina, 2015), and one case where a “Ukrainian patriot” (as termed by the interviewee) had his identity transformed into the civic identity of “a bridge.” Accounts below demonstrate the interviewees’ perception of such identity changes:

> [Now, working as a dialogue facilitator] I remember my experience of being in a dialogue group as a participant. At that time, I had a regional identity of a resident of eastern Ukraine. After that, I had a half-month project in which we got acquainted with representatives of different regions and carried out dialogues with them. Through stories we got to know them. And after that, my regional identity changed to Ukrainian, a citizen of Ukraine. This was expressed in external manifestations – after this dialogue the language came easier. Before, I did not speak Ukrainian, in principle, but I understood. After the dialogue I started speaking Ukrainian. It was such an outward manifestation for me that I found answers to some of my internal questions. This was no longer the identity of the people that I started my dialogue with; it was already something bigger than the regional identity that I had before.[16]

> [W]hen I was a facilitator, I observed how new identity was forming in a person during a dialogue. The girl was previously a resident of the Non-governmentally controlled territories [ORDLO/NGCA]. During the escalation of the conflict and hostilities, she moved to [mainland] Ukraine to integrate there. But it did not work out and she returned back [to the NGCA]. And when she came to the dialogue, she said, “I realized that I can be a guide, an intermediary. It is not necessary to live somewhere, on the one or the other side. It is important for me that I can be useful and active both for these people and those people. And this transformation has occurred to me because of the dialogue.”[17]

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[15] Two facilitators denied identity change, although this may be connected to the fact that they do not perceive an inclusive civic orientation as an identity: “No, [as a dialogue facilitator] I do not have a goal to change people's identity like to unscrew the old identity and screw in the new one.” (Follow-up focus group with Ukrainian dialogue facilitators from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporijjia, Donetsk *oblast*, November 2018), Kyiv; “Dialogue aims to form the third position – we call it ‘dialogue position’, but it does not change identities. Yes, they were radicals before [the dialogue] and now they are in the middle” [Rus. - *seredynnye*] (Interview with Ukrainian facilitator, June 2019).

[16] Follow-up focus group with Ukrainian dialogue facilitators from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporijjia, Donetsk *oblast*, November 2018, Kyiv

[17] *Ibid.*

In both cases, the change of identity is not explicitly linked to shifting political views but to a change of the relationship between the self and "the other" or, respectively, the self and the two conflict sides. The "new identity" could in both cases be described as "multicultural" and "civic" (Korostelina, 2015, p. 229). Given that identities in Ukraine are not based on ethno-nationalist or linguistic elements but rather on ideological constructs, it is likely that this type of identity transforms in the course of political discussions that might stimulate ideological reflection. However, it remains unclear what exactly triggered the transformation although there are hints to relational experiences, group dynamics, dialogue methodologies and individual insights. Depending on this still non-determinable interplay of impact factors, the participation in dialogues may thus transform one-sided, regional, potentially "pro-Russian" into broader inclusive "Ukrainian" or multi-perspective identities and views.

If people with "pro-Russian" political views shift in their identities during the course of dialogue, does it finally amount to a representation of those "pro-Russian" political perspectives, or rather to their disappearance? Whether we see these transformations as an inclusion or rather an exclusion of "pro-Russian" views depends on the understanding of the purpose of dialogue – whether it is about relational change or about the recognition of the diversity of views (Korostelina, 2007).[18]

Initially developed and conceptualized in the context of inter-ethnic protracted conflicts, modern approaches to peacebuilding assume a certain stability of (ethno-national) identities as well as clearly defined boundaries between them (Todd et al., 2006). In this classical approach, where transition from oppositional to non-oppositional identities happens, people still retain their primary sense of identity and affiliation with a certain ethnic, religious or social group, but become more open to

[18] Looking into policy recommendations for inclusive dialogue in Ukraine, the two understandings seem indeed to be often intermingled. https://www.scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//Citizenship2018_ENG.pdf https://www.scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//ukraine/FINAL%20ENG%20-%20SCORE%20Ukraine%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20Peace%20Process.pdf

understanding "the others" and co-existence with them. This corresponds with the traditional understanding of the matter in conflict transformation theory:

> Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.… No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other (Saunders, 1999, p. 82).

Therefore, from a conflict transformation perspective, there seems to be nothing wrong with what happened in those cases cited above. In fact, conflict transformation in the tradition of Galtung aims at exactly that: to transform attitudes, behaviors and relational patterns that reproduce root causes of conflict towards more constructive ways of dealing with conflict (Miall, 2004, pp. 4–5). Regarding Ukraine, the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index even explicitly states that "moving people from the polarized to the tolerant camp" is part of a "wider strategy for developing a more cohesive Ukrainian identity," referring to both polarized pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian views (SCORE, 2016, p. 5). If we follow this line of thinking, we can consider the cases quoted above as a "successful" inclusion of individuals with potentially "pro-Russian" views into another group with a broader civic identity.

However, greater contextualization of the capacity of dialogue to change identity with respect to the Ukrainian case reveals two risks of identity change vis-à-vis people holding "pro-Russian" political views.

First, we see a risk of missing the chance to involve populations with "pro-Russian" political perspectives in shaping Ukrainian society, thereby failing to properly address their interests and concerns. One-sided views seem to be merged too quickly in joint meta-perspectives before their messages have been expressed, heard and understood. This could have socio-psychological reasons – the discomfort of an antagonistic atmosphere might create an individual or collective tendency to accommodate, converge or transcend those "other" views – which require specific methodological responses.

Second, we see a risk of ideological influencing, be it unintentional or intentional, and at the least the risk that the social environment perceives the changes as political conversion or “brainwash.” Dialogue is a fundamentally value-laden instrument; it is based on modern liberal values of participation, egalitarian decision-making and responsibility for own decisions. It could be possible that by the very fact of taking part in dialogue a person holding “pro-Russian” political views becomes more societally active, thereby abandoning so-called essential traits of “pro-Russian” identity as low civic engagement and paternalism as a part of Soviet nostalgia (SCORE, 2016). A key question that further research needs to address here is: is this type of identity change a voluntary act – as dialogue ethics, at least in theory, require –, or more an imperceptible, unconscious and therefore not fully voluntary process? If it is the latter, what does it mean for the question of inclusion?

Third, we see a risk of negative social feedback effects. Within a politically polarized environment like Ukraine family members or friends of people whose identities shift during or after taking participating in dialogues might perceive this as treason – thus not only as a change of identity, but also as a change of sides in the conflict. In the worst case, this might lead to a retributive exclusion from the family or circle of friends and deepen divides between groups. In a “war of identities” as in Ukraine, cases like the ones quoted above may make people holding “pro-Russian” political views think of “inclusive dialogue” as a rather as an exclusion of their views from political discourse. Thus, in terms of conflict sensitivity and *Do no harm* principle, it seems to be key that dialogues with a transformative potential reach out to the communities to be included in a broader sense and openly discuss all sensitive questions related to identity transformation. As well, dialogue actors need to be capable to actively respond to negative feedback effects within the conflict system that they still possibly trigger.

To conclude, while much more research has to be done to understand the frequency and nature of identity change in dialogues in the Ukrainian conflict context, the possibility of such change identified by this study shows the potential of dialogues to build bridges across the divides in Ukraine, but raises also caution against the temptation to use dialogues as a tool of Ukrainization.

CONCLUSION: IS AN INCLUSION OF "PRO-RUSSIAN" ACTORS INTO DIALOGUES IN UKRAINE IMPOSSIBLE?

As the factors that prevent an inclusion of Ukrainians holding "pro-Russian" political views into track III dialogues appear to be considerable, it is up to Ukrainian dialogue actors to decide whether they want to apply this international norm in this regard and in what ways. As a first step, the article aimed to raise awareness about this inclusion gap in the local and international peacebuilding community and to provide research-based evidence that points to several explanations for its deep-rooted causes.

The analysis of data from interviews and focus groups with Ukrainian and international mediators and dialogue facilitators, NGOs and government officials, suggests that the observed representation gap of "pro-Russian" views in dialogues in Ukraine is conditioned by complex patterns of unintended structural non-inclusion and deliberate strategic exclusion. While other factors (for example donor expectations) may also contribute to these patterns, we believe that four factors represent the most significant explanations for the inclusion gap.

First, the most active parts of Ukrainian civil society as well as the political elites strongly oppose engaging "pro-Russian" views in the public arena and peacebuilding during the ongoing armed conflict. This opposition is nurtured by a Russian-led hybrid warfare currently taking place in Ukraine resulting in the narrative of "Russian aggression." Consequently, there is no inclusion agenda with respect to people holding "pro-Russian" political view on the part of the local and international peacebuilding community working in Ukraine. The election of President Zelensky in 2019 by 73%

of voters – including some who traditionally are seen as holding "pro-Russian" political views – may suggest a societal request for inclusion that so far has not been met.

Second, if a political will for inclusion of "pro-Russian" views ever arises, dialogue is still prone to high security and manipulation risks – from threats to physical safety of dialogue participants to fears that Russia may use pro-Russian constituencies, if they are legitimated, to destabilize Ukraine and threaten Ukrainian sovereignty. Whether real or perceived, these fears deter dialogue facilitators from engaging "pro-Russian" views and discourage people from expressing such views as well as from participating in dialogues.

Third, even if security risks are mitigated, it remains unclear whom to include because of the complex, flexible and shifting nature of identities of people holding "pro-Russian" political views that are not connected to stable indicators such as ethnicity or language. Furthermore, after 2014 this group of people does not have an established constituency or institutional bodies that represent it at the civil society level. Thus, in order to include those people in dialogues, one has to first distinguish them from other groups within Ukrainian society, i.e. draw boundaries that can potentially deepen the divides between pro-Russian and other types of Ukrainian identities.

Finally, in cases where alleged actors holding "pro-Russian" political views can be identified and included, there is no guarantee that they will express "pro-Russian" views in dialogues: Inclusive dialogue appears to have a tendency to transform one-sided identities into broader identities and thereby again fail to include those "pro-Russian" views into dialogue. Even if those broader identities have the potential to build bridges across the divides in Ukraine, the transformation appears to imply three serious risks – a lack of representation of interests and concerns of people with "pro-Russian" political views, (perceived) ideological manipulation and negative social feedback effects.

These four factors translate into four practical dilemmas (Kraus et al., 2019) for peacebuilding and dialogue actors:

1. How can peacebuilders and dialogue actors argue for an increased inclusion of "pro-Russian" views without being rejected as traitors?
2. How can peacebuilders and dialogue actors include participants with "pro-Russian" orientations and guarantee their safety without jeopardizing the collective security of the Ukrainian state?
3. How can Ukrainians holding "pro-Russian" political views be identified without deepening division lines among polarized groups?
4. How can Ukrainians holding "pro-Russian" political views be included in dialogue without automatically transforming, and thereby again excluding, their specific initial perspectives?

On purpose, this article does not provide any answers or suggest solutions for these problems, trusting that in such a way, as a first step, this research will provoke more critical and creative thinking in the field. On one hand, further empirical research, in particular into the nature of identity of people holding "pro-Russian" political views and their participation in dialogues, will help provide answers to the remaining open questions. On the other hand, conceptual models and methodological experiences in dealing with similar challenges of inclusion in other contexts need to be collected and tested for applicability in Ukraine. Considered together, those dilemmas might be much better manageable. To generate new entry points for such dilemmas, a more honest discussion of the complex and inconvenient self-contradictions of peacebuilding in polarized contexts is needed.

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