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THE ARMED CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE: EXPLORING COMPETING NARRATIVES

ABSTRACT

How do we understand the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and what are its implications for Ukraine's domestic politics as well as for stability in the region? The media, policymakers, and political analysts have used several competing narratives to explain the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. This paper examines three competing narratives of the armed conflict. The first narrative focuses on domestic causes of the conflict; the second narrative examines the role of Russia in the insurgency; and the third narrative describes the conflict as a result of Western policies and interference.

Key words

Ukraine, armed conflict, domestic politics, Russia

1. The first narrative: domestic causes

The first narrative explains the armed conflict by focusing on domestic causes within Ukraine. This narrative is largely advocated by mainstream Russian media, Russian policymakers and some scholars. The Russian media have described the events in late 2013-early 2014 as a coup executed by extremist, neo-fascist groups. As early as in March 2014, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the radical right group "Right Sector" of challenging the public order using "the methods of terror and intimidation" (Kramer 2014). According to the official Kremlin position, by ousting a legitimately elected president, the

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