

Historical Myths, Enemy Images, and Regional Identity in the Donbass Insurgency (Spring 2014)

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Abstract: This article examines the use of the Soviet Great Patriotic War myth by Russian journalists in the news coverage of events in the Donbass in spring 2014. It begins by setting out the key aims pursued by Russian policy and propaganda in the course of the 2013-14 crisis in Ukraine. Next, it explores the ways in which the cultural memory of the Great Patriotic War has been instrumentalized in the Russian media portrayal of Ukraine, with a particular focus on its use in the construction of enemy images and on the specificities of the reception of these images in the Donbass region. Finally, it traces the genealogy of such imagery back further, to the Party of Regions' deliberate creation of the image of the "fascist/banderite" threat in the Donbass for the purposes of electoral mobilization and manipulation over the past decade.

Introduction

With each new stage of the "Ukrainian crisis"—the mass anti-government protests in Kiev (the "Euromaidan" or the "Second Maidan"); the flight of President Yanukoyvch; annexation of the Crimea; the anti-Maidans in the South-East; and the separatist uprising in the Donbass—Russia's intervention in Ukraine's domestic affairs has increased. This process has been supported by Russian mass media, which, over the past decade, have been definitively transformed into a vehicle for Kremlin propaganda. The Russian mass media coverage of the events in Ukraine has been dominated by tropes and categories adapted from the Soviet