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An unconventional security actor: Civil society in the Ukraine crisis

For the fifth year, the 'Ukraine crisis' has been at the top of the East European security agenda. Above all, the Maidan massacre, the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia and the Donbas war were a challenge for Ukraine's existence as an independent nation. However, the crisis is also associated with the revival of civil society and the increased willingness of Ukrainians to take charge of defending the country's sovereignty. This came as a surprise to scholars of post-communist civil societies, traditionally perceived as weak and lacking political influence.

This paper investigates the rise of Ukrainian civil society as a security actor. It works with securitisation theory as the paradigmatic constructionist approach to security. Emphasising security as a discursive act, the theory allows to understand how political issues become problems of security, endowed with their specific meanings and governed by particular actors. The critical question here is who gets to speak security? Given the importance of the discursive dimension of security, the reconstruction and dissemination of a 'truthful' narrative of the events have been a priority in Ukraine and Russia alike. The paper focuses on the case of Ukraine Crisis Media Centre (UCMC), an NGO formed in response to the Russian occupation of Crimea in March 2014 which became a major international hub for communicating the situation in Ukraine. UCMC elucidates the dynamics of the birth of a non-state security actor with the power to grant legitimacy to other security agents in the ongoing armed conflict.