

# The 'mantra of stability' versus human security in the post-Soviet space

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**Abstract:** *This article provides an understanding of current human security challenges in the post-Soviet space. Cognisant that such studies are rare, we hope to provide a stepping stone for further theoretical and empirical research. Drawing on comparative case studies of Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the article argues that while securitisation techniques deployed by authoritarian and/or semi-authoritarian regimes vary in scope, degree and targeting, they share two important commonalities with the overarching aim of ensuring regime endurance. First, the exogenous threats, whether real and/or willfully constructed by the ruling regimes, provide a convenient context in the Balzaquian sense to construct effective securitisation acts. Closely related to the first point, the external environment and internal deliberation by ruling elites fuel a specific narrative-constructing strategy of illiberal state-building ideology, which normalises anti-human rights policies in the specific countries. Concurrently, we problematise the traditionalist approach and treat the 'audience' as a monolithic and passive entity. Making use of Bourbeau and Vuori's work on resilience, we demonstrate that securitisation is not a straightforward bottom-up process, but also is filtered through societal resistance.*

**Key words:** *human security; securitisation; democratisation; illiberal state-building*

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## 1 Introduction

This article has a dual ambition. On the one hand, it aims to unravel the complex securitisation techniques used by authoritarian and semi-authoritarian leaders in the former Soviet Union, to ensure regime endurance. On the other hand, it aims at demonstrating the pockets of resistance to such practices and assess the societal ability to organise itself when facing securitisation. There are abundant studies on authoritarianism in the post-Soviet context. However, the linkage between securitisation, human security and regime protection remains under-explored. In an attempt to fill this vacuum, the article draws on the comparative case studies of Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, with the aim of identifying the overall structural challenges to human security posed by their respective governments. The logic behind this approach is informed by Kenneth Booth's contemplation (Booth 2007: 108-113) that security is an instrumental concept in the hands of the ruling elite and that there is a need to reverse this approach, by embracing an emancipatory approach in one's conceptualisation of security. This, of course, is easier said than done in a region where geopolitical thinking remains prevalent against the backdrop of protracted conflicts and mutual threat perceptions of states. In this context, conceptualising humans as referent objects of security is a challenging, yet promising, direction (Simão 2013). While the case selection has largely been determined by the research profile of the participants, it also provides a geographic and thematic representative outlook on the region.

Before proceeding with the theoretical framework, it is important to chart the terrain – the post-Soviet space – upon which this study will be constructed. First, the demise of the Soviet Empire has left Russia (then the central state) with a perceived special status and capacity to intervene in the internal affairs of former member states of the Soviet Union (USSR). The rapid disintegration of the USSR removed central control mechanisms, allowing the eruption of armed conflicts in the Caucasus, Moldova and Central Asia. The recent conflict between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists in the Ukrainian Donbas and Luhansk regions, as well as the earlier annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, confirms the volatile geopolitical situation in the region. Second, the initial promise of democratisation in the region proved illusionary. As noted earlier by Ambrosio (2014), and confirmed by Freedom House (2017), two things have taken place: the rise of populism and authoritarian consolidation. Two of our four case studies, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, are categorised as consolidated authoritarian regimes (with respective Freedom House scores of 6,61 and 6,0 out of 7); Armenia is ranked as a semi-consolidated authoritarian system (5,39); and Ukraine is still understood as a hybrid regime (4,61). Third, but also connected to the second point, over the past 25 years the countries in the post-Soviet space have developed competing foreign policy preferences, pursuing integration with Russia or the European Union (EU) and the west, in general, which, in turn, may account for regime outcomes (Nodia 2014).

Following the theoretical framework, four case studies are presented, and for each the categories of generator of risks, dealers of fear and risk managers, are identified. Moreover, these case studies will also demonstrate the specific typology of the human security challenges in the

respective countries. After the four case studies, the article concludes with an overview of the current state of human security in the post-Soviet space, and suggests some recommendations and traces further avenues of research.

## 2 Theoretical framework: Making sense of human security in post-Soviet space

Since the notion of 'human security' was introduced during the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development report by Mahbub ul Haq, the concept has gained currency among practitioners and academics. The report spelled out two underlining philosophies for constructing the 'human security' paradigm – the 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. It went on to specify seven interrelated dimensions of the 'human security' concept – economic security; food security; health security; environmental security; personal security; community security; and political security (UNDP 1994: 24-25). The concept of 'human security' was introduced as an aspiring paradigm for constructing the post-Cold War security architecture. It reflected the common revolutionary *zeitgeist* of critical security studies. At the same time, the concept reflected the philosophies enshrined in two pillar international agreements: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Lastly, it should be noted that in the post-Soviet space, the focus on human security is not really a novelty. Since the conclusion of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which envisioned a common security architecture for transatlantic and communist countries, the human dimension has been enshrined in all pivotal documents.

Furthermore, when the CSCE was converted into the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1995, the human dimension basket attained more institutional characteristics. All four countries used as case studies are members of OSCE and partake in this security co-operation. While some progress has been made in respect of the human dimension, the overall security philosophy of the OSCE remains rather state-centric (Adler 1998: 147-149). While the OSCE's human dimension remains an important regional mechanism for advancing democracy and human rights protection, it nevertheless falls short of the same political and philosophical vigour that the concept of 'human security' entails. To be sure, since the term was introduced in the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, the frantic academic debates have not abated. A group of scholars argued for the 'narrow approach' to human security, viewing state violence as a foundational element, while the other camp argued that since the humans are referent objects, non-state driven issues such as natural disasters should also be included (Owen 2004).

Despite the fact that academic debates are continuing to date, on the policy level 'human security' has gained significant ground. Under the aegis of the UN Trust for Human Security, the Human Security Unit (HSU) had completed projects ranging from peace-building, supporting agricultural projects to reducing the risks in the nuclear site (UN Human Security Unit 2009). Despite significant policy achievements, the lack of

conceptual clarity about human security resulted in uncertainty about the different dimensions of human security. The moving target of addressing the most pressing threats to human security has up to now perhaps been the only strategy of policy makers. It resonates with the attempt of Michael Owen (2004) to reconcile the 'broad' and 'narrow' perspectives on human security. As a first step, Owen suggests that the 'broad' concept of security should be measured against a 'threat threshold' to determine in which direction each case should be prioritised.

In our research, the threat threshold approach is used to map out the pressing issues of human security in the post-Soviet space. The problem with this approach is who, and which threats to human security are being assessed. As Acharya (2001) has demonstrated, states tend to highlight those aspects of human-related security that are in harmony with their national security strategy. Notwithstanding this, Owen's approach to balance the inclusiveness of the concept and attempt to operationalise it is valuable. While the human security concept has been challenged (Buzan 2004; Paris 2001), there have been attempts to conceptualise human security, for example by King and Murray (2001). Floyd (2008) has argued that human security holds an important normative value, but falls short of the analytical edge that conventional securitisation theories offer. At the same time, it should be noted that this early redundant approach to human security was due mostly to the studies of resilience that were developing in fields other than security studies (Bourbeau & Vuori 2012).

Hence, a more harmonised approach should be adopted, following the theoretical framework of Balzacq (2005). Drawing on an earlier research framework developed by the Copenhagen School and ameliorating it further, he divides securitisation into three categories: the securitising agent; the context; and audience. The categories that Balzacq suggests can be adjusted: The 'generator of risks' can be matched with the 'securitising agent' category; the fear dealers facilitate the perception of the 'context' within the wider population; and, lastly, the 'risk managers' can be found in the category of 'audience'. This is where our work takes issue with the reading of the 'audience' through a passive lens. Making use of the 'risk managers' category, we view the audience as a reactionary entity. In this way, we preserve the normative coherence of the conventional theory but suggest a further avenue to challenge it.

This having been said, securitisation is not only achieved through a discourse-based enterprise, but can also be attained through routine practice without a securitising agent making a specific claim of a special situation. Bourbeau explains that the path to securitisation does not lie solely through the declaration of an exceptional situation by the securitising agent/s, but also through the routine exercise of control by the state agent, where bureaucracy and technology play a pivotal role (Bourbeau 2014: 189-190). He further contends that these two logics do not necessarily exclude each other but can, on the contrary, complement each other (Bourbeau 2014: 196). Indeed, it would be erratic to look merely for some exceptional discourses that do or do not create the process of securitisation, as the mundane, systematic and target practices by authorities can also create successful securitisation. In these types of cases, considering resilience networks is valuable given that although some of the routine-based securitisation may take place in the shadows of state

secrecy, the relative freedom of access to information in modern polities provides a sufficient argument for societal mobilisation.

To summarise our theoretical deliberations, a two-pronged approach becomes evident. On the one hand, we proceed with the suggestion by Owen (2004) to apply a threshold of pressing threats on human security dimensions; on the other, the study will proceed with both discourse-based and routinised securitisation techniques. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a useful tool for narrowing our approach to the most pressing issues of human security. While the UNDP (1994) clearly demarks two concepts, the overlap is significant. The HDI includes 12 components that include health; education; income; inequality; gender poverty; employment; human security; trade; mobility; the environment; and demography. The HDI covers the first four dimensions of human security spelled out in the UNDP 1994 report, except the categories that fall under the 'freedom from fear' basket, namely, personal, communal and political security.

Our focus on these dimensions is driven by three things. First, there is an understanding that human security is an emancipatory concept and is aimed at nourishing human dignity. Second, from the theoretical perspective, given that three of the four cases under review resort under the high human development category,<sup>1</sup> with only Kyrgyzstan in the middle human development range,<sup>2</sup> the narrowing towards freedom from fear is justified. Lastly, as the study is primarily concerned with the way in which securitisation techniques are used to ensure regime endurance, the stress on civil-political dimensions cannot be avoided. To be sure, we are not attempting to be dismissive of other crucial dimensions that human security entails. To the contrary, we attempt to bring in the useful aspects that are defined to be interrelated with HDI (UNDP 1994). Both the Belarus and Kyrgyz cases prove that the socio-economic politics of the states can also be securitised. At the same time, huge military spending in the cases of Armenia and Ukraine deteriorates the socio-economic fabric of the state, which in turn affects human security.

### **3 Armenia: The enhancement and militarisation of the police forces as human security challenge**

As underlined in our theoretical framework, the protracted conflicts remain the most potent challenges to human security in the post-Soviet space. The dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region with neighbouring Azerbaijan has driven the country to extreme militarisation. According to the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC), in 2016 Armenia was the third-most militarised country in the world and had been in the top ten since 2005 (Mutschler/BICC 2016). It has been noted by scholars of authoritarianism that the external insecure environment of Armenia has translated into a build-up of internal strong coercive apparatus (Hess 2010). The BICC index also calculates all garrisoned units per capita,

1 Armenia is the 85th, Belarus is the 50th, Ukraine is 81st in the world in the 2014 UNDP HDI report <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

2 Kyrgyzstan is the 120th in the UNDP HDI report <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

which includes the state's police force. It is thus logical to claim that the key area of securitisation in Armenia remains the militarisation of the police, which in turn exerts pressure on the other baskets of human security, both by denying resources for development of other institutions, by limiting civil-political freedoms in the country.

While the exact number of personal police remains a state secret, the oppositional media argued that per 100 000 inhabitants in Armenia, there are 1 000 police officers (Gevorgyan 2015). Thus, analysing how the growth of the internal repressive mechanism is affecting the human security dimensions is a natural step. The increase in the coercive force often falls into the logic of the routine-based securitisation, and at the same time includes discourse-based elements, which allows the tracing of our categories (Bourbeau 2014).

Armenia's post-independence trajectory of statehood has been marred by political violence. The post-electoral and/or popular protests were stifled with excessive and disproportional force in 1995, 2001, 2003 and 2008. In 2015, the police dispersed the supporters of 'Electric Yerevan', who protested against a 17 per cent electricity price increase. The police deliberately targeted journalists and arrested 200 people on bogus charges (Human Rights Watch 2016). The investigation into police violence by a Special Investigative Service (SIS) did not reveal any tangible outcome (AI+, 2016). Most recently, in July 2016, the police heavy-handedly responded to a peaceful protest that had gathered in solidarity with the armed group, Sasna Tsrer, which captured riot police headquarters in Yerevan. The police fired stun grenades into the peaceful crowd, causing first and second-degree burns and injuries. As in 2015, there was a deliberate intent to target journalists covering events, many of whom were arrested on charges of 'organising mass disorder' (Human Rights Watch 2017b).

Reflecting upon Burobeau's recommendation (Burobeau 2014: 194-195) to look for critical junctures and eventually path-dependency, when dealing with routine-based securitisation, it becomes apparent that in Armenia it starts with the post-election rallies in 2003 and crystallises in 2005. According to the Chairperson of Helsinki Citizen's Assembly of Vanadzor, Artur Sakunts, the first step in institutionalisation of 'the police state' was when the Ministry of Internal Affairs was restructured into the police attached to RA government. In this way, it was removed from parliamentary oversight and turned into guardians of the regime (Interview with Artur Sakunts 2017). Coupled with routine-based securitisation, the limitations of civil political rights, especially those related to freedom of assembly, are justified through a construction of securitisation speech acts. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict provides a ready-made context in a Balzaquian (2004) sense to do this. For example, the 2008 March first post-electoral violence, which left 10 people dead and where an estimated 150 opposition activists were arrested (Human Rights Watch 2009), was rhetorically legitimised as a preventive step to ensure Armenia's internal as well as external security. By the same token, during the 'Electric Yerevan' protests, the head of the Armenian police was attempting to pacify the protesters by shouting 'Wake up, this is a small country that people have died for' (Aravot 2015).

It only remains to conjecture on how the rhetorical construction of a linkage between internal stability and external security plays out within

the wider public. However, rhetorical devices such as ‘making our borders safe, and ‘guaranteeing security of our soldiers’ are especially sensitive for the population due to the universal draft (of males) in Armenia. The events of 2008 highlighted to the authorities the importance of social media manipulation. An influential network of bloggers and media professionals, often linked to state agencies, have been actively engaged as fear dealers, with the deliberate agenda to highlight security issues, especially during the political protests. As Simão (2013: 143-142) argues, the elites in the post-Soviet space tend to use the securitised situation to further their grip on power and to accumulate resources. The year 2008 served as a second critical juncture for boosting the state-coercive apparatus, when then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan ascended to presidency. His formative experience of serving in almost all security agencies of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh clearly had transcended into the body politics of Armenia. Thus, increases in police funding and powers during his tenure should not strike one as unusual.

**Table 1: Total budget of Armenia; funding of police and crime rates**

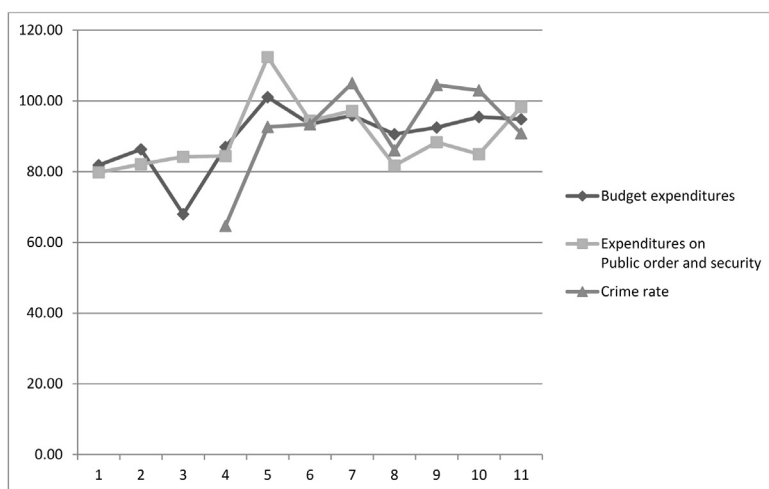
	Total Budget Expenditure in USD	Expenditures on Public order and security <sup>a</sup>	Crime Rate <sup>b</sup>
2005	813 608 541,65	37 497 130,10	*
2006	994 214 252,58	46 992 296,08	*
2007	1 151 911 473,40	57 235 386,60	*
2008	1 694 957 481,03	67 966 489,48	9 271
2009	1 949 380 969,07	80 526 101,44	14 339
2010	1 928 916 668,04	71 658 515,46	15 477
2011	2 064 029 432,99	75 916 993,40	16 572
2012	2 152 947 679,38	78 112 185,57	15 776
2013	2 376 535 990,93	95 568 081,65	18 333
2014	2 569 974 045,36	108 198 410,31	17 546
2015	2 691 957 781,44	127 405 743,30	17 043
2016	2 839 160 908,25	129 568 946,80	18 764

- a. In the official budget reports of Republic of Armenia the spending category of ‘Public Order and Security’ include three components— the funding of the Police, the National Security System and the Justice system. As this study is concerned primarily with the growth of the Police, which is marked as ‘Maintaining of Public Order’, it is not considering the spending on the National Security System and spending on Judiciary.
- b. The data on the crime rate (number of crimes) presented by the RA Police starts only in 2008. While we acknowledge that the omission of crime rate from 2005-2007 is problematic, it nevertheless does not invalidate the overall logic of the securitisation presented here.

The increase in police force numbers occurred under a veil of secrecy, and despite Armenia’s international obligations, as foreseen by the European

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and reinstated in a 2012 Constitutional Court decision to ensure freedom of information requested to state agencies, the police still is not transparent (Interview with Artur Sakunts 2017). Lastly, typical of routine-based securitisation, the presence of a self-perpetuating mechanism is important. According to investigative journalists, the state police benefits from extra budget funding, stemming from the closed-circuit television traffic surveillance of Armenia. In 2011, the police received around US \$24 million; in 2012 US \$27 million; in 2013 US \$41 million; and in 2014 US \$42 million (Barseghyan 2014).

**Table 2: Calculated without taking into account 'extra budget funding' due missing of the data from year 2008 to 2011 and 2014 for 2016**



Despite all the funding and significant aid from OSCE, the Armenian police have chiefly been focused on ensuring regime survival rather than public order and fighting crime. The general crime numbers have more than doubled since 2008. There were 30 crimes per 100 000 inhabitants back in 2008 when the police was receiving half the amount of budgetary allowance of that of today, while the number has since continually increased and, by 2016, had reached 63 crimes per 100 000. Furthermore, as confirmed by international researchers (Pearce et al 2011) as well as domestic monitoring (Helsinki Citizen's Assembly of Vanadzor 2017), the general public remains highly mistrustful toward the police given that they are seen as a politically-motivated body.

Despite all these developments, the increase in the police force has not gone unnoticed. Investigative journalists exposed the true logic behind public spending on the police, and the issue eventually was elevated to the political agenda. While this resilience has not reversed the policy, it nevertheless has highlighted the costs of further increasing police funding.

In any event, if the logic of the increase in police funding was to stifle the civil-political movements in the country, in some instances it has failed. For example, the ‘Electric Yerevan’ protests in 2015 eventually resulted in the reconsideration of the tariff plan and an external audit was called for the company that was managing Armenia’s electricity networks. Moreover, while the ‘context’ of the protracted Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is often instrumentalised in domestic politics, it also puts the ruling regime in a vulnerable position to societal mobilisation. When the armed group captured the riot police station in Erebuni in July 2016, they received considerable societal support in terms of protests. This was mostly due to the fact that there was a high degree of mistrust towards the government, after the ‘April War’ of 2016, when Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh clashed with the Azerbaijani offensive, resulting in a high death toll due to the mismanagement of defence policies. The ‘risk managers’ in Armenia, notwithstanding the increase of the coercive apparatus in the country, were able to organise mass societal mobilisations. While these cases are not typically effective at reversing or causing the adjustment of the state securitisation policies according to the resilience theory, they nevertheless are indicative of a societal potential to deflect securitisation policies.

4 Belarus: Divorcing human development from human security

The Belarusian case is especially interesting as it testifies against the optimistic assumptions that human development and human security are mutually reinforcing. Belarus has the highest HDI in the post-Soviet space, closely approximating the level of very high human development. The achievements in economic security, accessible healthcare and education wrapped in President Alexander Lukashenko’s socially-oriented economy building (Belta 2017) is willfully opposed to civil-political freedoms. To be sure, this strategy has so far been successful, but is increasingly challenged by the worsening economic situation in the country. At the same time, prioritising a certain dimension of human security over others should not be surprising, as governments tend to leave out the political dimension of human security in their security blueprints (Acharya 2001).

Table 3

Human Development Index	Legatum Prosperity Index	Ease of Doing Business Index
Poland (39)	Poland (34)	Lithuania (17)
Lithuania (41)	Lithuania (43)	Latvia (24)
Latvia (44)	Latvia (48)	Poland (45)
<b>Belarus (50)</b>	<b>Belarus (58)</b>	<b>Belarus (63)</b>
Russia (55)	Russia (61)	Russia (92)
Ukraine (78)	Ukraine (64)	Ukraine (112)

Table 4

Economic Freedom Index	Freedom House Index	Press Freedom Index
Lithuania (21)	Lithuania (free)	Poland (19)
Latvia (42)	Latvia (free)	Lithuania (32)
Poland (50)	Poland (free)	Latvia (37)
Russia (92)	Ukraine (partly free)	Ukraine (127)
<b>Belarus (150)</b>	<b>Belarus (not free)</b>	<b>Belarus (157)</b>
Ukraine (155)	Russia (not free)	Russia (148)

In Belarus, the key areas of securitisation are those relating to freedom of assembly, criticism of the government, enhancement of the police force and state-surveillance. While Belarus is a member of OSCE and participates in European Eastern Partnership framework, it is not a member of Council of Europe (CoE), hence the European Court of Human Rights, unlike Armenia and Ukraine. Hence, despite its proximity to the EU, the normative pressure on Belarus to improve its human rights records is timid. The authoritarian regime led by the charismatic President Lukashenko has been in power for 23 years and through these years has developed an extensive coercive apparatus and a monopoly over the economy. Furthermore, the Western-led regime changes in the post-Soviet space, particularly in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2005) and Kyrgyzstan (2004), have been interpreted as security threats to the country's stability (Korosteleva 2012). To counter Western influences, a state ideology has been developed since 2003, with pervasive special departments across the country. Although there are elements of communism in this ideology, it is in many ways more sophisticated due to its strong bureaucratic structure and large social support base (Usov 2009: 99-102).

The enforcement of the unique Belarusian model of development entails both discourse-based (Balzacq 2004) and routine-based (Bourbeau 2015) characteristics. Given the charismatic profile of President Lukashenko, the securitisation through narrative has been common place, which should not obfuscate the bio-political techniques of mass-surveillance and the growth of a strong police force. The overall securitisation logic in Belarus is aimed at ensuring regime endurance. In doing so, a two-step strategy of control over economic activity and political dissent is used. While the latter is self-explanatory, the control over economic activity allows for resource centralisation and redistribution, through which government safeguards its support. It also serves as a disenfranchisement mechanism: denying free mobility to the citizens; and channels for alternative funding opportunities for any political activity.

Against the backdrop of the worsening economic situation in the country since 2009 (Usov 2009), President Lukashenko has steadily securitised the work force issue. In 2014 Lukashenko introduced a new law that prohibited *kolkhoz* workers (approximately 9 per cent of the total work force) from leaving their jobs at will; a change of employment and living location now required permission from governors. The discourse that Lukashenko has deployed in relation to this new law clearly demonstrates that he stands as a securitising agent (generator of fear) (Charter 97 2014):

I put this question straight, because I have the decree, which I've spoken about, on my table. I was handed it over in connection with, let's put it straight, 'serfdom'. We'll give all powers to governors. You cannot quit. You may remember that I said it in my address to the nation. Start working so that people cannot say: you press on us, but you don't work properly. The government agencies will receive all powers in the nearest week. Don't expect unlimited freedom any more.

Similar regulations were introduced for the forest industry earlier in 2012 (Onliner 2012).

Although these decrees somehow were bearable for Belarusians, given the specific context of the Global Economic crisis of 2008 out of which Belarus has been more successful than other post-Soviet states. The

'Ordinance Number 3: On Preventing Freeloading', which effectively was aimed at taxing those clustered as 'under-employed' with 250 dollars, was met with strong societal resilience. Thousands went to protest in Minsk and other cities of Belarus and, as a result, around 400 people were detained while the order was frozen for a year but not scrapped (BBC 2017). While the Bill was not reconsidered, societal mobilisation was able to re-adjust the securitisation policy, something that has been argued (by Bourbeau & Vouri 2012). The risk managers, in this case the scattered oppositional parties and members of civil society, were able to rally significant popular support on the socio-economic issue and challenge the state's continuous monopolisation of economic life. Again, this did not result in overall structural changes in the economic life or at least full reconsideration of the Bill. However, this event is indicative of the fact that state policies can be reversed, and one should be cautious to treat 'audience' as a neutral and monolithic entity.

The routine-based securitisation of the economic activity is facilitated through well-funded law enforcement bodies, for example, the police and the KGB, as well as the pro-regime youth organisation, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRYU). These state-supported agencies may be considered fear dealers. While the former is tasked with dealing with dissent in the country through enforcement, the latter plays an ideological role in supporting the regime's policies. The crackdown on political dissent and serious limitation of oppositional activities have been the rule of thumb in Belarus. Opposition activists, journalists, writers and political scientists critical of the government have become prisoners of conscience or have had their freedoms largely limited. No political party has been registered since 2000 (Human Rights Watch 2017a).

As in Armenia, Belarus has one of the strongest and largest police apparatuses in the post-Soviet space. According to international observers, the police-to-person ratio in Belarus is the highest in the post-Soviet space, and is six times higher than the Soviet level ever had been. Belarus has 1 442 law enforcement officers per 100 000 people. The world average is 300 police officers per 100 000 people, while the UN officially recommends 222 police officers per 100 000 people (Charter 2013: 97). Last year, Amnesty International reported that the Belarusian governmental structures used mobile networks to monitor free speech and dissent (Charter 2016: 97). There was no visible resilience against these developments as the social contract where Belarusians have affordable living standards but do not engage in civil-political movements for some part holds.

Concurrently, BRYU provides an ideological sanitary line for the regime. When on 25 March 2017, the symbolic Freedom Day, Belarusians led demonstrations against the rule of the current regime, the BRYU with the communist party tidied Kuropaty – a wooded area on the outskirts of Minsk, Belarus. During the Great Purge (1937-1941), vast numbers of people were executed at this location by the Soviet secret police, the NKVD (Tut.by 2017). In this way, the regime is trying to deny the opposition any mobilisation against the communist ethos in the country. However, this narrative, based on stability and a socialist way of life, has continuously been challenged by opposition youth groups. Since the early 2000s, youth organisations such as 'Malady Front', 'Zubr' and others, have challenged state narrative by appealing to the national symbolism of

Belarus (stifled by the regime), the prospect of EU integration, and the need for free and fair elections (Nikolayenko 2015). While these mobilisations were not successful, their emergence and continuity are indicative that even in repressive countries such as Belarus, the risk managers still maintain the capacity to challenge the government.

It may be concluded that in Belarus the securitisation process involves both routine and discourse elements with the overarching aim of guaranteeing regime stability. While the high HDI undoubtedly is an accolade for the Belarusian authorities, this is achieved through tight state regulation of labour activities and the stifling of political dissent. At the same time, as the increase in tax has proved, the state-building philosophy merely anchored on social protection remains vulnerable to the economic shocks.

## 5 Kyrgyzstan: The 'state-sponsored' Islam versus 'foreign' Islam as human security challenge

Often viewed as the most liberal country among the five Central Asian states with the partial transparency of the government, a strong civil society, freedom of association and expression, and a relative freedom given to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Kyrgyzstan has gone through a challenging transition since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 2010 Kyrgyzstan's interim government (established after the Tulip Revolution in 2005) was removed after violent clashes in the southern city of Osh, and in 2011 Almazbek Atambayev assumed the presidency. Since then, the religious-ethnic cleavage largely dormant has been weaponised by central authorities against ethnic Uzbeks (14 per cent of the overall population), mostly residing in the southern part of the country. The external security challenges, including the country's proximity to Afghanistan, and foreign-sponsored religious activity including ISIS recruitment attempts, provide the ruling authorities with a convenient context (Balzacq 2005) to securitise religious and ethnic diversity in the country.

The key areas of securitisation include, but are not limited to, the increased powers of security agencies, empowerment of hate groups to spread misinformation, and the re-interpretation of religious minority rights. The securitisation models that Kyrgyz authorities (generators of fear) deploy are mostly discourse-based, where the state-sponsored version of Islam is promoted through fear dealers: state loyal clergy and social media groups, as the only true way of development. There is a wilful denigration of the other versions of Islam labelled as 'foreign', 'backwards', and often intertwined with discrimination against local Uzbeks. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan's HDI is the lowest in the post-Soviet space, namely, 120th out of 180 countries.<sup>3</sup> Although the country has moved economically from a 'low-income' country to the 'lower middle-income' category, according to the World Bank in 2014, poverty and economic inequality remain prevalent. The combination of external religious influences with the drastic economic situation makes fertile ground for further radicalisation.

3 Human Development Report: Kyrgyzstan', UNDP, 2016, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf)

Lastly, routinised security operations with little civil society oversight are carried out against the ethnic Uzbek population.

It should be noted that after 70 years of secular Soviet rule, the Kyrgyz founding government opened the door for Islamic influences supported by the Saudi Arabians in an attempt to regain the concept of nationhood (Policy The American Foreign Council 2017). At the same time, when the religious activity in the country attained political momentum, the authorities were quick to label these activities as attempts to destabilise the country by promoting the Muslim clergy and members of fundamentalist groups to assume state power. One of the most prominent Islamic groups in the country, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), came to Kyrgyzstan from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the early 1990s. It has evolved into a political opposition movement providing an Islamic alternative to regime corruption (Policy The American Foreign Council 2017). While the goals of the HuT are problematic, such as the establishment of a 'caliphate' through peaceful means, the authorities have drummed the actual threat that this organisation poses and categorised it as a terrorist organisation in 2003. The ideology of HuT is very popular in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad, especially among ethnic Uzbeks (De Lossy 2016). Uzbeks primarily reside in the southern part of the country, Osh, and have always been deemed religious and conservative. Another alarming development is that around 600 fighters from Kyrgyzstan joined the Islamic State (ISIS), 70 per cent of whom are ethnic Uzbeks (Putz 2015).

Apart from being religious, the rationale behind Uzbek radicalism is also associated with their unjust treatment by the state coercive apparatus. The apogee of discrimination against the ethnic Uzbek population were violent clashes in 2010 between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh. As a result, 420 people were killed (International Crisis Group 2012). It has been reported that since these events, Uzbeks have been subjected to illegal detentions and abuse by security forces and have been forced out of public life. Members of the Uzbek minority report that they are marginalised by the Kyrgyz majority, forced out of public life and their professions; most Uzbek-language media outlets have been closed; and prominent nationalists often refer to the Uzbek minority as a diaspora, emphasising their separate and subordinate status in the country (International Crisis Group 2012). Indeed, based on a report released by Amnesty International in 2015, the ethnic Uzbek population of Kyrgyzstan continues to be subjected to physical attacks based on their ethnic origin. State authorities refrain from considering or fully investigating these as hate crimes, and instead classify the activities as 'petty hooliganism' (Amnesty International Report 2014-5).

The societal resilience to this tragedy was understandably timid in its immediate aftermath. At the same time, due to the relentless work by human rights organisations, especially Bin Duino (risk manager) as well as strong international pressure, the Kyrgyz central government was obliged to address the issue. The progress is dubious, even after seven years, as the authorities tend to target only the ethnic Uzbek minorities, and the issues with involvement of the security apparatus is not duly considered (International Crisis Group 2016). Some progress in addressing the root issues of the conflict was made, through community-building projects and improvement in local governance in the region (Civil Union-Safer World 2014).

At the same time, even with the Osh tragedy in the background, the Kyrgyz government continues its efforts to monopolise religion in the country. Parallel to coercive measures, such as counter-terrorist measures aimed at monitoring the inflow of Kyrgyz nationals and the arrest of several individuals based on their alleged connections to terrorist organisations, including those linked to HuT by the State Committee of National Security (United States Department of State 2016). All major religious gatherings are under close surveillance by the State Security Committee. In addition, nearly all religious authorities in the country, including all but the top two members of the Spiritual Board of Kyrgyzstan's Muslims, the country's central religious authority, will be subjected to special screenings. Most significantly, the power of the 'grand mufti' will be significantly reduced, leaving his authority only over the Spiritual Board (Radio Free Europe 2011). The change is meant to diffuse the absolute authority of the grand mufti's post while ensuring that critical decisions, such as the appointment of new imams, remain channelled through a single body.

Furthermore, a special information campaign has been launched with the objective of securitising 'foreign Islam' and dissuade its spread through the population. Billboards were raised in major cities, where one image showed a Kyrgyz woman in traditional dress and another with a woman fully covered in a *hijab* with the caption 'Poor people, where are we heading to?' After the religious sections of the population criticised this approach, the President went on to a press conference stating: 'When we erected banners some smart people appeared and started pointing at miniskirts. Our women have been wearing miniskirts since 1950s, and they never thought about wearing an explosive belt.' He also added: 'No one should impose a foreign culture on us under the guise of religion'.

In addition to these measures, the government position is supported by the expansion of channels of communication. The *Facebook* platform 'We Are for Secular and Democratic Kyrgyzstan' (originally in Russian), which has more than 20 000 followers, is an arena to discuss and present personal arguments against the extensive penetration of religion in the lives of the people, and criticises the form of clothing that religious women and men are expected to wear. Judging from the large number of followers on this online platform, it becomes apparent that the securitisation practices mounted by the authorities were successful with some parts of the audience. However, the religious layers of society condemned this campaign, and the resilience to this securisation act was launched through an alternative social media campaign – the *Elechek* (the traditional hat worn by Kyrgyz women) group where they were criticising the government-led campaign. This instance again corroborates our concern of conceptualising the audience as a monolithic entity.

When analysing the current security situation and the ways in which the government has responded to it, a number of human rights protected by major international documents could be observed. Indeed, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Kyrgyzstan is a party, requires state parties to respect and protect the rights of the people residing in the territory of that country. This includes the right to life; freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom of assembly; electoral rights; and rights to due process and a fair trial. Kyrgyz authorities initially did not view religion as a threat to national security.

However, this changed when religion was used for political means. Addressing the continuous fragmentation of religious and political identities is not only important human security issue, but remains a pressing issue for the national security of Kyrgyzstan.

## 6 Ukraine: Unconventional warfare as human security challenge

The tug of unconventional warfare that Ukraine is currently facing remains the most pressing issue for human security in the country, but also entails security ramifications for the post-Soviet space at large. Since President Yanukovich was removed from power through popular protests in the winter of 2013-2014, Euromaidan, after he had made the controversial decision to reverse Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU, Ukraine has found itself in an unequal battle with Russia. Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his entourage presented the popular revolution as a *coup d'état* against the lawful President of Ukraine and deliberately securitised the rights of the Russian-speaking population largely residing in the eastern regions and Crimean Peninsula. The revolutionary context was exploited by Russia to swiftly occupy Crimea and support a separatist war in the Donbas and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

The military intervention and destabilisation in the east were cloaked in ambiguous legal rhetoric coupled with intense diplomatic and media campaigns (Allison 2014:1258). Furthermore, the warfare Russia launched, often dubbed as a hybrid or limited war, entails a serious strand of propaganda which aims not only at the persuasion of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine (now largely under Russian control or the puppet states Donbas and Lugansk Republics), but also cautions against any Western support for Ukraine. In addition to the huge humanitarian crisis involving more than 1 700 000 internally-displaced people (Internal Monitoring Displacement Centre 2016), the conflict puts pressure on the social and political dimensions of human security. There has been a sharp increase in the militarisation of Ukraine, effectively consuming 5 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Trading Economics 2017).

The key areas of the securitisation, namely, the growth of state surveillance powers; terrorism laws; limiting rights to associate, assemble and criticise the government; and cyber-security regulations and informal empowerment of the hate groups to spread misinformation, are intertwined processes justified by the situation of active war. At the same time, Ukraine's membership of the Council of Europe and its European aspirations provide the West with the necessary leverages to counteract such measures. Interestingly, even under the condition of the war, as will be demonstrated, the societal resilience remains strong. Similar to the Armenian case, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, although serving as convenient context for mounting securitisation policies, also restrains the capacity of the central government capacity for such actions. Both strong international attention and rather vibrant civil society are able to co-operate at critical moments to pressure the government.

The securitisation techniques used by Ukrainian authorities involve both discourse and routine-based paths. However, it should be noted that routine-based securitisation is rather a new phenomenon in Ukraine,

mostly connected to context of the conflict. Identifying the generators of fear, fear dealers and risk managers is challenging in the Ukrainian case given the fragmentation of the state. One clear direction is to look at the Ukrainian government as fear dealer. At the same time, this is true about the authorities of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which will be discussed briefly. At the same time, the category of the context of Balzacq (2005) – the Russian aggression against Ukraine is useful, while the audience, as in other cases, will not be treated as a singular phenomenon.

One of the most pressing issues in Ukraine is freedom of information. The countermeasures that Ukrainian government sought to respond to the Russian information war are problematic. In 2014, all Russian television channels were banned in Ukraine. In the same year, the Ministry of Information Policy was established which, along with the Ukrainian SBU and military, exerted pressure on the Ukrainian media, especially when reporting on the war or government activities. Furthermore, according to a Reporters Without Borders report, Ukrainian and foreign journalists were targeted in a defamation campaign by the *Mirotvarets* (Peacemaker) website which published the personal data of 4 086 journalists who visited the separatist regions with the help of Ukrainian hacker groups (Reporters Without Borders 2016). In 2016, 159 criminal proceedings were launched on attacks against journalists, which is 29 per cent higher than those of 2015 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2017: 28-30). In 2015, a cyber police unit was established to combat cyber-security threats. The SBU activities against information technology companies were allegedly conducted illegally, and a petition was launched to create an e-ombudsman in Ukraine (President.Gov.UA 2016). The SBU inspected the telecommunication company Intertelecom, where they searched the premises and seized equipment, accusing Intertelecom of having provided communication services to LNR and Crimea.

Ukrainian authorities' attempts to monopolise the information challenge were met with significant resilience (Mapping Media Freedom 2014-2016). After cyber, a petition was sent to President Poroshenko's office to establish the e-ombudsman in the country. Furthermore, in organising this resilience, the Ukrainian media community was able to rally international support. The Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) included in its resolution that the Ukrainian government should address the situation with the journalists (Srećko 2014). As a result of international and domestic pressure, the Ukrainian authorities had to adopt one of the most liberal media legislations, where institutional guarantees were enshrined to ensure the safety of the journalists, the libel was decriminalised, and so forth (Freedom House 2016). This example illustrates that not only the reading of the audience is problematic in traditional securitisation studies, but also that the international pressure on the state is not taken into account. In the same way as the 'de-communisation law' was cited by the Ukrainian court to prohibit the Communist Party in Ukraine, the Venice Commission recommended that the law be amended as it violates freedom of expression, speech, association and electoral rights (OHCHR 2017: 34).

The war naturally also increases the militarisation both in Ukraine and in the rebel-controlled Donetsk and Lugansk Republics, and gives security services free reign to conduct illegal actions. There are recorded series of

unlawful detentions, interrogations and threats to peaceful protesters by police officers, the SBU, as well as DNR/LNR armed groups in territories under their control. In the DNR and LNR, the practice of severe control over information coupled with ideological activities is carried out through youth organisations that act as dealers of fear. One example is the *Mir Luhanshchin* (Peace for Luhansk), which is created by armed groups with mandatory membership for the youth (OHCHR 2017). It would be too optimistic to imagine opposition to such practices in the rebel-held territories at this stage. However, over the time such possibilities might emerge.

Lastly, the war exposes the most vulnerable groups, IDPs, to even more danger. The IDP influx from separatist-controlled regions has been securitised by Ukrainian authorities. The OHCHR monitoring of the human rights situation in Ukraine from February 2016 to February 2017 recorded hate speech and inflammatory language towards IDPs and Roma people in Ukraine, visible in the media and among public figures. In his recent public statement, the Minister of the Interior, Arsen Avakov, attributed the huge increase in the number of the crimes committed to the influx of IDPs that came from the eastern regions of Ukraine, a statement repeated by his deputy (Bezruk 2016). While Ukraine's HDI remains largely unchanged, ranked 81st in the world,<sup>4</sup> the basic human needs of those directly affected by the conflict remain severe. With the worsening of the economic situation in the country, scapegoating strategies are likely to further target IDPs.

In this context, the ability of human rights NGOs (fear managers) to act in a co-ordinated manner and appeal to the public with signal voice, coupled with international support, drove the successful resilience. The strategy of early detection of hate speech and directly addressing the Minister's speech did not allow the securitisation speech to attain endorsement by the audience. In strictly theoretical terms, one may say that thus far there have been no significant changes in state policy, hence no re-adjustment of the securitisation. At the same time, the influx of IDPs did not meet the threshold of securitisation, and so the *status quo* was maintained.

The Ukrainian crisis remains the most pressing issue that continues to affect the human security of millions of people in the post-Soviet space. The pervasive conflict with a strong informational component remains a breeding ground for discourse-based securitisation. At the same time, routinised securitisation is slowly but steadily evolving, and the extent of its scope and endurance remains an open question. Despite these challenges, the instances of resilience vis-à-vis the securitisation of freedom of information as well as the inflow of IDPs demonstrate that even in a situation of war, the resilience can take place. Of course, this had to do with the weakness of the Ukrainian central government but, at the same time, this alone cannot explain the resilience. It is also about the quality of civil society, its organisational capacities and international support.

4 [hdr.undp.org](http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/UKR). (2017). Human Development Reports Ukraine. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/UKR>

Despite the failure of the two Minsk agreements, the peace talks continue to date. However, the prospects of reaching an agreement are slim (Sasse 2016). Hence, the humanitarian support for Ukraine is paramount, and at the same time, the Ukrainian authorities should be held accountable for the continuous protection of fundamental freedoms. The promise of further Western integration should follow a normative path rather than embrace the narrative of victimhood. Freedom of information, often the first victim of war, should be guaranteed and supported by international partners. This, in turn, will allow more ownership of a peace perspective for common citizens. Lastly, while the operations of state security in the context of war are understandable, these should be based on legal grounds and court orders.

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations: Searching human security in the post-Soviet space

The analysis of the above cases indeed casts a pessimistic shadow on the prospects of human security in the post-Soviet space. Geopolitical thinking remains prevalent in the broader region, and despite the limited success of security co-operation between the states under the OSCE umbrella and other regional organisations, the cleavages of divergent state-building strategies have become more pronounced. The earlier conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the recent conflict in Ukraine attest to the fact that, while it is believed that gross violations of human rights result in conflicts (Human Security Unit 2009), the reverse is also true. At the same time, one should not be timid and should not consider all aspects of national life, especially when sections of the population live under conditions of war (Booth 2007: 105-106). The Ukrainian as well as the Armenian cases prove that in certain scenarios, even in the case of protracted conflicts, the citizens are able to organise and challenge securitisation policies and protect their way of life.

Our two-pronged approach, where we make use of the securitisation theory of Balzacq (2005), but also problematise the reading of the 'audience' as a monolithic category (Bourbeau and Vuori 2012), proved a viable theoretical move. This is not to say that 'human security' is not a problematic concept to operate with. Indeed the theoretical and methodological issues connected to this term remain unaddressed. However, to remedy some of these shortcomings, we employed the 'threshold approach' (Owen 2004), to capture the most pressing issues. At the same time, this alone is not sufficient, and new avenues of theoretical work should also be charted. The question of ownership of the human security concept remains open. While the notion is often regarded as 'Western-centric', there is enough evidence to suggest that there is a significant Eastern (Asian) dimension to the term (Acharya 2001). The further advancement of the human security agenda should additionally address this issue.

The securitisation techniques and targets varied across the cases. As mentioned above, they share one commonality, namely, to ensure the continuation of unchallenged authoritarian rule in the respective countries. In the same way our cases differed in terms of human security challenges, so the capacity of civil society to deal with them differs. According to the Freedom House 2017 ranking, the civil liberties (the higher the score, the weaker the civil liberties) of Armenia is 4 out of 7; in

Belarus 6 out of 7; in Ukraine 3 out of 7; and in Kyrgyzstan 5 out of 7. This broadly characterises the openness of the respective societies. Another dimension to consider is the degree of commitment of the states to uphold human rights and democracy under international obligations. All four states are parties to the ICCPR, and the ICESCR, and also participate in the OSCE, which involves human dimension co-operation. However, only Armenia and Ukraine are members of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, which allows more tailored mechanisms to ensure the protection of human rights.

The different levels of the civil-political freedoms in our respective case studies are indicative of the fact that resilience was stronger in Ukraine and in Armenia as compared to Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. At this stage, it seems certain that both 'strong' resilience and 'weak' resilience are not only due to a state's coercive capacity, but also to the ability of the 'fear managers' to organise successful civic campaigns. Our work reflected the philosophy of Booth (2007) that the genuine emancipation of citizens is possible only if they challenge the state's monopoly over knowledge on security.

Indeed, as our case studies reveal, most of the human rights abuses fall within state secrecy initiatives or, after they have been committed, they tend to be relegated in that direction. Ensuring freedom of and access to information, even in cases of emergency, is the first step towards constructing human security. In the Armenian case, there have been discussions as well as investigations by civil society members as to why the police force is receiving so much funding, when the fight against criminality is not fulfilled to the best standard. Concurrently, there should be a willful approach of challenging narrative that internal stability and external security are inseparable. Although internal stability is important, the means of its achievement should be through nourishing human security and not through state coercion. The nexus between human development and human security can be appealing for the authorities. State violence always entails an international price; while channelling state funding to improve Armenia's HDI would not only ameliorate the well-being of the citizens, but it would also ensure long-term stability in the country.

In Belarus, civil society is not as vibrant as in Armenia or Ukraine, given the tighter grip of authorities. At the same time, the high HDI is achieved in contrast to human security. While this strategy has so far been successful, with the current economic downturn internal stability in the country is at risk. Civil society actors should negotiate the careful engagement of civil-political rights in the rather successful human development strategy of Belarus, which should also be supported by the international community. One pressing issue that civil society should focus its efforts on is the establishment of the institute of the Ombudsman as in other post-Soviet states. The gradual move from human development to human security would help the Belarusian authorities to improve its relations with its immediate Western neighbours, the European Union, which could bring more prosperity to the country.

In the case of Kyrgyz, the human security dimension can be achieved through human development. As the case study exhibits, the radicalisation of the Uzbek population is not only due to ideational contours, but entails strong poverty-driven aspects. The NGOs in Kyrgyzstan who work on

human rights issues are important, but they should also be accompanied with advocacy for larger representation of ethnic Uzbeks in political life. The increase in human development would allow the Kyrgyz authorities to ensure immunity to external penetration of radical religious elements. The genuine dialogue between religiously conservative groups and those that are inclined towards the state version of Islam or secularism would bring more internal stability to the country.

Lastly, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine remains the most pressing human security challenge in the post-Soviet space. The war effort and resurgent nationalism puts limitations on the freedom of information (Luxmore 2016), and provides a pretext for the growth of surveillance in the country. Furthermore, gross violations of human rights, especially hate speech, can be detected in both Ukraine and the rebel-held territories. The international effort should be directed at boosting freedom of the media in Ukraine, which remains largely under the control of oligarchs. The shift towards human security for Ukraine should be encouraged, as it will allow avenues of transitional justice to develop and become a condition for humanitarian assistance in the country.

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