DONBAS IN FLAMES

GUIDE TO THE CONFLICT ZONE

This publication is the result of work of a group of authors of various competencies: investigative journalism, politology, geography, and history. Written as a kind of *vade mecum*, this guidebook will familiarize the reader with the precursors, problems, terminology, and characteristics of the war in the Donbas. The book is targeted at experts, journalists, and representatives of international missions working in Ukraine. It will also interest a wide range of readers trying to understand and develop their own opinion on the situation in the east of Ukraine.

The electronic version of this publication can be downloaded from
https://prometheus.ngo/donbas-v-ogni

Content

Foreword. When the Truth Is the Best Weapon

In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries selected the term "post-truth" as its international word of the year. Objective facts have been losing their key role in politics and decision-making, causing an overwhelming proliferation of fake news and public opinion manipulation. Western countries have only now realized how vulnerable they are to post-truth, but Ukraine first started feeling it in the spring of 2014, when, after the victory of the Euromaidan Revolution, the Kremlin launched its massive propaganda campaign. Seeking to undermine Ukrainian statehood, both on the domestic (Ukrainian) and international level, Russian agitprop has been targeting every potential audience, from housewives to key decision makers.

After three years of war, against all odds, Ukrainian society has learned how to confront Russia's propaganda aggression through numerous initiatives aimed against the policy of post-truth. We believe that Ukraine's first-hand experience can be useful to other countries and communities that are just becoming aware of the new threats and challenges.

Ukraine has been countering Russian hybrid aggression in the Donbas and Crimea for three years. Our research aims to offer an introductory lecture for journalists, analysts, diplomats and experts trying to comprehend the situation in the East of Ukraine, the region's geographic and sociopolitical features, external and internal causes and stages of the war. We also want to steer you away from the models, stereotypes, and simplifications that often appear in the media. It is especially important for us to illustrate to our readers the hybrid nature of the military and propaganda aggression by the Kremlin, and outline the ways to counter it.

We would like to thank the InformNapalm volunteer community for providing source material for this research. We are also deeply grateful to the experts and journalists, who helped us with valuable ideas and advice during our work.

Chuhuiv
Kupiansk
Bilokurakyne
Balakliia
Svatove
Milove
← Kharkiv, Kyiv
Starobilsk
Bilovodsk
P07
Izium
Sviatohirsk
Rubizhne
Novoaidar
P22
Lyman / Krasnyi Lyman
Sievierodonetsk
Lysychansk
Barvinkove
Siversk
Sloviansk
Hirske
Shchastia
Karachun
Zolote
Stanytsia Luhanska
Kramatorsk
Popasna
LUHANSK
Druzhkivka
Kadiivka / Stakhanov
Bakhmut / Artemivsk
Brianka
Kostiantynivka
Alchevsk
Svitlodarsk
Perevalsk
Molodohvardiisk
Sukhodilsk
M04
Dobropillia
Novhorodske
Horlivka
Debaltseve
Lutuhyne
Izvaryne
← Dnipro / Dnipropetrovsk
Myrnohrad / Dymytrov
Vuhlehirsk
Khrustalnyi
H21
Sorokyne / Krasnodon
Dovzhansk / Sverdlovsk
Voznesenivka / Chervonopartyzansk
Pokrovsk / Krasnoarmiisk
Karlivka
Yasynuvata
Yenakiieve
Hrabove
Krasnyi Luch
Gukovo
Avdiivka
Makiivka
Shakhtarsk
Miusynsk
Antratsyt
Rovenky
Hirnyk
Chystiakove / Torez
Snizhne
Diakove
M03
Krasnohorivka
DONETSK
Ilovaisk
Savur-Mohyla
Zelenopillya
Kurakhove
Marinka
Mospyne
Stepanivka
Vuhledar
Amvrosiivka
Marynivka
Novoshakhtynsk
Novotroitske
Dokuchaivsk
Starobesheve
Kvashine
H20
Volnovakha
Kalmiuske / Komsomolske
Matveyev Kurgan
ROSTOV-NA-DONU
Boikivske / Telmanove
RUSSIA
M14
Sartana
Taganrog
← Crimea, Odesa
Novoazovsk
Shyrokyne
Mariupol
SEA OF AZOV

Legend:
Areas of militant activity in 2014
Territories liberated by the ATO forces in 2014
Occupied territories as of mid-2015
Contact line

Chapter 1. Donbas – the Panoramic Picture

Donbas on the Map of Ukraine

Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts are located in the east of Ukraine. They have many common features and are often joined under the name "Donbas".

The word "Donbas" is an abbreviation of two words: "Donetsky Bassein" ("Donets coal basin"). This term was first introduced in the 1820s by Yevgraf Kovalevskyi, a mining engineer, to mark the coal deposits in the basin of the Siverskyi Donets river. The Donets coal basin is of a considerable length – over 500 kilometers from the Dnipro to the Don. The total area of the geological Donbas is approximately 60 thousand square kilometers, which is 13 times the area of the Ruhr coal basin. It spreads over parts of the current Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts of Ukraine, as well as a part of Rostov Oblast of Russia.

The heavy industry of the Donbas was the factor that determined the region's administrative boundaries. Donetsk Governorate established in 1920 combined most of the industrial cities of the region. For the purposes of improving food provision to the workers of the Donbas, the territories of Pryazovia (the Sea of Azov area) and Slobozhanshchyna (Sloboda Ukraine), which were then mostly agrarian, were included in Donetsk Governorate. Lengthy reorganizations in the territories belonging to Donetsk Governorate eventually resulted in the appearance of the current Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

Industrial complexes of the coal basin are the core of these regions. Even the names of some cities speak about the mining industry: Shakhtarsk (City of Miners), Antratsyt (Anthracite), Vuglegirsk (Coal Mountain), Vugledar (Gift of Coal), Girnyk (Miner). For that reason, "Donbas" is used as a synonym for Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts combined.

However, many find this generalization objectionable. First, the borders of the oblasts do not match the borders of the coal basin. Mariupol in Donetsk Oblast and Starobilsk in Luhansk Oblast do not belong to the Donbas, while Pavlograd in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and Shakhty in Rostov Oblast do. Second, in view of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine, many Ukrainians speak against assigning any political meaning to the term "Donbas". Despite these considerations, we proceed from the

established tradition and the practical convenience of calling the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts the Donbas. At the same time, we recognize the logic of alternative approaches.

The east of Ukraine is mostly flat steppe country crisscrossed with river ravines, the largest being the Siverskyi Donets. In Luhansk Oblast, the Donets became the separation line between the troops of the Anti-Terrorist Operation and the militants. Another feature of the terrain in the region is the Donets Ridge – a series of hills rising up to 200-300 meters above sea level. The strategic height Savur-Mohyla also belongs to the Donets Ridge. The typical landscapes in the industrial areas include spoil banks.

Donets coal basin

Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts share a border with the Russian Federation. The land border between these oblasts and Russia is 923.24 kilometers long, out of which 409.3 kilometers (44.3%) are currently under the control of the militants of the DPR and the LPR. Additionally, Donetsk Oblast has access to the Sea of Azov, where the sea border between Ukraine and Russia presents its own problems.

One of the peculiarities of the land border between Ukraine and Russia is that it mostly lacks any natural barriers, such as large rivers or mountains. It stretches through mostly empty fields and grasslands. Until 2014, the eastern border was rather poorly equipped, because the Ukrainian-Russian border inherited not the outer border of the USSR (a state border with proper equipment) but its internal
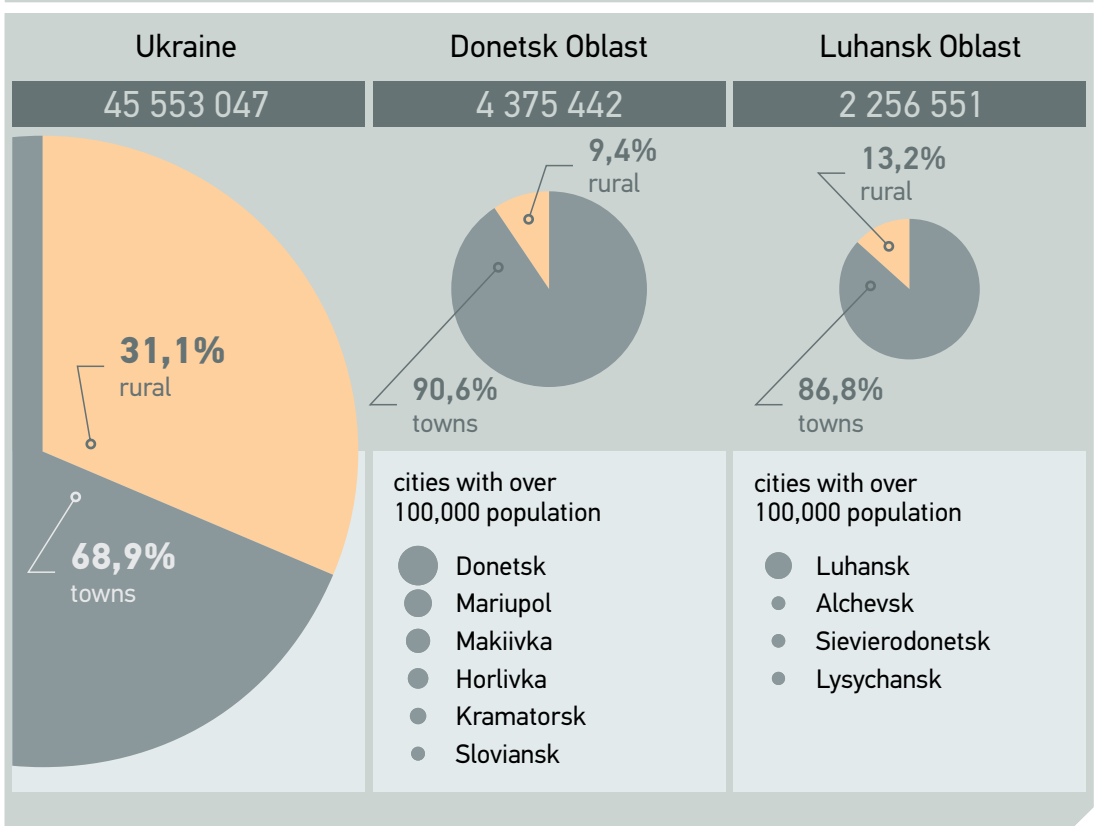
(inter-republican) administrative border. Its demarcation began only in 2010. This factor facilitated illegal crossings into Ukraine from Russia.

Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts are connected to each other and to the rest of Ukraine as well as to Russia with a network of highways and railways. The most important roads in the region are international highways M03, M04, M14, reaching the state border of Ukraine, as well as national roads, particularly, roads H20 and H21. Control over these roads (or parts of them) was essential for both sides of the armed standoff in 2014.

« The greatest dangers faced by a person in the Donbas are those associated with roads…

Anastasia Bereza, journalist

Population breakdown by the municipality type
(source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2013)

Ukraine	Donetsk Oblast	Luhansk Oblast
45 553 047	4 375 442	2 256 551

31,1% rural

68,9% towns

9,4% rural

90,6% towns

13,2% rural

86,8% towns

cities with over 100,000 population

- Donetsk
- Mariupol
- Makiivka
- Horlivka
- Kramatorsk
- Sloviansk

cities with over 100,000 population

- Luhansk
- Alchevsk
- Sievierodonetsk
- Lysychansk

Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts hold an important place among the 27 regions of Ukraine. Together they cover approximately 9% of the territory of the country, at the same time being the most densely populated and urbanized area. Before the war, approximately 16% of the total population of Ukraine lived in these two oblasts. Donetsk Oblast is first in Ukraine in the number of cities – there are 52 of them. Luhansk Oblast is in third place with 37 cities (after Lviv Oblast). Together the two Donbas oblasts contain almost 20% of all the cities of Ukraine. Most of them are in the center of dense urban areas, which developed around heavy industry enterprises.

The high level of urbanization in the central parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts also had its influence on the pattern of the hostilities. At the early stages of the standoff, the militants managed to establish control over the large cities. Storming such cities would have required special training, which the Ukrainian army lacked. The Ukrainian command did not dare to directly attack the militants' locations in densely populated residential areas, as it meant the risk of numerous casualties among the civilians and the troops. As the result, most of the urban areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts remained under the control of the DPR and the LPR.

In 2015, the Ukrainian parliament passed the act entitled "On the condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols". It required the cities, raions (subdivisions of oblasts), and oblasts that used communist symbols in their names to be renamed. Through 2016, in accordance with this law, 987 cities and 25 raions were renamed.

Of those, 166 cities and 8 raions are in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, including 78 cities and 3 raions in the occupied territories of the Donbas. The self-proclaimed DPR and LPR do not accept these changes and continue using the old names.

Further in this text, we will specify the names of the cities that have been renamed in the form "new name / old name". The detailed list of the renamed cities and raions of the Donbas is provided in the appendix.

As Seen by Analysts and Journalists

The Donbas as a whole is a subject that is covered from different standpoints. Journalists planning their trips to the zone of the military conflict should be especially careful about the words they are using. The words, together with the accompanying videos or photos, set the perceptions of this standoff. In order to comprehend the Donbas conflict, one has to take into account its characteristics that have been used by unbiased analysts, experts and researchers. It is essential to be able to distinguish well-reasoned statements from propagandist clichés.

The analysis below covers about 100 scientific texts by Ukrainian researchers in the social and humanitarian area that use the term "Donbas". These texts fall under two categories: those created before the conflict and those prepared during its rise. The words frequently used in these texts are included in the Top 100 list. Together they form the basis of the content and, to a certain extent, help to understand the Donbas.

Top 100 words about the Donbas in Ukrainian publications before the war

Top 100 words about the Donbas in Ukrainian publications after the beginning of the war

For example, from the Top 100 one can conclude that the region has been and still is regarded as a part of Ukraine. The regional specifics are often emphasized in the context of the difficult social and economic conditions as well as the strong attraction to the Soviet past. At the same time, if previously the Donbas was mostly described in relatively positive terms (formation, modernization, improvement, encouragement, investment, reconstruction, urbanization), since 2014 the region is mostly associated with problems of integration, safety, reclamation, overcoming, reconciliation, relocation, demarcation, and improvement of living conditions.

Participants of the anti-government protests near the seized SBU building in Luhansk.
One of the persons has "USSR" shaved on his head. April 9, 2014. Photo by Taras Shumeyko.

Comprehensive studies of the Donbas could not predict the events happening today. Before the conflict, the region had been referred to as the center of labor, industry, life, education, market relations, traditions, creativity. These terms disappear from the Top 100 after 2014, while the analytical vocabulary acquires such new Donbas-related terms as "military conflict", "(in)security", "external aggression", "casualties", "uncontrolled territories", "annexation", "separatism", "geopolitics", "occupation", "scenario".

In pre-war Ukraine, the Donbas was generally described as a relatively prosperous and influential region of Ukraine with marked social and economic tendencies. Since the beginning of the war, these impressions have changed sharply. Now the region is analyzed primarily as the territory of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and geopolitical standoff, a serious challenge for the national sovereignty of Ukraine.

By 2014, the expert community identified "Donbas" as a distinct socio-cultural trend; however, now we see only traces of the related associations, a vague image quickly losing its past attractiveness.

In the end, every person visiting the Donbas will most probably find their definition of this region of Ukraine. We gathered the region-related statements, which were suggested by Ukrainian and foreign experts, researchers, columnists, politicians, journalists, artists at various times and in various contexts. So, for our purposes, the Donbas is:

- ↗ its history embodies ... freedom, militancy, violence, terror, independence (Hiroaki Kuromiya)
- ↗ colonized steppe borderlands (Aleksandr Kaufman, Dmytro Bahaliy, et al)
- ↗ a land of "mass assimilation" and "intellectual genocide" (Oleksa Tykhyi)
- ↗ an integral part of Ukraine, "the land of the Ukrainian word" (Ivan Dziuba)
- ↗ russified mining towns and Ukrainian traditional villages (Vasyl Holoborodko)
- ↗ "feudal land" of "local lords", oligarchs; a regional business clan (Ella Libanova, Denys Kazantsev, Roman Ofitsynskyi, et al)
- ↗ "lumpenized land" using blackmail as a weapon (Oles Honchar)
- ↗ social expanse of poverty (Liliya Lebid)
- ↗ an old industrial region with signs of "necro-industrialism" (Yevhen Shybalo)
- ↗ a part of the "rust belt" (Sergii Plokhiy, Anders Aslund, et al)
- ↗ a frontier region, a contact border, a borderland (Yaroslava Vermenych, Oleksandr Osipian et al)
- ↗ a pole of the Ukrainian regional system, one of the "two Ukraines" – the opposite of Galicia (Mykola Ryabchuk et al)
- ↗ the Donets Ridge is a territory inhabited by residents with "traumatized consciousness of a Soviet person" (Oksana Mikheyeva)
- ↗ a region of "strong industry, advanced technologies (here and there) and old idols (everywhere) (Yevhen Sytnyk)
- ↗ a region of mythologized history (Andrew Wilson)
- ↗ a region of "darkened places, anomalous time zones" (Serhiy Zhadan)
- ↗ a land of regional patriotism (Kostyantyn Paustovskyi)
- ↗ miners' culture (Marta Studenna-Skrukva)
- ↗ "international frontline" (Vladimir Kornilov)
- ↗ "holy land", part of the "single space of the Holy Russia" (Vladimir Gundyayev)
- ↗ cultural synthesis of Ukraine and Russia (Illya Kononov)
- ↗ a non-homogeneous region – active and expectant, creative and common, dreamy and nostalgic, aggressive and abused (Vira Dodonova)
- ↗ an unstable region of radicalized worker movements (Charles Wynn)
- ↗ "the land of dreams" (Viktor Marushchenko)

Donbas (Un)Known to the World

Using the word "Donbas" and its spelling variations as the search terms in Google Trends, it is possible to make certain conclusions about the international interest towards the region. The infographics shows that in March, May, and August 2014 and February 2015, Google users' interest towards the Donbas increased significantly, albeit with certain oscillations – up to its historical maximum of the period from 2004 to 2017. By the frequency of sources of the queries, Ukraine is followed by Poland, Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and USA. However, starting from March, 2015, this interest gradually diminishes.

Google Trends data
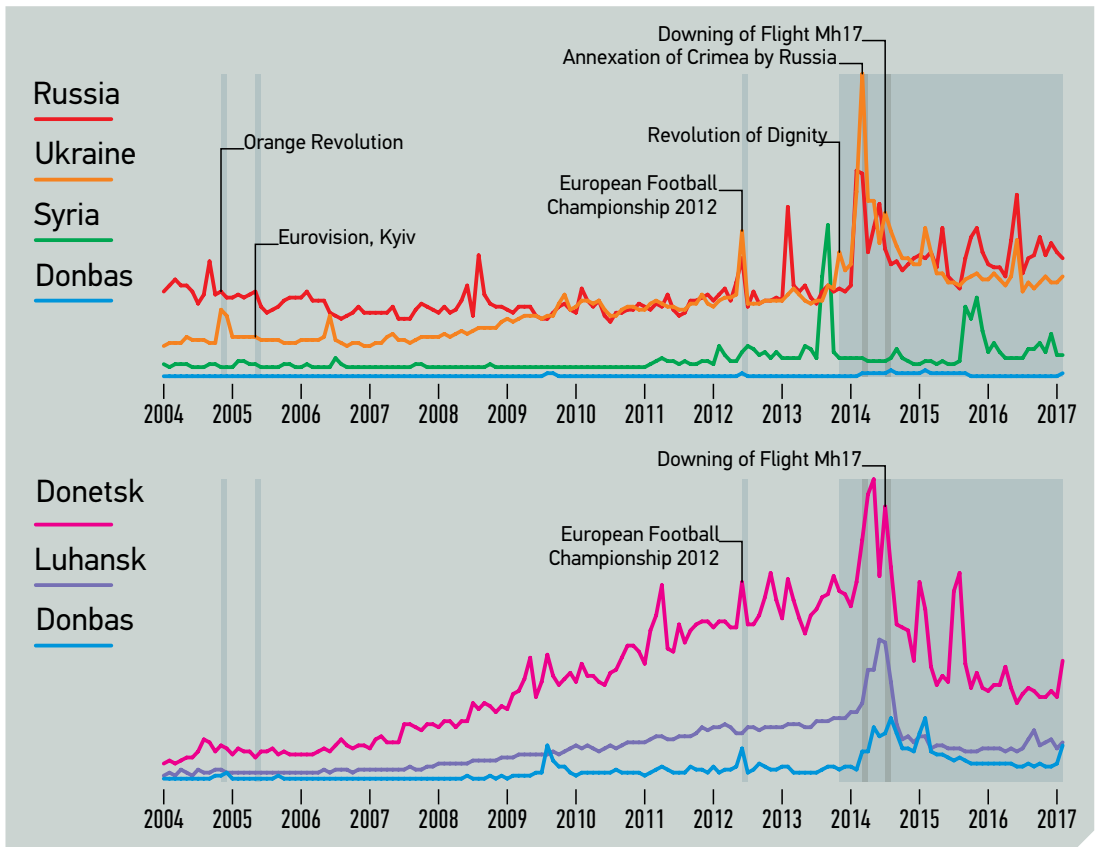
It is significant that in January 2017, Google users worldwide show one third as much interest towards a European region with an ongoing military conflict as in June 2012, when Donetsk became one of the host cities of the European football championship. In general, it is easy to see that the first successful steps towards forming a positive international image of the Donbas were made with the development

of the sports infrastructure during the independency of Ukraine. Donetsk hosted matches of the UEFA Champions League in 2004/2005 and 2006/2007, the Euro-2009 (U-19) youth football championship, the Bannikov international football tournament, and the 2005 Davis Cup tournament, the 2013 World Youth Championships in Athletics, and other international sports events. The opening of the Donbas Arena – the first stadium in the Eastern Europe designed to the "five star" category standards, the best stadium of Euro-2012, the winner of the Safety & Security Award at the 2013 Stadium Business Awards – attracted, as anticipated, wide public attention. Now the stadium that on the day of its opening hosted almost 50,000 visitors from all over the world has been badly damaged.

Unveiling of the official Donetsk logo for Euro-2012 football championship. Donetsk, July 2010.

Nowadays, Google search users are more likely to make Donbas-related queries on other issues: war in the east of Ukraine, Syria, Petro Poroshenko, Donbas militia, pro-Russian movement in Ukraine, the Crimean peninsula, Russia, Novorossia, Islamic State, Vladimir Putin, Debaltseve, war in Donbas, news Donbas, save Donbas, Ukraine war, Donbas map, Donbas people, Donbas facebook, battalion Donbas, Islamic state of Donbas, and others.

At the same time, the following queries still maintain certain popularity: Donetsk territory, Donbas Arena stadium, Donbas hockey club, Shakhtar football club, Donbas Palace Hotel, European football championship of 2012, Industrial Union of Donbass, DonbassAero airlines, and others.

Donbas Arena, the stadium opened in the center of Donetsk in 2009 in preparation to Euro-2012. On the right: the damage to the stadium as a result of the fighting in 2014.

《 ...These are the typical problems of an industrial region in a country without economic reforms. The Donbas continued to depend on the old Soviet industry, which hadn't been reformed, hadn't been modernized, but had been privatized. And this state of affairs, of course, led to the increased role of clans and criminal gangs and to the rise of a completely unique mentality [...] It was absolutely clear that this area would be marginalized and it would be used by certain groups to establish their dominance. In these industrial areas a certain group of "lords" always appears, who keep the local population not just in subservience, but in ideological subservience, and people begin to believe that this is the model that is best suited to preserve "stability".

Vitaly Portnikov, political columnist

Chapter 2. Could the War Be Avoided?

Ukrainian land

Up to the second half of the 18th century, what is now Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts remained sparsely populated. The steppes to the north of the Sea of Azov were the stage of the frequent clashes between Zaporozhian, Sloboda, and Don Cossacks on the one side, and Turkic nomads of the Crimean Khanate on the other. Victorious campaigns of the Russian Empire ended the domination of the Ottoman Empire along the northern coast of the Black Sea. This area ceased to be a dangerous borderland, finally becoming a part of Russia.

Streams of colonists flowed to the Donbas from Crimea, the Balkans, the Caucasus, central regions of Russia, and Western Europe. But the majority of the settlers were Ukrainians from neighboring territories. Ukrainians immediately became the dominant ethnic group in the region, which was evidenced by fiscal lists of the population in the 18th and 19th centuries, and later by the first general Census of the Russian Empire in 1897. In the 19th century, ethnographers also confirmed the Ukrainian character of the Donbas.

Since there were no separate Ukrainian administrative structures in the Russian Empire similar to the Kingdom of Poland or the Grand Duchy of Finland, the only way to determine Ukraine's borders was to identify the territories inhabited by the Ukrainian people.

Metaphorically the Ukrainian territory was defined by Pavlo Chubynsky in a poem - now the national anthem of Ukraine – "Ukraine has not yet died", written in 1862, as "From San to Don". The suggestion of the Don River as the eastern national border implied the inclusion of the Donbas in the area settled by Ukrainians. The more detailed picture of eastern Ukrainian territories was offered by ethnographic maps of the 19th century. The pragmatic approach dictated the need to take into account the existing administrative boundaries of the provinces of Russia, where the majority of population was Ukrainian.

This was the program that was presented by the Ukrainian national movement after the overthrow of the Russian monarchy in February 1917. The territories of the modern Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts mostly belonged to the eastern outskirts of the Ekaterinoslav and Kharkiv Governorates. Since they were mostly inhabited by Ukrainians, they were to be included in the Ukrainian autonomy.

On November 20, 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada adopted the Third Universal which proclaimed the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR), consisting of nine governorates, including Ekaterinoslav and Kharkiv. In the future, the border territories, where Ukrainians were the majority population, were anticipated to join the UNR. For example, at the time, the south-eastern outskirts of the modern Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts were a part of Taganrog District of the Don Host. According to the 1897 census, Ukrainians accounted for 61.7% of its population.

The Bolshevik leadership of Russia and its head Vladimir Lenin de facto recognized Ukraine within the Third Universal. However, the Bolsheviks immediately began an armed fight to seize power in the UNR. With the help of the Russian Red Army, the Soviet government was established in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (UkrSSR), proclaimed by the Bolsheviks, claimed the same territory as the UNR. Thus, the issue of the administrative Ukrainian-Russian border was to be resolved between the Ukrainian and Russian Soviet Republics.

Transformation of the border between Ukraine and Russia in the Donbas

LEGEND

Border of the Ukrainian National Republic, 1917

Don territories ceded to Ukraine in 1920

Territorial exchange of 1925

Territory gained by Russia

Territorial claims of Ukraine

Territory gained by Ukraine

Modern state border of Ukraine

Lenin's administration in Moscow did not question that parts of the Donbas within Ekaterinoslav and Kharkiv Governorates belonged to Ukraine. On February 25, 1919, the leaders of Soviet Ukraine and Russia confirmed the appropriate border line in a joint decision. In reality, Russia and Ukraine were governed from the same center, so the issue of the border between the two Soviet republics was seen as an academic question.

After the defeat of the troops of General Denikin, the Bolsheviks finally asserted their authority over the Donbas. On April 16, 1920, to accelerate the post-war reconstruction, they combined the whole industrial region within a newly formed Donetsk Governorate. It included the eastern parts of the Ekaterinoslav and Kharkiv Governorates, as well as the part of the Donbas that before the revolution belonged to the Don Host. The new governorate became a part of the UkrSSR, so the territory of Ukraine increased significantly taking in parts of the Don land. In August 1920, Stanytsia Luhanska was added to the Donetsk Governorate. These were the borders of UkrSSR as it joined the Soviet Union.

In addition to industrial areas, territories settled by Ukrainians as early as the beginning of the 19th century (e.g. Taganrog District) were transferred to Ukraine. However, the administrative border between Ukraine and Russia significantly differed from the ethnographic one. The UkrSSR hoped to exchange the Russian populated eastern part of the Donbas for the territories of Voronezh and Kursk Governorates, where Ukrainians were in the majority. The issue of changing borders between the republics was considered for more than a year, but the decision accepted on October 16, 1925 was not in favor of Ukraine. Russia took back most of the areas of the Eastern Donbas and Taganrog, while Ukraine in return was given only small parts of Voronezh and Kursk Governorates. The UkrSSR's attempts in 1926-1928 to initiate a review of the unfavorable decisions were unsuccessful.

After 1928 and until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian-Russian border in the Donbas remained unchanged. The boundary between Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts was finalized in 1938.

The border of independent Ukraine is identical to the administrative border of the former Ukrainian SSR. This is consistent with the principles of international law and is enshrined in a number of multilateral and international agreements, including:

- ↗ Treaty between the Ukrainian SSR and the Russian SFSR (November 19, 1990);
- ↗ Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation (May 31, 1997);
- ↗ Treaty Between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian State Border (January 28, 2003).

Since Ukraine's independence, the Russian Federation never officially put forward any territorial claims to the Ukrainian Donbas.

Rust Belt

The economic development of the Donbas is mostly determined by mineral deposits, primarily coal. In this regard the Donetsk Basin is similar to other old industrial zones, such as the Rust Belt in the U.S., mining regions in Great Britain, the Ruhr and Saar regions of Germany, Silesia in Poland, Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. These regions have a high level of urbanization. They used to develop at a rapid pace. But the decline of heavy industry in the economy and the inability to compete with newly industrialized countries (China, India, etc.) brought unemployment and social vulnerability.

The first coal mines and steel mills in the Donbas appeared in the late 18th century. Then the workers were mainly Ukrainian-speaking peasants from nearby villages. The rise of coal mining, steel, and later machine-building industry, occurred in 1880-1890's. The need for labor led to significant population growth in the region. Skilled workers from Russia and, more generally, people of different nationalities looking for better life, were coming to the Donbas. Foreign investments and companies from Belgium, France, Germany, and Great Britain boosted the local economy. The first name of Donetsk - Yuzivka - comes from the name of John Hughes, a native of Wales, the owner of a steelworks. The Donbas was one of the main industrial centers of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.

The typical mindset of the Donbas population was formed in the Soviet period, and it has remained the same to this day. Because of the demographic devastation during the Holodomor - the famine of 1932-1933 - the Ukrainian countryside was not a major donor of human resources for the growing industrial cities of the Donbas. The demand for labor was satisfied with people from all over the Soviet Union, creating an international, predominantly Russian-speaking environment in urban agglomerations.

Soviet propaganda cultivated the image of the heroic working class. In the 1930s, the movement of champions in production was a signature sign of the Donbas. The most famous of them was Stakhanov movement named after Alexei Stakhanov. In 1935, he set a record for coal extraction and became an icon of Soviet miners. In 1978, the town of Kadiyivka in Luhansk Oblast was renamed Stakhanov. Another episode of Donbas heroic history was the Young Guard, an underground youth group that was active in Luhansk Oblast during the Nazi occupation in 1942-1943. The nostalgia for the former glory and the devotion to the memories of the anti-Nazi resistance were successfully used later by Russian propaganda in the politicization of the Donbas.

Despite the constant glorification of the Donbas by Soviet propaganda, its population faced unresolved social and economic problems. Worker strikes began in the Donbas in the 1960's, long before the Solidarity movement in Poland, peaking in 1989-1990. The strikers demanded better living and working conditions and reviews of company management. The great hope was that the independence of Ukraine would help resolve social problems. This created the precedent of a powerful political alliance between national democratic forces and the miners in the fight against the communist regime.

Contrary to expectations, with independence, the economic problems of Ukraine only deepened. The collapse of the interconnected industrial complex of the USSR, the primary consumer of the Donbas production, and painful transition from a planned to a market economy led to the decline of factories and mines. Unemployment increased sharply. Social problems were compounded by rising crime and industrial pollution. In the years preceding the conflict, Donetsk Oblast was ranked last among all regions of Ukraine in terms of human development index. Luhansk Oblast was also at the bottom of the list.

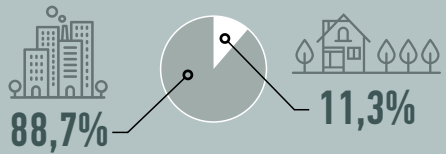## Snapshot of an average resident of the Donbas before the war

Born in Ukraine

75% born in Donetsk or Luhansk Oblasts

10% born in other regions of Ukraine

Lives in a city or town

88,7%

11,3%

Monthly consumption

21 pcs eggs

20,1 kg milk products

1,7 kg fish

1,8 kg vegetable oil

6 kg meat

3,1 kg sugar

8,7 kg vegetables

4 kg fruits and nuts

6,2 kg potato

8,7 kg bread

average age **45** years
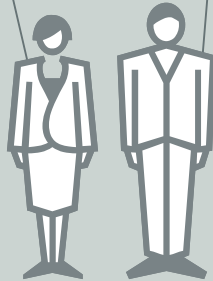
average age **39** years
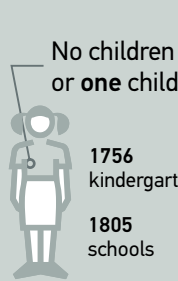
No children or **one** child

1756 kindergartens

1805 schools

Observes aging population

+24,5%

1989 – 2014

population over 65 years old

Dies at 70 years old

65 years

76 years

Most likely dies of

64,7%   **17,7%**

of the total number of deaths

Receives income from

salary

pensions, stipends, financial assitance

Observes negative net migration

2518 persons per year
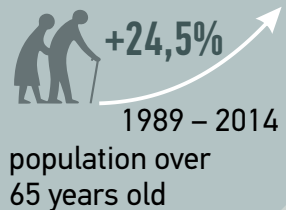
Mostly spends money on groceries

50,4% groceries

4,3% alcohol and cigarettes

2,2% enterntainment

0,8% education

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine

However, the output of Donbas economy remained significant. Anthracite coal is mined here, and it is used by all thermal power plants of the country. Coking coal went to steel production, which, along with agricultural products, is one of the main exports of Ukraine. Donbas business owners became the richest people in Ukraine. They converted their influence into political projects such as the Party of Regions. The importance of Donbas industrial enterprises for the economy of Ukraine has been a contentious subject. The opinion that the region "gives more than it receives" from the central government is popular, but it is not supported by any economic evidence. For example, in 2010 the share of Donetsk Oblast in Ukraine's GDP was 12%, but the share of subsidies received by the oblast from the state budget was 20.9% of the total allocation for all oblasts.

The industrial facilities are located in urban agglomerations. Many factories are located in Donetsk, including: 4 steel and 1 non-ferrous metal works, 25 coal mines, 26 machine building plants, and 8 chemical plants. There are 2 steel mills and 19 machine building plants in Mariupol. Luhansk has 9 large industrial complexes. These cities formed the basis of the industry in the region. Company towns, with a single factory being the foundation of the local economy and a major source of employment, are a typical feature of the Donbas. For example, Severodonetsk was built around a chemical plant, Vuhledar exists because of nearby coal mines.

Similar and different

The latest and, for the time being, only census of independent Ukraine was conducted in 2001. For reference, we will use the data obtained in the last USSR census of 1989. Both censuses show that the most numerous nationalities in Ukraine (including Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts) are Ukrainians and Russians, and the most spoken languages are Ukrainian and Russian.

Most numerous nationalities
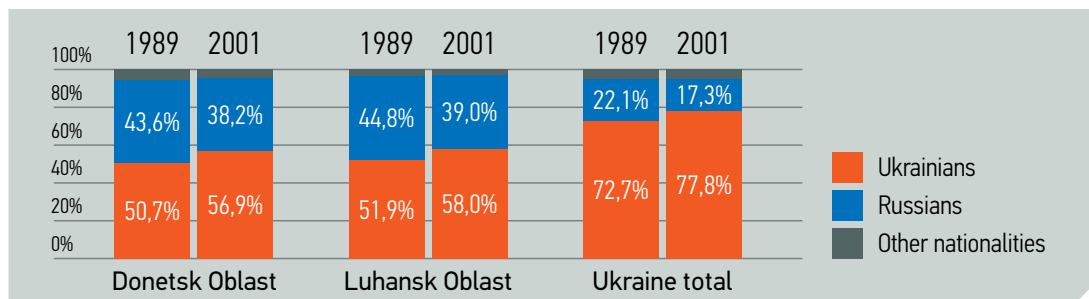
Even though the share of ethnic Russians in the population of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts is significantly higher than in Ukraine as a whole, Ukrainians are still the majority here. According to the 2001 census, in the Donbas Russians were the majority nationality only in 2 districts of Luhansk Oblast (Stanytsia Luhanska district and Sorokine district), and in 7 cities of regional significance: Donetsk, Makiyivka, Yenakiieve (Donetsk Oblast), Sorokyne / Krasnodon, Dovzhansk / Sverdlovsk, Khrustalnyi / Krasnyi Luch, Kadiivka / Stakhanov (Luhansk Oblast).

Between the 1989 and 2001 censuses, the share of Ukrainians in the population increased, while the share of Russians decreased. This was true for both Ukraine as a whole and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in particular. To a certain extent, the decrease of the share of Russians can be attributed to their migration to the Russian Federation after 1991; however, the main reason is the change of the national identity of many citizens of the independent Ukraine. After the collapse of the USSR, being a Russian national, as claimed by many people of different ethnicities, including Ukrainians, was no longer "prestigious". On the contrary, many citizens of Ukraine, regardless of their ethnic origin, started to identify themselves with the Ukrainian political nation, and that was the meaning they associated with the concept of "nationality" during the 2001 census.

Most spoken languages
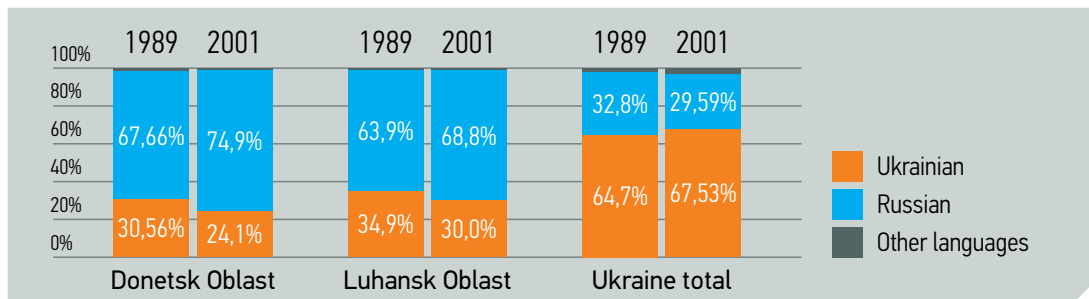
While Ukrainian is the most common native language in Ukraine, and the share of all citizens claiming Ukrainian as their native language increased between the 1989 and 2001 censuses, the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts is different.

For most of the Donbas population Russian has been and still remains their native language. From the territorial perspective, Russian-speaking people are the majority in the urban communities of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Ukrainian-speaking areas are located mostly in the north and west of the region and are mainly rural. The census data shows that the share of Ukrainian-speaking population in these regions decreased as compared with the USSR period. This was due to the depressive trends in the rural areas and urbanization accompanied with Russification.
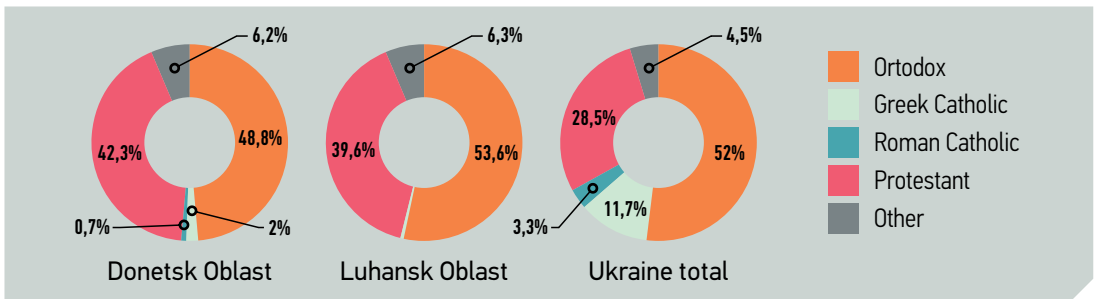
The absolute majority of the population of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, just like in all of Ukraine, is fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian.

Composition of the population of Eastern Ukraine in the 2001 census by ethnicity and native language

Nationality
- Ukrainians
- Russians

Native language
- Ukrainian
- Russian
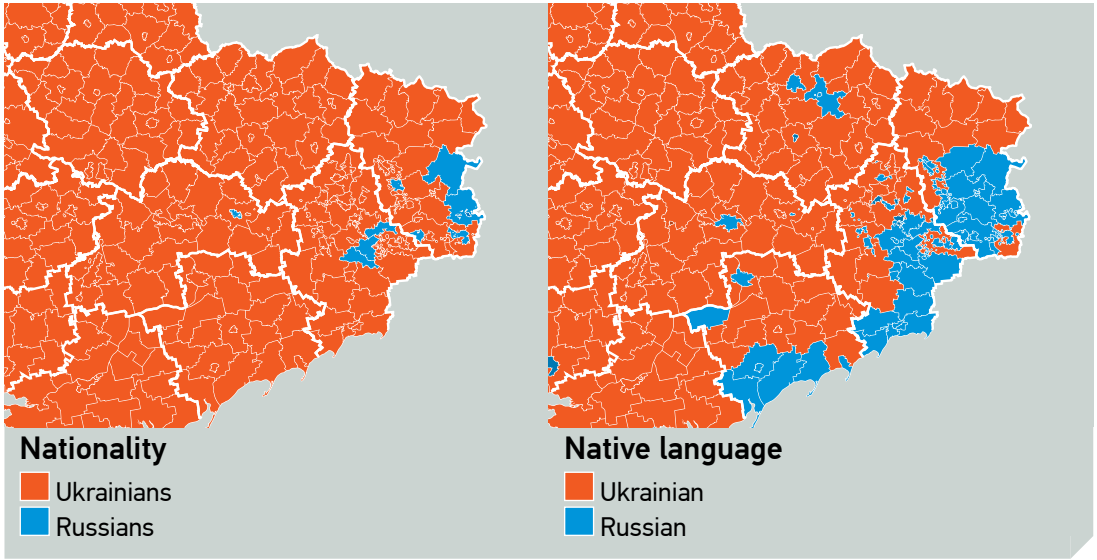
The distribution of religious beliefs in the society can be to a certain extent evaluated on the basis of the data of the State Committee on Religions of Ukraine, containing the information on the number of registered religious organizations. As of 2013, religious communities in the region were represented in the following proportions:

Religious communities

Donetsk Oblast: 6,2% / 48,8% / 2% / 0,7% / 42,3%

Luhansk Oblast: 6,3% / 53,6% / 39,6%

Ukraine total: 4,5% / 52% / 11,7% / 3,3% / 28,5%

Legend:
- Ortodox
- Greek Catholic
- Roman Catholic
- Protestant
- Other

The proportion of religious organizations in the region is similar to that in all of Ukraine: Orthodox Christians are the majority.

None of the ethnic, language, or religious factors make Donetsk or Luhansk Oblasts significantly different from the rest of the country. There is no distinct political differentiation in the Ukrainian society

based on cultural background. On the contrary, there is the tendency towards mutual assimilation and the possibility for each individual to choose their ethnic, language and religious identity. Therefore, the war in the Donbas is not an internal conflict based on ethno-political or religious differences, like those in Ulster, Karabakh, or Bosnia

Voting Rights

On December 1, 1991, the All-Ukraine referendum on the support of the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine was held. At the national level, 90.32% of the citizens voted for independence. The level of support for independence in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts was almost the same and rather high: 83.9% and 83.86%, respectively. During the period of 1991-2015, Ukraine held 6 presidential elections and 7 parliamentary elections, which ensured sufficiently frequent transition of power among political groups at the national level.

Donetsk Oblast holds the top spot in Ukraine by the number of registered voters with approximately 9% of the total. Together with Luhansk Oblast in the 7th place, the Donbas represents almost 14% of the total number of Ukrainian voters.

Judging by the results of the presidential campaigns, the voters in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts mostly supported the winning candidates. Donetsk Oblast favorites won four electoral campaigns, those of Luhansk Oblast – three campaigns. During the 22 peaceful years, the Presidents of Ukraine that won the vote in Donetsk Oblast were in office for 17 years. Luhansk Oblast favorites held the President's office for 12 years. These presidents were Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, and Viktor Yanukovych – that is, all presidents except Viktor Yushchenko.

Describing the political engagement of the population of the region is not a simple task. Of the 352 political parties of Ukraine, only 12 were established in the densely populated Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. However, the voters consistently supported the national-level political forces established in Kyiv, rather than local parties. In parliamentary elections, the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts mostly voted for the Communist Party of Ukraine or for the ruling political forces (for example, the "For United Ukraine" bloc). This remained true up to 2006, when the Party of Regions supporting Viktor Yanukovych became their main favorite. Both the parties supported by Donbas voters and the people from that region were always properly represented in the parliament of Ukraine.

> « By the end of the 1980s through the beginning of the 1990s, a miner movement was quite strong in the Donbas, then later - in the 1990s – it was either bought or banned...
>
> Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

None of the political forces most strongly supported by the voters of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts presented itself as a single-region party. None of the local parties stated as its goal the independence of the Donbas or its unification with Russia. The mainstream of the political life of Ukraine had no tradition of Donbas separatism.

Depending on the political situation, political representatives of the Donbas tried either to expand their influence to the entire country or to minimize their opponents' influence through decentralization. The leaders of the Party of Regions were mostly concerned about strengthening their personal

administrative and economic influence, and were quite successful in that, too. However, they failed to dominate the culture and ideology on the national scale. To prevent his opponents' "ideological expansion" into his main electoral regions, Yanukovych's party raised the issue of the federalization of Ukraine, securing the status of regional languages, and generally the right of certain regions to live "side by side rather than together".

The Party of Regions won the parliamentary elections three times (in 2006, 2007, and 2012); Yanukovych was the Prime Minister in 2006-2007, and in 2010 he won the presidential elections.

Therefore, before the war, the Donbas was always actively involved in the politics at the national level and was able to have its interests represented in Kyiv.

Unsolicited patronage

Officially, the Russian Federation never advanced any territorial claims to Ukraine. With the possible exception of Crimea, Moscow was interested in being able to influence the politics of the Ukrainian government, rather than claiming specific territories.

Ever since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia has never stopped hoping to restore the political unity with most of the ex-Soviet republics. The European Union became a model of integration. Following the EU example, Moscow emphasized economic integration as the prerequisite for the political format.

Membership of the post-Soviet republics in the Customs Union of the Eurasian Economic Union was to become the first step. For Ukraine, which stated its intentions to integrate into the European economic and political structures (the EU and NATO), the Customs Union with Russia was less attractive. Balancing between the East and the West, Ukrainian governments for quite some time kept to the principle of the so-called "multi-vector" foreign policy.

In 2010-2013, Moscow increased its pressure on Kyiv. During that period Yanukovych was the President of Ukraine, and he had the reputation of a pro-Russian politician. He rejected the NATO integration policy and helped strengthen Russia's standing in the economy, ideology, security, and other important areas. The Kremlin put great hopes on Yanukovych becoming the leader, who would bring Ukraine into the Customs Union.

However, the President of Ukraine was also forced to take into account the pro-European popular opinion, and he also expected the West to provide financial aid. Therefore, the government initiated the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and was preparing for its signing in November 2013. At the last moment, under the intense pressure from Moscow, Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement, which triggered popular protests known as the Revolution of Dignity or the Euromaidan. When it became obvious that Yanukovych would not be able to hold the power and to bring Ukraine into the Customs Union, Moscow began its military aggression against Ukraine.

The ghost of Russian separatism in Ukraine appeared whenever Moscow became unsure of its position in Kyiv. In fact, it was a tool used to blackmail the Ukrainian authorities in order to keep Ukraine within the circle of Russian influence. For a long time, Moscow had been demanding federalization of Ukraine to strengthen its position in the peripheral regions. Autonomous peripheral regions led by pro-Russian politicians could have:

↗ prevented the consolidation of the Ukrainian society

↗ blocked Kyiv's resolutions unfavorable for Moscow

↗ prepared the base for Russian expansion.

Moscow had been encouraging outward tendencies in Ukraine for years. And here the Donbas was getting special attention. It was in the focus of government and non-government organizations of the Russian Federation, their branches in Ukraine, and pro-Russian organizations of Ukraine – of regionalist, leftist, and Orthodox character. Russian interests in Ukraine were represented by the Institute of the CIS Countries (with its branches in Ukraine), the Coordination Council of the Organization of Russian Compatriots (with its branches in Ukraine), the All-Ukraine Social Movement "Ukrainian Choice", the political party "Russian Bloc", and others.

« At the History Department of the Donetsk University there was a group under the personal patronage of Aleksandr Dugin. Every year he arranged camps, offered ideological lessons to the delicate graduate youth and instilled neo-Eurasian ideas in them…

Taras Shumeyko, journalist

At the same time, several concepts of separating the Donbas from Kyiv were being developed.

"South-East"

Russian political strategists considered Crimea and the 8 oblasts in the South and East of Ukraine (Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk) as the most promising base for launching the federalization agenda.

During the 2004 presidential elections, the team of the pro-Russian candidate Yanukovych was convincing their followers that the team of their opponent (Yushchenko) was allegedly scornful towards the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine; that they regarded them as "inferior", when compared to the central and western regions. Although Yanukovych lost those elections, the south-eastern regions became the electoral base for him and his Party of Regions for many years. The contraposition of the different parts of Ukraine reached its peak on December 28, 2004, at the Congress of Deputies of All Levels in Severodonetsk (Luhansk Oblast). Yanukovych's supporters then attempted to proclaim the South-Eastern Ukrainian Autonomous Republic.

"Three ranks of Ukrainians", the banner used by the Victor Yanukovych campaign during the presidential elections of 2004. On this map, the residents of the Western Ukraine are assigned the first rank, while the residents of the southern and eastern regions are assigned the third and worst rank. Yanukovych's competitor, Viktor Yushchenko, was accused of having this vision of Ukraine. This false accusation was never properly refuted and took root in the views held by many residents of the Donbas.

« At first, local oligarchs pushed this «for Russia» movement to keep their assets in the Donbas...

Taras Shumeyko, journalist

The Kremlin's political strategists were actively spreading the message of the national and civilizational singularity of the south-eastern regions. It was accompanied by fabricated facts about their national identity and their history as a part of Ukraine. Moscow declared its readiness to protect the interests of the population of those territories from Kyiv.

"Donetsk Republic"

In order to legitimize the Donbas as a political entity, various historical and economical justifications were offered. The Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic, a short-lived (winter-spring of 1918) political formation created by the Bolsheviks, was presented as a historical tradition. The status and significance of this formation were exaggerated in every possible way. The Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic was set against the real republics of that time: the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. In 2011, the Director of the Ukrainian branch of the Institute of CIS Countries Vladimir Kornilov published a book titled "Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic: A dream shot dead", where he tried to prove the allegation that the Donbas was a part not of Ukraine but of the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic. Kornilov's work was widely promoted in Ukraine.
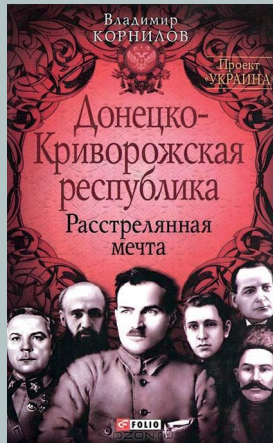
The cover of the book "Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic: A dream shot dead" by the Director of the Ukrainian branch of the Institute of CIS Countries Vladimir Kornilov. In this book, the author promotes the tradition of separate governance in the Donbas, contrasting it against the rest of Ukraine.

The economic reasoning was compressed into a very short statement: "The Donbas feeds Ukraine". The alleged "injustice" was that the foreign policy and ideological agenda were formed by the "subsidized regions", while the Donbas was deprived of its political rights.

Until 2013, the Kremlin actively supported the activities of pro-Russian organizations in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, in particular The Donetsk Republic, The Donbas for Eurasian Union, The United Donbas, and others. The propaganda of these organizations stated that the economy of the Donbas would benefit from Ukraine's integration with the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and not from the signing of the EU Association Agreement.

"Novorossiya"

The concept of Novorossiya offered a historical basis for the federative and separatist projects for the south-eastern regions of Ukraine. In the 18th century, Novorossiya Governorate was established in the Russian Empire. Its borders were always changing, but they never matched those of the current separatist "Novorossiya" project. For example, Kharkiv and the northern parts of Luhansk Oblast (Sloboda Ukraine) never belonged to the historical Novorossiya. On the other hand, the historical Novorossiya included, for example, Crimea and Taganrog.

Support for the idea of the "restoration of Novorossiya" as a distinct territory, culturally and politically different from the rest of Ukraine, first emerged in the early 1990s. However, until 2014 its followers remained marginalized. The gist of their argument was that all credit for the colonization of the steppe lands, establishment and development of cities was to be given to the Russian Empire. Therefore, "by right" Novorossiya was to belong to Russia rather than Ukraine.

The borders of the historical Novorossiya and Putin's "Novorossiya"

Legend:

Historical Novorossiya
- Borders of the Novorossiya Governorate in 1764-1775
- Borders of the Novorossiya Governorate in 1775-1783
- Novorossiya Governorate territory in 1796-1802

Putin's "Novorossiya"
- Oblasts planned to include in "Novorossiya"

« The conflict is not supported internally, it is an occupied territory. If the Russian army had come to a different region of Ukraine, it would have also found some supporters, let's say in Kharkiv or Odesa, and then we would be trying to understand the characteristics of that phenomenon too. Of course, it was easier to do in the Donbas for several reasons: there are more people with the «Soviet mindset» there. However, in Kharkiv there were many more Kremlin agents, because that was the center of the Russian destabilization of Ukraine.

Vitaly Portnikov, political columnist

This political project was given a boost by Putin at his annual press conference on April 17, 2014, when he said that Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa belonged to Novorossiya, which had never belonged in Ukraine. According to the President of Russia, Novorossiya was unlawfully included into Ukraine by the Bolsheviks. In the spring of 2014, the concept of Novorossiya Confederation was developed. It was to include 8 so-called "people's republics", created out of the eastern and southern oblasts of Ukraine. In reality, only the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics were formed in the particular districts of the corresponding oblasts.

The militants of Girkin's unit near Slovyansk city administration building, April 16, 2014. Photo by Taras Shumeyko. The seizure of Slovyansk and other towns in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast by Girkin's unit became the reason for the launch of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the East of Ukraine (ATO).

Chapter 3. Chronicles of War

Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine began on February 20, 2014, when Russian military began to reposition its units at the Strait of Kerch and on the Crimean peninsula in violation of the rules stipulated by Russian-Ukrainian treaties on Russian Black Sea Fleet status in Ukraine. This date is recognized by both the Ukrainian and Russian sides as the beginning of the standoff. It is engraved on the Russian Ministry of Defense medal "For the Return of Crimea" established on March 21, 2014. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in its statement released on April 21, 2015 and the Law of Ukraine "On amendments to some laws of Ukraine regarding the determination of the start date of the temporary occupation" of September 15, 2015 defined February 20, 2014 as the start of the Russian aggression.

In February and March of 2014, Crimea was the major theater of the conflict. Russia was successful in combining the operations of paramilitary and regular military units. Starting in April, the epicenter of the confrontation shifted to Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Unlike in Crimea, in mainland Ukraine the Russian tactics did not work so well. The first stage of the war lasted until September 2014 and ended with the signing of the Minsk Protocol (Minsk I). The most intense fighting during the conflict occurred in July and August of 2014. The second stage of the war took place in December 2014 through February 2015 - up until "Package of measures to implement Minsk agreements" (Minsk II) came into effect. Since then the standoff took the form of a limited positional conflict.

End of February 2014

After the mass shooting of Euromaidan protesters, the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych left Kyiv and escaped to Kharkiv, where on February 22 the congress of MPs and regional elected officials from the South-Eastern parts of mainland Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula took place. The situation echoed the congress of local government officials held on December 28, 2004 in Severodonetsk. Just like in 2004, the plans to establish an alternative power center in Kharkiv failed. Yanukovych did not show up at the congress, and its organizers fled to Russia shortly thereafter. Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine ousted Yanukovych and his cronies from the office in Kyiv.

Ukrainian government was still recovering from the revolutionary turmoil. In Kharkiv, Donetsk, Simferopol, Odesa, and other large cities, the camps of supporters of the new government (participants of the Revolution of Dignity) and Yanukovych regime backers (so-called Antimaidan) coexisted. It were the civil activists from both camps who were in control of the situation and often took over governing from the paralyzed official apparatus.

Meanwhile, Russia was making the last preparations for the invasion of Ukraine. The stationing of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol and other locations in Crimea facilitated the task of infiltration and accumulation of disguised regular troops in the peninsula. Select local government officials were recruited by Moscow and received instructions from Russia. Russian hybrid forces were joined by local Antimaidan supporters, riot policemen from Berkut units, who had just recently cracked down on the protests in Kyiv, and fighters of paramilitary Cossack organizations, who had arrived from Russia.

On February 23, the so-called National Will Rally was held in Sevastopol, where local pro-Russian activists announced that they would not recognize the new government in Kyiv and called on Russia to intervene. Right at the rally, the crowd "voted" for the new "people's mayor" – a Russian citizen and businessman Alexei Chaly. The takeover tactics first tested in Sevastopol would later be used by Russia in the mainland cities of the South and East of Ukraine. During the night of February 23, Yanukovych with his family and closest supporters left Ukraine aboard one of Russia's Black Sea Fleet warships.

On the morning of February 27, Russian soldiers wearing unmarked military uniforms seized administrative buildings of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Simferopol. In the following days mobile combat teams of the Russian Army spread from Russian Black Sea Fleet garrisons across Crimea. Acting in close cooperation, paramilitary groups and Russian military servicemen seized key facilities and communications of Crimea. Ukrainian servicemen barricaded themselves at their military bases and offered passive resistance. At the time of political uncertainty, none of the Ukrainian commanders was bold enough to take the responsibility for authorizing the use of weapons.

The rise of anti-government groups in Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine was branded by Russian propagandists "the Russian Spring". This label covered the pro-Russian unrest in both mainland Ukraine and Crimea.

March 2014

Within one month, all military bases and warships, along with the headquarters of the Ukrainian Naval Forces in Sevastopol, were captured by Russian hybrid forces. To seal the takeover of Crimea, a fake referendum on the status of the peninsula was held. The Russian government hastily signed a treaty with the self-proclaimed Crimean leaders for the "reunification" of Crimea with Russia. The treaty was signed into law by Russian President Putin on March 21, even before the military takeover operation in Crimea was over. The crew of the Ukrainian Navy minesweeper Cherkasy was the last one to surrender on March 25.

While the occupation of Crimea was underway, several cities of the East and South of Ukraine witnessed the first attempts to seize administrative buildings. Political "tourists" were bussed to the sites of anti-government protests in Ukrainian cities from Belgorod and Rostov Oblasts of Russia and

from Transnistria. Pro-Russian rally participants seized Regional Administration buildings in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Odesa and flew Russian flags on them. Following the example of Sevastopol, protesters appointed "people's governors" and "people's mayors". At pro-Russian rallies speakers were demanding the federalization of Ukraine and making Russian an official state language. They also rejected the new interim government in Kyiv and appealed for support to the Russian leadership.

Despite persistent attempts, pro-Russian protesters could not hold on to their success in mainland Ukraine in March 2014. Maidan activists and law enforcement officers loyal to the government stood against them. From time to time, street clashes between activists would turn into bloody fights. Some pro-Russian protesters and rally leaders were arrested, "people's governors" Pavel Gubarev and Aleksandr Kharitonov among them.

Step-by-step, the Ukrainian government started regaining control over the situation. On March 13, Interior Troops were reformed into the National Guard of Ukraine. Amid the revival of patriotic enthusiasm, participants of Euromaidan Revolution were readily joining its ranks

Russian troops surround the base of the 36th Separate Coastal Defense Brigade of the Ukrainian Navy. Perevalne, Crimea, March 2, 2014. Photo by Taras Shumeyko.

April 2014

The militants that helped Russia occupy Crimea were now redeploying to Southern and Eastern cities of mainland Ukraine. A major upsurge in pro-Russian unrest occurred on April 6-7. After a fight with the police, protesters seized Donetsk and Kharkiv Regional Administration buildings and proclaimed

the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) and the "Kharkiv People's Republic" (KhPR). In Luhansk, a mob seized the regional office of the Security Service of Ukraine with its firearms arsenal. On behalf of the "Joint Staff of the Army of the South-East", the leaders of Luhansk militants released on Internet the ultimatum to government authorities.

Militants from Igor Girkin's team ride the captured BMP-2 in the center of Slovyansk. In the foreground is the militant nicknamed "Balu", who had arrived from Crimea. April, 16, 2014. Photo by Taras Shumeyko.

« There was a really interesting moment in Slovyansk, when we went there with reporters from Polish TV stations. We were approached by a commander of all those fighters. Not Girkin, someone of a lower rank. And we asked him, "Who are you all?" And he said, "We are Donbas militia." I ran to the senior fighter right then and asked, "I'm sorry, are you all locals?" And I was answered, "No, we all came from Crimea." That was direct evidence of where they all really came from - though I had had no doubts whatsoever, who they were.

Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

The Ukrainian government managed to reverse and stabilize the situation everywhere, with the exception of Donetsk and Luhansk. Police prevented the mob from seizing the building of the Mykolaiv Regional Administration. The Kharkiv Regional Administration building was retaken by special forces of Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs. The leaders of the self-proclaimed KhPR and the most prominent separatists were arrested, though some of them fled to Russia, Transnistria, and occupied Crimea. Meanwhile, the leaders of the self-proclaimed DPR announced the formation of "armed self-defense groups".

The demands of Donbas militants were contradictory and confusing. Calls for the federalization of Ukraine, the independence of the Donbas, and the unification of the region with Russia were proclaimed all at the same time. It was obvious that Pushilin, Bolotov, and other leaders of the militants did not want to take the responsibility for further steps. They sat on their hands and waited for Moscow to repeat the Crimean scenario in the Donbas.

> ...In April 2014, we were in Slovyansk ... Everything looked sort of surreal: people with Shock Worker of Socialist Labor badges were protesting against the Kyiv junta. Popular support was still weak at that time. Later, most of the indifferent masses sided with the separatists. The local narrative gradually persuaded them...
>
> Taras Shumeyko, journalist

On April 12, 2014, government buildings of the city of Sloviansk in Donetsk Oblast were seized by the armed and well-equipped assault team led by Igor Girkin (a.k.a. Igor Strelkov), a Russian citizen with military intelligence background, who arrived from Russia. The militants also established control over a number of other towns in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast: Lyman / Krasnyi Lyman, Sviatohirsk, Kramatorsk, Druzhkivka. This laid the ground for the seizure of other towns in the region. Girkin's militants engaged in a firefight with the reconnaissance group of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) near Sloviansk, during which SBU captain Gennady Bilichenko was killed.

On April 14, acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov signed a decree enacting the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on the start of the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in Eastern Ukraine. Subsequently the ATO zone was divided into sectors: A (northern part of Luhansk Oblast), C (northern part of Donetsk Oblast), B (western part of Donetsk Oblast), M (areas close to Mariupol) and D (along the state border with Russia).

The 25th Separate Airborne Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine stationed in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast was the combat-ready formation closest to the ATO zone. Its units were the first to be sent to Kramatorsk Airport. Later on, other Army and National Guard units joined them there. In Sloviansk, Igor Girkin appointed himself the commander of all DPR militant troops. They called themselves "People's Militia of the Donbas".

In April, Ukrainian troops were predominantly fighting against Girkin's militant groups in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast. When fighting with Ukrainian forces, militants widely used human shield tactics. Armed clashes also occurred in Mariupol. Two assault operations aimed at regaining control of Sloviansk that were conducted by Ukrainian troops on April 13 and April 24 came to naught. Meanwhile, Ukrainian government officials continued the negotiations with the militants in Donetsk and Luhansk, respectively.

Locals incited by the Girkin's militants are blocking the path of Ukrainian armored convoys. Suburbs of Slovyansk, April 2014. Photo by Taras Shumeyko.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) was proclaimed on April 27. By the end of the month the separatists managed to capture the entire city of Luhansk and some other cities of Luhansk Oblast, including Alchevsk, Stanytsia Luhanska, Dovzhansk / Sverdlovsk, and Khrustalny / Krasnyi Luch. Armed groups of LPR militants called themselves "United Army of the South-East".

May 2014

The beginning of May was marred by the bloody events in Odesa. On May 2, during provoked armed clashes between pro-Russian separatists and supporters of the united Ukraine, dozens of people were killed. Most of them were pro-Russian activists, who died in the fire that broke out in the Trade Unions Building. From that moment, overt activities of Russian supporters in the cities of Southern and Eastern Ukraine waned. However, the tragic events in Odesa were used by Russian propaganda as a recruiting tool for anti-Ukrainian militias participating in the armed conflict in the Donbas.

In the beginning of the month, the fighting with Girkin's militant groups continued around Kramatorsk. Ukrainian troops took Karachun, the dominant hill between Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Ukrainian anti-terrorist forces began using helicopters, but almost immediately suffered losses to MANPADS. Ukrainian Armed Forces lost 3 helicopters in May. Armed militants took control of Mariupol and some other cities of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

Lack of equipment, training and motivation of Ukraine's professional army were compensated by the astounding rise of Ukrainian civil society. Volunteers came to help the Army and the National Guard: Dnipro, Donbas, Aidar, Azov, and other volunteer battalions joined ATO forces.

« ... In May 2014, Aleksey Mozgovoy confidentially told us, BBC journalists, that his Prizrak squad was armed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party...

Taras Shumeyko, journalist

In the meantime, militants were forming new combat units to fight with government forces in the Donbas. The Vostok battalion was created in Donetsk Oblast, with the Cossack National Guard of Great Host of Don Cossacks, Prizrak and Zarya battalions in Luhansk Oblast.

Small special forces teams and trucks loaded with weapons started crossing the border from Russia. This was when first armed clashes at Ukraine-Russia border checkpoints occurred. Russian regular troops – in particular, the ones from Chechnya - were spotted in the Donbas in May.

A Chechen Interior Ministry special forces soldier on the roof of Donetsk Airport. May 26, 2014. Photo retrieved from the phone of a militant killed on that date.

On May 11, 2014, militants' appointees organized the so-called "referendum on the independence of the DPR and the LPR" in various towns and villages of the Donbas. The passivity of government authorities and law enforcement officers at the local level contributed to the swift territorial expansion by militants seeking to gain control over all the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

Roads became the next target of the fighting. Checkpoints were erected by both sides of the conflict in cities and on highways. The Zello push-to-talk application was used by anti-government forces for communication. Militants sought to take control of Route H20 connecting Sloviansk, Donetsk, and Mariupol. One of the battles took place near the town of Volnovakha on the highway connecting Donetsk and Mariupol. Along highway M03, militants reached as far as Kharkiv Oblast and attacked Izium. Militants ambushed the Donbas volunteer battalion on Route M04 near Karlivka (one of the entry points to Donetsk).

Armed clashes broke out around Luhansk as well. Expanding to the north, militants seized Severodonetsk, Lysychansk and Rubizhne. Deploying over Route H21, they attacked Novoaidar. Still, they failed capture the northern part of Luhansk Oblast and the western part of Donetsk Oblast.

On May 24, the leaders of the DPR and the LPR announced their association into the so-called Confederate Alliance of People's Republics of Novorossiya. This association was a formal declaration of territorial claims over other regions of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The election of the President of Ukraine was held the next day. Polling stations opened for voting in the government-controlled part of the Donbas: in the western and northern parts of Donetsk Oblast and in the northern part of Luhansk Oblast.

On May 26, Ukrainian troops pushed Vostok battalion militants and Russian mercenaries out of Donetsk Airport. Ukrainian forces used several aircraft against the militants. At the end of the month, Ukrainian troops shot down their first Russian drone, which was flying over the ATO zone near Donetsk.

June 2014

In June, both sides of conflict were busy with military buildup and entrenching. The Ukrainian Army liberated Lyman / Krasnyi Lyman, Mariupol, and Schastya and made attempts to secure a denser blockade of Sloviansk. ATO forces took hold of Luhansk and Donetsk airports.

The ATO command continued to use aircraft, but still suffered losses. Militants shot down a helicopter and an An-30B reconnaissance airplane near Sloviansk. On June 14, an IL-76 transport aircraft was shot down by militants on approach to Luhansk Airport; all 49 troops onboard were killed.

DPR militants consolidated in the urban areas along the Donets Ridge. They established control over Chystiakove / Torez and Shakhtarsk located along Route H21. After the liberation of Mariupol, ATO forces continued their advance along the state border with the intent to cut off the militants' communication routes with Russia. This task was assigned to the sector D. Clashes at the border checkpoints - Dyakove, Marynivka, Voznesenivka / Chervonopartyzansk - intensified.

Meanwhile, trucks and armored vehicles were coming into Ukraine from Russia through Izvaryne on a massive scale. On June 13, ATO forces captured a BM-21 "Grad" MLRS near Dobropillya; the accompanying documents indicated that the MLRS belonged to the 18th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 58th Army of Russia.

BM-21 "Grad" MLRS of the 18th Brigade of the 58th Army of Russia, captured by ATO troops near Dobropillya, Donetsk Oblast. June 13, 2014.

A short ceasefire lasted from June 20 to June 30; both sides used this time to continue their military buildup. In Donetsk, militants formed two new battalions: Oplot and Kalmius. Tanks and large caliber artillery appeared in the hands of the anti-government forces. Militants systematically violated the ceasefire.

July 2014

In early July, the fighting intensified in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast. On July 5, militant troops commanded by Girkin left Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Druzhkivka, Kostyantynivka, and Bakhmut / Artemivsk and retreated to Donetsk. The epicenter of fighting in Donetsk Oblast shifted there as well. Militants set up a heavily fortified area on the outskirts of the city.

Protracted battles continued in Sector D. Attacking from the towns located on the Donets Ridge, militants were trying to secure access to the state border with Russia near Marynivka and Izvaryne. Ukrainian forces were squeezed into a narrow corridor between the militants' strongholds in the Donets Ridge cities and the state border with Russia.

On July 11, 2014, a Ukrainian forces' camp near Zelenopillya was shelled with rocket launchers from the territory of Russia. 36 troops were killed. After that, Ukrainian territory was regularly shelled from Russian territory across the border. Supported by Russian artillery, DPR militants attacked Ukrainian forces from the area of Chystyakove / Torez in the direction of the state border near Marynivka and cut off some units of Sector D positioned to the east of Stepanivka.
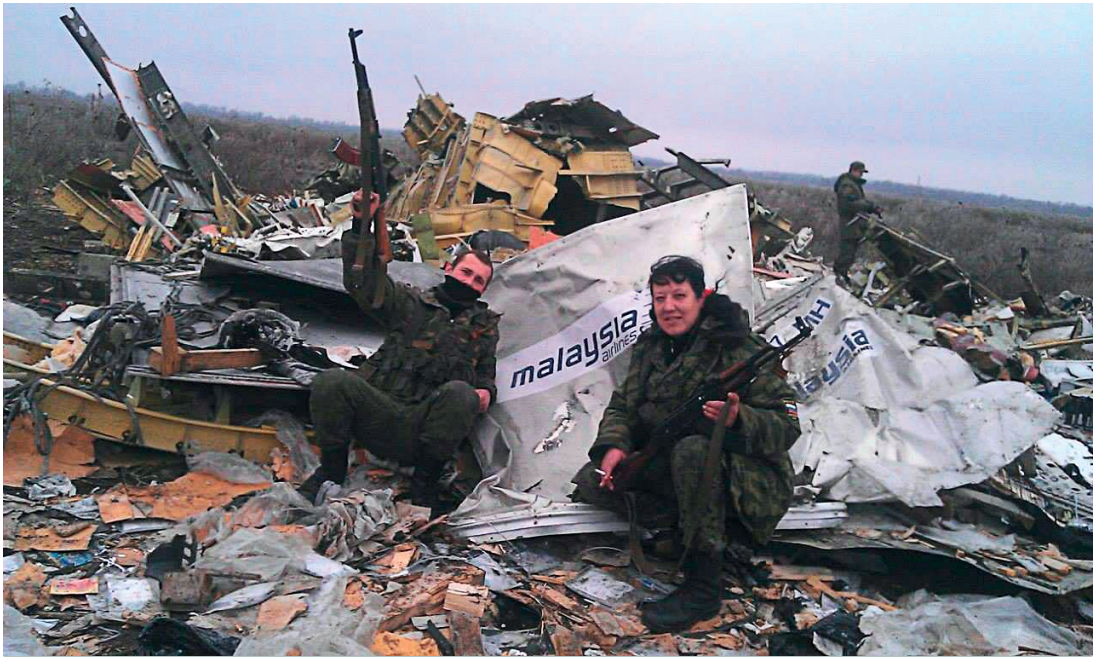
DPR militants posing with the debris of Flight MH17.
Late 2014. Photo posted on a social network.

The fighting continued around Luhansk and Donetsk Airports controlled by ATO forces and on the outskirts of Luhansk and Donetsk. The Ukrainian Army virtually surrounded Horlivka and made attempts to cut the routes from Luhansk to Izvaryne and Alchevsk. Ukrainian aviation and artillery inflicted heavy losses on militants and military convoys coming from Russia by Route M04. However, the Ukrainian Air Force continued to suffer losses. Four Ukrainian military planes were shot down in July; two of them were hit with air-to-air missiles from the territory of Russia.

On July 17, near Hrabove in Donetsk Oblast, militants shot down the Boeing 777 aircraft operated by Malaysian Airlines as Flight MH17. All 298 people onboard were killed. In the days before the incident, militant-controlled websites reported about a newly acquired Buk surface-to-air system.

On July 20-24, Ukrainian Army drove the militants out of Lysychansk-Severodonetsk agglomeration in the north of Luhansk Oblast. The militants retreated to the area around Kadiivka / Stakhanov. Subsequent sieges and assaults of large cities by Ukrainian Army produced no results. Under the circumstances, ATO headquarters shifted to the tactic of partitioning the area under militants' control and blockading its individual parts. Ukrainian Sector C troops advanced on Debaltseve from the north with the aim to block M03, M04, and H21 routes and thus separate DPR and LPR forces.

After the successful recapture of Debaltseve on July 29, fierce battles unfolded in Shakhtarsk, located on Route H21 connecting Donetsk with Luhansk. A raiding group of the 95th Brigade reached the

northern outskirts of Shakhtarsk and continued moving to Marynivka and the strategic height Savur-Mohyla. The group's task was to unblock the troops in Sector D that were encircled by enemy forces in the so-called Southern Kettle and suffered from constant shelling from the territory of Russia.

In late July, Russian regular troops equipped with armored vehicles were repeatedly spotted crossing the border from Russia into Ukraine.

August 2014

In early August, it became clear that Ukrainian troops in Sector D could not keep their positions along the border any more. On August 7, they broke out of the Southern Kettle moving west. Also, Ukrainian Army failed to hold Shakhtarsk and block Route H21.

The ATO forces' tactics were changed. Instead of a broad envelopment along the border, the Ukrainian Army launched an offensive on the stronghold cities along Donets Ridge from Ilovaisk to Khrustalny / Krasnyi Luch. ATO forces managed to gain control of Ilovaisk and Miusynsk. It was assumed that the offensive from Miusynsk towards Khrustalny / Krasnyi Luch would help cut Route H21 and connect with the ATO troops near Lutuhyne and Luhansk Airport. After a series of failed attacks, government forces finally managed to take and hold the Savur-Mohyla strategic height. In Sector A, the fighting continued for the control of the section of Route M04 between the border with Russia and Luhansk. In August, the Ukrainian side continued using military aircraft and lost 4 planes and 2 helicopters.

August 3, 2014. Border crossing "Dovzhanskyy" in Luhansk Oblast after the heavy artillery bombardment from Russian territory. Photo provided by Border Guard Lieutenant Colonel Oleksandr Demchenko.

In the meantime, militant groups in the cities of the Donets Ridge received significant reinforcements from Russia. During that period Moscow put together the plan of a joint offensive of the Russian Army and militants to surround and defeat Ukrainian forces. There were some major leadership changes in the DPR and the LPR. Girkin and Borodai were recalled from Donetsk to Russia, and Zakharchenko was placed in the top position. In Luhansk, Bolotov was replaced by Plotnitsky. On August 15, during a meeting of the so-called DPR Council of Ministers, Zakharchenko announced the commitment of "Novorossiya" army reserves in the form of 30 tanks, 120 armored vehicles, and 1,200 troops that trained in Russia over the previous four months.

Russian military convoys started coming in large numbers through the border abandoned by the Ukrainian Army and Border Guards. During the battles that took place in the last decade of August, about two dozen Russian Army servicemen were captured by ATO forces. The first so-called humanitarian convoy became a convenient cover for the deployment of Russian troops, weaponry, and ammunition to the Donbas.

On August 24, after accumulating considerable forces, the Russian hybrid army launched a counteroffensive in the Donbas. Advancing towards Amvrosiivka and Starobesheve, Russian troops surrounded ATO forces near Savur-Mohyla and Ilovaisk. Sector D that had been essentially defeated ceased to exist. In the southern part of Donetsk Oblast, Russian hybrid troops captured Novoazovsk and approached Mariupol. The command of the Ukrainian units surrounded in Ilovaisk negotiated a peaceful withdrawal to the main ATO positions, planning to go over predefined routes in two columns. However, on August 29, Russian troops violated the agreement and destroyed the columns as they were moving out. Near Ilovaisk, Ukrainian forces suffered their heaviest losses of the war.

Beginning of September 2014

In early September, the ATO command had to take into account the fact of the direct Russian military invasion in the Donbas. Ukrainian units that were holding Lutuhyne and Luhansk Airport retreated north to Schastya. The heaviest fighting took place between Donetsk and the Sea of Azov. On September 2-5, the 95th and 79th Airborne Brigades conducted raids in the direction of Boikivske / Telmanove and Kalmiuske / Komsomolske, inflicting significant losses on the militants and Russian troops.

On September 5, on Route H21 near Vesela Hora (between Luhansk and Schastya) a combat team of the Aidar volunteer battalion was ambushed. Several dozen Ukrainian soldiers were killed. The Minsk Protocol (Minsk I) on a bilateral ceasefire was signed on the same day.

September 2014 – February 2015

During the fall of 2014, the contact line between the militants and the Ukrainian forces remained stable. Ceasefire violations occurred on a regular basis, but large-scale offensive combat operations no longer occurred.

At that time, the advancement of the Russian hybrid army towards Mariupol was considered the most probable scenario. It was anticipated that Russian forces would attack Mariupol, then move along Route M14 to establish a land bridge to the occupied Crimea. This scenario was actively discussed by both parties of the conflict.

Officers of the 15th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of Russian Peacekeeping Force (military unit 90600) posing with the dismantled sign "State border of Ukraine. No trespassing." September 2014.
https://goo.gl/gSPdbM

Hostilities resumed in late November. DPR militants supported by regular Russian Army units attacked ATO forces in Donetsk Airport. Heavy shelling resumed everywhere along the contact line. On January 13, Russian hybrid army shelled the checkpoint on Route H20 near Volnovakha and hit a passenger bus. As a result, 12 civilians were killed and 18 were wounded. The fighting for Donetsk Airport continued until January 21 and ended with the withdrawal of Ukrainian units from the airport.

Once the battle for Donetsk Airport was over, Russian hybrid forces launched a large scale offensive against the Debaltseve bulge. On January 24, DPR artillery shelled a residential area of Mariupol, killing 30 and injuring 128 civilians. The leader of the self-proclaimed DPR Zakharchenko announced the official start of Mariupol offensive.

The Russian command planned to surround and destroy ATO forces near Debaltseve. On February 10, in order to divert enemy forces from the Debaltseve bulge, Ukrainian Sector M units carried out an attack towards Novoazovsk. Ukrainian advancement came to a halt near the village of Shyrokyne.

On February 12, "Package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements" (commonly referred to as Minsk II) was signed. It provided for immediate ceasefire and outlined the plan for a political settlement of the conflict. Yet, Minsk II did not stop the Russian offensive. The fighting in Sector C ended only on February 18, 2015, after government forces withdrew from Debaltseve and consolidated at the so-called Svitlodarsk bulge.

From February 2015 to this day

Over this period, the DPR and the LPR, with the participation of their Russian handlers, have reorganized the disjointed militant groups into 1st Army Corps (DPR) and 2nd Army Corps (LPR). Some disobedient warlords have been removed to Russia or liquidated.

The leadership of the Russian Federation sought to achieve their political goals in Ukraine by taking advantage of the Minsk Process. This plan involved the integration of DPR and LPR militants into the decision-making process of the Ukrainian state government. On May 18, 2015, the self-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPR Alexander Kofman and Speaker of the Parliament of Novorossiya Oleg Tsaryov announced the freezing of the Novorossiya project for an indefinite period, since its existence was not envisaged by the Minsk Agreements.

« It didn't become a large scale war, like it was in July or August, with heavy artillery, right from the start. The conflict escalated gradually, and we kept getting used to it.

Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

Periodic outbreaks in fighting can be correlated with the moments when the Kremlin wants to pressure Ukrainian leadership into complying with its agenda. The Battle of Debaltseve was the last notable episode of the war. Large scale offensives no longer occur, but the ceasefire is regularly violated. Among the major clashes of this period can be mentioned the failed assault by the militants against Mariinka in June 2015, the spikes of hostilities at the Svitlodarsk bulge in June and December of 2016, and the fighting in the Avdiivka industrial zone that has been continuing since the end of January 2017.

Chapter 4. Life During Wartime

Losses and dangers

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that from mid-April 2014 to December 1, 2016 on both sides of the conflict in the Donbas at least 9,758 people were killed, of whom more than 2,000 were civilians, and about 22,800 people were wounded. On February 8, 2017, the National Police of Ukraine reported 1,767 civilians killed and 2,871 wounded in the Donbas during the ATO. According to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, their combat losses as of February 17, 2017 were 2,197 dead and about 8,000 wounded.

« Before a trip to the Donbas, it is necessary to get training for working in dangerous places, most importantly in tactical medical aid, which should be refreshed once a year. One should be properly equipped and physically fit.

Sergiy Karazy, journalist

The report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from February 17, 2017 states that one million children in the east of Ukraine are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance; 200,000 children live within 15 kilometers on both sides of the line of contact, of which around 19,000 are exposed to the constant danger of landmines and other explosive devices. Every fifth school in the Donbas has been destroyed or damaged in the fighting.

The entire region has experienced a sharp increase in the number of violent deaths, the deepening demographic crisis, desolation of some areas, significant reduction in industrial production, rising crime rate, deterioration of social standards, high level of migration (mostly due to internally displaced persons - IDPs), and a humanitarian crisis in general.

The peace process in the Donbas is governed by the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk II). This format gives no reason for optimism as to the political solution for the conflict, but it constrains Russian hybrid forces from an armed escalation. Since March 2014, the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE has been operating in Ukraine, its work is focused on monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire in the Donbas.

ATO zone

The parts of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, which experienced or continue to experience the armed conflict, are defined in Ukrainian legislation as «the territory of the anti-terrorist operation» (ATO zone). This area covers about 40,000 sq. km, with its localities listed in a governmental decree.

The ATO zone can be divided into three types of areas:

- ↗ the territory controlled by the Ukrainian authorities;
- ↗ temporarily occupied territory (the so-called DPR and LPR);
- ↗ contact line and the "gray" area.

Ukraine controls most of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. At the end of December 2016 it had about 2.6 million residents.

Several localities (cities and towns of Kramatorsk and Lysychansk-Severodonetsk agglomerations, Mariupol, and others) were liberated by the ATO forces during the summer campaign of 2014. Since Donetsk and Luhansk remained occupied, the regional governments were temporarily relocated to other cities. From June to October 2014, the regional authorities of Donetsk Oblast were located in Mariupol, and then were moved to Kramatorsk. The center of Luhansk Oblast has been in Severodonetsk since September 2014.

During 2014-2015, administrative boundaries were changed for Novoaidar and Popasna Raions of Luhansk Oblast and Bakhmut / Artemivsk and Volnovakha Raions of Donetsk Oblast. They absorbed parts of other raions, where administrative centers are under the control of militants.

> « ...Even if you go into some sort of "gray zone «, a place where there is no fighting, you must bear in mind that ambulances there might not have dressings. When you are brought to a hospital, it may be too late... So, what you are counting on is your individual first aid kit.
>
> Anastasia Bereza, a journalist

Given the nature of the governing process in the conflict zone, the Parliament of Ukraine passed the Law «On civil-military administrations» (CMA). CMAs were created as temporary public administration bodies within the framework of the Antiterrorist Center of the Security Service of Ukraine. They perform a subset of local government functions. The CMAs, as a rule, operate in the areas adjacent to the contact line and are staffed by military personnel. As of November 2016, there were active Luhansk and Donetsk regional CMAs, four raion CMAs and 25 CMAs responsible for specific cities and towns.

In the areas controlled by Ukraine, humanitarian aid is provided and distributed through the mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Cross Society of Ukraine, UNICEF, GIZ, KfW Development Bank, and Caritas. Ukraine receives the largest amount of aid from the European Union, administered through the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

The area controlled by DPR and LPR militants measures more than 15,000 sq. km, a little larger than Montenegro. It is less than 30% of the total area of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (which they lay claim to), and only about 2.5% of the territory of Ukraine. The militants hold 46 cities and towns. According to

various sources, about 3.8 million people (over 8% of the population of Ukraine) remain in the occupied parts of the Donbas. Most likely, this number is exaggerated and does not take into account all IDPs.

Minsk II defines the territory controlled by DPR and LPR militants as «Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts» (PDDLO). Of the 36 raions of the two oblasts, the PDDLO completely cover the territory of only 10 raions and parts of a few others.

> There is still no clear power vertical in the DPR/LPR, so it can happen that military units do not obey commands from Donetsk / Luhansk. So, the more connections you have, the better are your chances of getting out of the basement even before the scandal around your detention receives international publicity.
>
> Taras Shumeyko, journalist

The administrations of the DPR and the LPR claim the status of sovereign state governments. They imitate the activities of authorities and the legal procedures typical for democratic countries (elections, referenda etc.). However, neither the DPR nor the LPR has been diplomatically recognized by any of the UN member countries. The leaders of the administrations of these entities (Zakharchenko and Plotnitsky) are signatories under the Minsk I and Minsk II agreements, but without any reference to their posts. Thus, the participants in the peace process recognize these persons as holding authority over the PDDLO de facto. In the resolutions of the Ukrainian Parliament from 2014 and 2015, the PDDLO are considered temporarily occupied territories, the DPR and the LPR are considered terrorist organizations, and the Russian Federation is referred to as the aggressor state. However, these definitions have not been codified into the law of Ukraine. Law enforcement agencies of Ukraine have initiated terrorism criminal cases against the leaders of the DPR and the LPR.

Most experts point to the critical dependence of the PDDLO administrations on the Russian Federation and its policymakers. Moscow controls and reshuffles as necessary the leaders of the DPR and the LPR, ensures operational capability of their military forces, and provides logistical support for the PDDLO administrations.

Missions of international organizations have noted a total regimentation of social processes and private life of citizens in the occupied territories. Curfew as well as censorship have been imposed, the official propaganda follows the guidelines set by the Russian Federation. Intimidation, torture, hostage-taking, terror, restrictions on freedom of movement, and persecution of minorities are common practice.

> I was going to a meeting in Donetsk, took a photo of the Lenin monument in the downtown with my phone and suddenly saw that a car without license plates was following me. The car stopped on the sidewalk and two militants with guns came out and took me … One was relatively polite. The second immediately began speaking very roughly … I pulled the phone, but some officer just took it … It lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. I stood there, and they kept asking me questions… Once I was released, the polite one told me, using obscenities: «You know, you just have a 'bad' passport.
>
> Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

Using indirect estimation method (by measuring the night-time light or NTL on the satellite images of Donetsk and Luhansk), economists Tom Coupe, Michał Myck and Mateusz Najsztub have shown a decline in the economic activity of the region. According to their data, relevant indicators have declined by half in Donetsk and by two thirds in Luhansk.

Major features of the economic situation in the PDDLO:

↗ Some plants and large enterprises have been shut down, their equipment has been dismantled and sold as scrap metal or illegally exported to Russia (mainly to state owned enterprises);

↗ Many coal mines have been shut down;

↗ A number of enterprises physically located in the PDDLO have been re-registered in the government controlled territory (mostly companies belonging to financial industrial groups, in particular DTEK); their products are normally transported to the government controlled territory by rail;

↗ Relations pertaining to property and businesses have been largely criminalized;

↗ Medium and small businesses, especially service businesses are being shut down or expropriated;

↗ Local budgets are completely dependent on the financial support from the Russian Federation and financial industrial groups;

↗ The occupied territories now effectively operate in the ruble zone (RUB, UAH, USD and EUR are in circulation).

Hybrid charity

External assistance to the population of the PDDLO can be classified into several types.

↗ Payment of pensions and social benefits by the Ukrainian government

The Ukrainian government is trying to meet its social commitments and pay pensions to the persons residing in the territory of the PDDLO that are able to travel to the territory controlled by Ukraine. An effective payment mechanism still hasn't been established; this matter is the subject of manipulations on both sides of the contact line.

↗ Humanitarian assistance by Ukraine

Nominally, the majority of humanitarian goods brought to the PDDLO is connected to the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation. According to the foundation, 286 convoys crossed the contact line during the war in the Donbas, and the local population received 11,236,000 food packages. The deliveries are documented according to the Ukrainian law. However, it is not possible to officially control the distribution of the aid, because neither representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross nor those of the Red Cross Society of Ukraine are admitted to the territory of the PDDLO. The administrations of the DPR and the LPR do not accept humanitarian aid from other Ukrainian and international organizations, forcing them to use Rinat Akhmetov Foundation as an intermediary. There were cases, when the trucks with humanitarian aid contained dual-use items, in particular radios and other communication equipment.

Russian "humanitarian convoy"

↗ Humanitarian aid from the Russian Federation

Humanitarian goods are also brought into the PDDLO from the Russian Federation in the so-called humanitarian convoys. Departures and arrivals of these convoys are always publicized by Russia and the administrations of the DPR and the LPR. From August 2014 until the end of 2016, the Russia-Ukraine border was crossed by 59 convoys (more than 6660 vehicles) carrying approximately 56,000 tons of cargo. These convoys violate all internationally accepted procedures and standards: the Ukrainian side is not informed about the types of cargo crossing the border; there is no inspection of the contents of the trucks by border and customs authorities of Ukraine; the cargo is never handed over to the International Red Cross for distribution. Instead, the goods are distributed by the DPR and LPR administrations. It has been proven on several occasions that on their way back the vehicles of the «humanitarian convoys» were used to haul dismantled equipment from the looted plants, scrap metal, as well as the bodies of dead Russian soldiers and mercenaries (known as Cargo 200).

Internally displaced persons

According to the official data of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, as of May 2016, the number of registered IDPs from the temporarily occupied areas of the Donbas reached 1.75 million people. Ukraine is ranked fourth in the world by the number of IDPs, following Syria, Yemen and Iraq, which are experiencing the most violent conflicts on the planet.

IDPs from the PDDLO find shelter all over the territory of Ukraine. Most of them settle in the unoccupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (724 and 262 thousand people, respectively). The total exceeds the number of Syrian refugees (884 thousands, according to the UN data), who had arrived in the EU by October 2016, causing the migrant crisis.

Many IDPs from the Donbas have also moved to Kharkiv and Zaporizhia Oblasts and the city of Kyiv. The problems of the migrants are placing additional strain on the central and local budgets. In the state budget for 2017, about 3.2 billion hryvnias (about $114 million) have been allocated for monthly targeted assistance to the IDPs. However, this amount is not sufficient to cover the costs of the resettlement of IDPs in the new locations. Many migrants are forced to deal with bureaucratic red tape at the local level as well as imperfect regulations.

The inefficiencies of the governmental machinery are partially compensated by Ukrainian civil society initiatives. Numerous volunteer associations and community organizations provide a variety of support to IDPs - from free legal services and advice on the paperwork to the search for housing or construction.

Donetsk Oblast. Kirill Demenkov, a serviceman of the 46th Separate Operational Purpose Brigade of the Russian Interior Ministry, is posing in front of the destroyed civilian buildings, holding an icon of Virgin Mary (likely removed from one of the buildings) in his right hand, and a rifle in his left hand.
https://goo.gl/sqFBRS

Transportation in the ATO zone

Air transportation

Airports in the regional centers of the Donbas became the scenes of fierce fighting and have been almost completely destroyed. Donetsk airport was closed for passenger flights on May 26, 2014, and Luhansk airport on June 11, 2014. The functioning Ukrainian airports nearest to the ATO zone are located in Mariupol, Zaporizhia, Dnipro / Dnipropetrovsk, and Kharkiv.

Automotive transportation

In Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, it is possible to travel by car, hire a taxi, or use scheduled bus services. This is true for both the government controlled part of Donbas and the PDDLO. The roads of the region are in various conditions, some of them have been damaged by the fighting or by the passage of armored vehicles. According to the Ukraine's roads authority Ukravtodor, Route P07 (Chuhuiv - Milove), which is the main route to the eastern part of Luhansk Oblast, is on the top ten list of the worst roads in Ukraine.

Vehicles and their passengers cross the line of contact according to the SBU regulation titled «Temporary procedures for control over movements of individuals, vehicles, and goods along the contact line in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts». At the beginning of 2017, crossing the line of contact by car could be done over six road corridors:

1. Kadiivka / Stakhanov - Zolote - Hirne - Lysychansk (Lysychansk checkpoint);
2. Horlivka - Bakhmut / Artemivsk (Zaitseve checkpoint);
3. Donetsk - Kurakhove (Marinka checkpoint);
4. Donetsk - Mariupol (Novotroitske checkpoint);
5. Novoazovsk - Pokrovsk / Krasnoarmiysk - Talakovka - Mariupol (Hnutove checkpoint);
6. Stanytsia Luhanska - Novoaidar (Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoint).

« It is always very unpleasant to go through a checkpoint, it is almost always stressful. Better not to talk more than necessary - just answer questions.

Taras Shumeyko, journalist

« We quickly realized that we could not approach any checkpoint (from either the militants' side or Ukrainian) not just with cameras on, but even with cameras in hand; we were immediately suspected of filming their positions.

Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

Bypass roads outside the corridors are blocked by the Ukrainian Army. To enter and exit the PDDLO, citizens of Ukraine and foreigners need to be in possession of a passport and a permit. These permits are issued after registering on the SBU web portal and filling an application form. Also, the application can be submitted to the coordination center, a coordination group, or a checkpoint.

There are no scheduled bus routes across the contact line due to the ban issued by SBU. However, there is a well-run scheme, where a bus drives the passengers to the line of contact, and another bus picks them up on the other side. There are also scheduled routes from the PDDLO to Russia through uncontrolled portions of the border.

Railways

In the past, there had been a well developed network of railways connecting Donetsk and Luhansk with other cities of Ukraine and Russia. Passenger trains were canceled at the end of July and in August 2014, when the intensity of the fighting reached its peak. After the contact line stabilized, the railway operations resumed, but the routes and procedures changed.

Currently, the cities in the territory controlled by Ukraine are reachable by rail from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro / Dnipropetrovsk, and other cities. The trains terminate in Mariupol, Pokrovsk / Krasnoarmiysk, Kostyantynivka, Bakhmut / Artemivsk, and Lysychansk. It is possible to reach towns even closer to the line of contact using commuter trains: they run to Avdiivka, Novgorodske, Popasna, Shchastia, and Stanytsia Luhanska.

Passenger trains do not cross the line of contact. However, freight trains operate through six checkpoints between the government controlled territory and the PDDLO. They provide the link for the heavy industry enterprises located in the PDDLO that supply their products to the territory controlled by Ukraine. Economic ties with such companies in the occupied territories cause mixed reactions in the Ukrainian society. There are initiatives to blockade the rail freight.

In the PDDLO territory, the commuter rail system also operates. In addition to domestic trains, there is an indirect rail link from Donetsk to Rostov-on-Don in Russia: from the PDDLO a commuter train takes passengers to the border point Kvashine, and on the Russian side the passengers change to a local train of the Russian Railways. Between the territories controlled by the DPR and the LPR there are «customs restrictions» on the import of certain goods.

Chapter 5. in the Focus of Mass Media

The Donbas as discussed by analysts is very different from the Donbas in today's media. But it is the domination in the media space that can play a key role in the current standoff.

Before the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the media space experienced significant changes. Rapid development of technology, high-speed Internet, blogs, and social networks increased the volume and speed of information exchange thousandfold. Russia was diligent in its preparations for the hybrid aggression, and it focused specifically on informational confrontation. Manuals, guidelines, troll factories, talking points, procedures, and divisions of responsibilities were developed well in advance.

> « ....After the marchers for the unity of Ukraine were beaten, we, the journalists from BBC, were dining at a restaurant in Donetsk and watching news on the Russian Channel One... When we saw how Russian television twisted what happened before our eyes, one of the British journalists could not help but say: 'It must be such a shame to work for Russian TV.' It was clear that the Russians who sat next to us heard what was said. Perhaps they really felt ashamed...
>
> Taras Shumeyko, journalist

The information war for the Donbas unfolded in several stages. These stages in the form of short informational pieces of the corresponding periods are listed below.

Shock

Mass media continue monitoring the events in Ukraine where the Euromaidan has just ended. People are still shell-shocked by the shooting of unarmed protesters in the center of Kyiv. The President, ministers, MPs, and bureaucrats have fled the country in the aircraft stuffed with cash, gold, and antiques. Pandemic corruption has left the country balancing on the edge of default. On February 20, 2014, Russian troops use the political crisis in Ukraine to start their occupation of Crimea and, on

March 20, after the falsified referendum, the State Duma of the Russian Federation ratifies the Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia. The official Kyiv is shocked – it is unable to fully comprehend the situation. The security agencies are disoriented, they have no action plan. In March 2014, alarming news starts coming from Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipro / Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Zaporizhya. The media space explodes with contradictory information and gruesome pictures of violence.

Internet – Hundreds of randomly commented amateur videos are posted. The videos show various groups of people. Young men in sportswear and jeans with black-and orange ribbons (the so-called St. George ribbons) chanting "Russia! Russia!", hitting people holding symbols of Ukraine with bats and pieces of rebar, burning and trampling flags of Ukraine in the cities' central squares. Older people holding Communist banners. New videos of pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian marches and meetings regularly appear from different cities.

Ukrainian mass media – They broadcast stories similar to those that appear on the Internet. Many of them are televised as is, with the "No comment" text overlay. Some TV channels try to offer explanations; however, reliable information is hard to find, so all news programs seem incomplete. News fail to give answers to the multitudes of questions the viewers have, the media show the facts but give no reasonable explanations. Ukrainians are seized by panic and the total incomprehension of the events. Nobody knows what to do.

> In 2014, we were so shocked that we did not even have time to analyze everything that was happening. We did not know what would happen next. ... These were scenarios prepared many years prior that at a certain point were finally acted out.
>
> Piotr Andrusieczko, journalist

Russian mass media – While many Ukrainians still can't figure out what is going on in their cities, the Russian media already have answers to all questions. All Russian TV news programs report that Ukraine is engulfed in mass unrest with people protesting against the "coup d'etat", the "junta", "oppression of the Russian-speaking citizens". They call the runaway Viktor Yanukovych the legitimate President of Ukraine and give airtime to the statements he's making while hiding in Russia. The propaganda keeps pushing the "Ukraine is no more" message. Which means that there is no law and no law enforcement, only the radicals fighting for power. They insist that Ukraine has started a genocide against Russian speakers. They use the headlines: "The South-East of Ukraine Becomes Novorossiya", "Time to Return the Donbass to Russia", "The South-East of Ukraine - with Russia or Drowned in Blood". News programs are broadcast more frequently than before, with almost 90% of the airtime dedicated to the events in Ukraine.

> I started working for the BBC in spring 2014 in the Donbas, when unrest had just started there. Columns of vagrants and 'tourists' from Russia were walking around Donetsk, but Western journalists did not always capture the nuances - they thought it was really citizens out on the street.
>
> Taras Shumeyko, journalist

Western mass media – At the beginning of the war, most of the Western media have no resident correspondents in Kyiv, let alone in the Donbas. So, the information on the Donbas events is obtained through resident correspondents in Moscow, who often rephrase Russian media and repeat propaganda cliches for the Western audience. As the result, the myth of a violent standoff between the West and the East of Ukraine permeates Western media and the terms "rebels", "separatists", and "militia" become deeply entrenched in the reporters' lexicon.

Pushback

Gradually, bits and pieces of information form a complete picture. It becomes obvious that the unrest, fights, murders, and seizures of administrative buildings are neither protests of local political elites nor popular actions. The young men prowling the cities with Russian flags speak Russian with a distinct non-local accent and have to ask their way around. The positions of separatist leaders are taken by Russian citizens who have come from abroad: Igor Girkin, Alexander Borodai, Marat Bashirov, Vladimir Antyufeyev, Igor Bezler, Arseny Pavlov, Alexander Mozhayev, and others. Some of them previously took part in other armed conflicts (Chechnya, the Balkans, Transnistria) and have old connections with the Russian special services. There are even more Russian citizens among the militants.

After the failure to resolve the problem by diplomacy, Kyiv decides to move the troops to the east of Ukraine. At the same time, large numbers of Ukrainian volunteers travel to the Donbas.

Ukrainian mass media – Start mentioning Russia's role in coordinating the hostilities in the Donbas and provide increasingly more factual information. Articles and stories about Russia supplying weapons to the militants start to appear. Journalists report that there are whole units of men from the Caucasian republics and the Far East of Russia among the "separatists". There are more and more frequent reports stating that the first line of motley mercenary forces is backed by the second line of regular Russian troops. They join the action, when the mercenaries are unable to manage on their own, and they also train the militants.

When Russia starts dispatching humanitarian convoys to the Donbas, journalists quickly establish that the white trucks mostly carry weapons and ammunition, which is why the vehicles avoid Ukrainian border checkpoints. Special mention should be given to Ukrainian media coverage of the defense of Luhansk and Donetsk Airports, Russian shelling of Ukrainian positions and towns – Zelenopillya, Volnovakha, Mariupol, shelling of border areas from the territory of Russia in August 2014, the Ilovaisk tragedy, the battles for Debaltseve, the shooting down of Ukrainian aircraft by the Russian hybrid army.

Russian mass media – Despite the overwhelming evidence, Russian mass media keep insisting that there are no regular Russian troops in the Donbas, and it is only local "miners and tractor drivers" fighting there. No weapons are sent to Ukraine from Russia, either – all weapons are captured from the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The "Ukraine is attacking the Donbas" message is being widely spread. Russian propaganda describes the conflict using the parallels with World War II: the Ukrainian forces are assigned the role of "fascists" and "punishers", while their opponents are described as "rebels" and "defenders of people". Absurd as it may seem, Ukrainian Jews are also easily added to the ranks of "fascists". The scale of the war in Ukraine is exaggerated. Instead of properly locating the military conflict in two eastern oblasts of Ukraine, the propagandists use the broader concept of "South-East of Ukraine" which includes 8 oblasts of Ukraine. Fake news claim massive casualties among the

Ukrainian troops, which are allegedly kept secret by the government. The responsibility for shellings of residential areas and for the downing of Flight MH17 is placed on Ukraine. Russian mass media start mentioning a "peacemaking operation" in Ukraine and "peace enforcement".

Seeing that the majority of Ukrainian regions have outright refused to join the Russian "Novorossiya" project and that even the residents of the Donbas are reluctant to join the "militias", Russian mass media take the propaganda to a new level. Russian TV channels use actors to film appalling staged pieces about "the atrocities committed by the Kiev junta", which they broadcast as actual news stories. The most remarkable example of such performance is the interview with a "Donbas refugee", who tells the Russian TV channel about "Ukrainian soldiers crucifying a three-year old boy in Slovyansk" (this fabrication was completely dismantled by both Ukrainian and Western journalists). Dozens of fully or partially staged stories appear every week to make more and more Russians and Ukrainians watching Russian TV join the mercenaries.

Internet community – Internet users on different sides of the conflict start a true information war. People report shellings live on Twitter, create Internet memes, share Facebook posts, and start groups focused on military operations, displaced persons, and other issues related to the Donbas war coverage. The Russian side expands the so-called "troll factories", hiring people to broadcast the talking points of the Kremlin propaganda via social networks and comments to articles and videos. On the Ukrainian side, volunteers create collectives with the goal of confronting Russian propaganda: Information Resistance, InformNapalm, StopFake, and others. They gather evidence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and take apart propagandist fakes.

Stabilization

This stage is characterized by the overall fatigue with the Donbas war felt by both the West and Ukrainian citizens. Despite two Minsk Agreements and economic sanctions against Russia, the Kremlin does not abandon its attempts of armed aggression. There is no consistent ceasefire. Ukrainian control of the border and democratic elections in the PDDLO seem unattainable. Ukraine and its supporters abroad intensify their actions aimed at holding Russia responsible for violating the international laws and for its military crimes in the Donbas. The Joint Investigation Team publishes its preliminary report on the MH17 crash, which rejects all Russian versions. On the basis of the available evidence, international organizations – PACE, OSCE, UN General Assembly, NATO PA – approve the resolutions on the Russian aggression against Ukraine in the Donbas and its unlawful occupation of Crimea. The International Criminal Court in the Hague acknowledges sufficient evidence of military crimes in the Donbas and passes a resolution to continue the proceedings on over 800 documented incidents. Russia is openly referred to as the aggressor and the country breaking multiple international norms and commitments.

Russian mass media – They keep insisting that Ukraine is not abiding by the Minsk II agreement. Still ignoring all evidence, they repeatedly claim that Russia is not a party to the conflict, that it is strictly internal, emphasizing it by their preferred term, "civil war". The activities of the political opposition in Ukraine that uses "anti-war" slogans receive constant media coverage. The message that "Ukrainians are tired of the war" is widely circulated. At the same time, the responsibility for the continuation or resolution of the conflict is placed exclusively on the government of Ukraine. Social problems and corruption in Ukraine are becoming the focus of attention. Actively promoted is the idea that "the

continued war is in the interest of the government", since it "distracts the people from the worsening economic situation in the country". Disguised Russian propaganda is used to provoke radical Ukrainian organizations (including the veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation) to rise against the government under patriotic and social slogans.

Ukrainian mass media – They keep assuring their audience that the international community still supports Ukraine, publishing reports on the USA giving Humvees and radar units to Ukraine, the help from Canada, the Great Britain, Lithuania, and other countries. The accomplishments of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukroboronprom (Ukraine Defense Industry) also receive the attention of journalists, who note the growth of the Ukrainian defense industry and the ability of the army to fulfil any tasks after the numerous international exercises and trainings by NATO instructors.

Western mass media – In the context of the Donbas war, they focus on the requirements for the fulfilment of the Minsk II agreement. Russia is often associated with cyberattacks, bombardments in Syria, bribes to European politicians, military intimidation (deployment of Russian missile systems to Kaliningrad and repeated violations of NATO members' airspace), interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries, and the attempts to influence elections. Many journalists stress the necessity of maintaining the sanctions against Russia and strengthening the borders. At the same time, a number of alternative media, some of them sponsored by Russia, are trying to whitewash Russia's image in the eyes of the international community. They publish articles attempting to present Russia as a country fighting global terrorism, opposing unsubstantiated accusations by enemies, and being the victim of unjustified sanctions.

Internet community – In general, the Internet community's behavior is similar to that at the previous stage. However, the cyber-conflict is growing more intense. All sides voice accusations of massive hacker attacks, not only against the conflicting parties – Ukraine and Russia – but beyond – in the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and other countries. DDoS attacks become routine for most of the news websites and government organizations. Russian hackers break into automated control systems of Ukrainian power facilities and perform a series of attacks on government organizations of Ukraine and the Western countries. At the same time, Ukrainian hackers obtain and publish private and proprietary information confirming the key role of Russian authorities in planning and coordinating the actions aimed at Ukraine.

Inattention

This is the stage we are in right now. While in the beginning of the conflict an outside observer could not understand who started the Donbas war, who participated in the fighting, what exactly was happening in the east of Ukraine, and who was to blame, and the western mainstream opinion was "let's not mess with Russia", now the global community is beginning to realize that the Russian leaders are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unscrupulous, and will never stop on their own. Despite these disheartening conclusions, there are still attempts to resolve the problem with the least amount of effort. The sanctions and coordinated diplomatic efforts are used to try to return Russia to the constructive track and to persuade it to remove its troops from Ukraine. At the same time, the NATO countries are strengthening their defense and trying to oppose other threats coming from Russia. The EU countries and the USA create centers for countering Russian propaganda, protecting data,

and responding to cyberattacks. Conclusions by specialized analytical centers carry more authority in making decisions in respect to Russia. International organizations are compiling the evidence of Russian military aggression and are developing new diplomatic, political, economic, and military approaches to resolving the Donbas conflict.

Russian mass media – They insist that everybody "unfairly turned against Russia", while Russia "is fighting for global peace and stability". They emphasize Russia's key role in resolving global problems, in particular those related to fighting international terrorism. They express assurance that new governments of the western countries will base their actions on "practical" motivations and will review the sanctions policy. Considerable efforts are made to ensure international isolation of Ukraine. For example, the difference in views on the historic events of the 20th century is used to provoke a conflict between Ukraine and Poland. There are strong demands for Ukraine to directly negotiate with the "government representatives" of the PDDLO.

Ukrainian mass media, Western mass media and Internet community – For the time being, they are continuing the same trends as at the previous stage.

Widespread talking points of Russian propaganda

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources	
There are no regular Russian troops in the Donbas	Participation of Russian troops from 75 regular military units in the Donbas war has been proven as fact. They all deploy to Ukraine on the orders of their command, the Russian Ministry of Defense pays their salaries, and they are regularly awarded combat decorations.	Evidence of Russia's military presence in the Donbas was published multiple times by independent analytical centers (RUSI, Atlantic Council), independent investigation teams (Bellingcat), Ukrainian intelligence, and journalists. One of the most complete databases containing the facts that establish the presence of Russian troops and army units in the Donbas in 2014-2016 has been put together by the volunteers of InformNapalm international community: russian-presence-in-ukraine.silk.co.	
Russian authorities are not involved in recruiting mercenaries to fight in the Donbas	Recruitment is performed by military registration offices, veteran and Cossack organizations, which arrange coordinated deployment of militants to the area of fighting in the east of Ukraine.	Journalists published numerous articles on the subject. Detailed description of the recruitment process can be found in Boris Nemtsov's report "Putin. War": https://goo.gl/Vxyl14.	

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources	
Russia does not supply military equipment, weapons and ammunition to the Donbas	Although Russian mass media insist that all weapons used by the militants in the Donbas have been captured from the Ukrainian army, there is vast evidence confirming that from the beginning of the hostilities, Russia has been supplying tanks, artillery, MANPADS, anti-aircraft missiles, electronic warfare stations, APCs, armored vehicles, trucks, trailers, drones, small arms, grenades, mines, various ammunition, etc., to the Donbas.	Strong evidence shows the use of unique weapons that have never been supplied to Ukraine. For example, InformNapalm volunteers have compiled the database that includes more than 40 types of weapons that could only be sourced from Russia: https://goo.gl/dXLC1f. The continuous flow of weapons and military equipment from Russia to the east of Ukraine is discussed in the Atlantic Council's report "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine": https://goo.gl/oBounk	
Russia does not sponsor the DPR and the LPR terrorist organizations	In fact, over 90% of the budgets of the DPR and the LPR is covered by Russia. The industry in the region has been destroyed, some of the factory equipment has been dismantled and moved to Russia, less valuable assets (mines, warehouses, small production equipment, etc.) have been taken apart and sold as scrap. Money, mostly cash, is delivered to the occupied territory by guarded trains. Also, the Kremlin uses banks in the occupied Abkhazia (Georgia) in its mechanisms of financing the terrorist organizations. Even the militant leaders have confirmed financing by Russia on more than one occasion.	A lot of evidence exists. The most notable are the investigations by the German newspaper Bild https://goo.gl/xK5YRn and France24 TV channel https://youtu.be/jxtq4PNfRPg	

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources	
Ukraine is responsible for the downing of Flight MH17	Even though the Joint Investigation Team has published only the preliminary investigation results, it has rejected all the versions offered by Russian mass media. "JIT concludes that flight MH17 was shot down by a missile of the 9M38 series, launched by a BUK-TELAR, from farmland in the vicinity of Pervomaiskiy. At that time, the area was controlled by pro-Russian fighters. The BUK-TELAR was brought in from the territory of the Russian Federation and subsequently, after having shot down flight MH-17, was taken back to the Russian Federation."	Full text of the Joint Investigation Team report can be found at https://goo.gl/pt6mIG	
Russia does not pay salaries to the militants in the Donbas	Contrary to these claims, there is solid evidence of Russia paying for "business trips" of career servicemen and mercenaries. Russian career servicemen are offered triple salaries for their participation in the fighting against Ukraine in the Donbas. Even the exact amounts are reported: 60-90 thousand roubles per month for enlisted soldiers and 120-150 thousand for officers. In some special cases, salaries as high as 240 thousand roubles have been reported.	There are multiple sources for this information. One of the best known is Boris Nemtsov's report "Putin. War": https://goo.gl/Vxyl14 Triple salaries for Russian servicemen in the Donbas were also mentioned by Vasyl Hrytsak, Head of the Security Service of Ukraine.	

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources	
Russia never shelled the territory of Ukraine across the border	In July, 2014, the Ukrainian troops' advance at the militants' positions was so rapid that Russia decided to use massive shellings from the territory of Rostov Oblast in the Russian Federation. There are videos of these shellings, witnesses' statements, satellite data as well as photo forensics data.	Cross-border shellings of the territory of Ukraine are mentioned in Atlantic Council's report "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine" https://goo.gl/bRCWDt as well as in InformNapalm's analysis of satellite images of 539 craters remaining after the shellings in August, 2014: https://goo.gl/S0mrtT and in Bellingcat's recent notable investigation of Russian shellings: https://goo.gl/Kp81GJ	
Russian troops and militants never torture prisoners of war and civilians	There are multiple witness statements and evidence of torture of both Ukrainian servicemen captured by the Russian hybrid army troops in the Donbas and civilians. 47 Ukrainian Army soldiers freed from the militants' capture decided to appeal to international institutions about their tortures while in captivity. Also there are witness statements and other evidence of many prisoners being shot on the spot.	One of the reliable pieces of evidence of prisoner torture is the documentary Those Who Survived Hell (youtu.be/hSLaPMhRQ_E) containing the statements of people who were imprisoned in the occupied territories. The relevant information can also be found in the report of Małgorzata Gosiewska, Deputy of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland: https://goo.gl/ZdVbe5	

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources
Human rights and freedoms are respected in the territories controlled by the DPR and the LPR.	There is documented evidence of grave violations of the human rights in the occupied territory, particularly: extrajudicial executions, kidnapping, torture, illegal arrests and imprisonments, excessive restrictions of the freedom of speech. The right to life is violated due to accidental and intentional shellings of residential areas. Expropriation of citizens' property is widespread. In addition, women and young girls are kidnapped to be made sex workers, people of both genders – for forced labor. Children are used as fighters, informers, or "human shield" for the Russian hybrid army. Freedom of speech is highly restricted in the occupied territories.	Official reports of the Commissioner on Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, missions of independent international human rights organizations. In respect to the involvement of children in combat, in addition to the reports of the OSCE SMM and other international organizations, the summary report on child labor in Ukraine in 2015 is worth mentioning: https://goo.gl/7LMdpG Human rights violations by Russia in the occupied territories were also recognized in a resolution of PACE. There is a large amount of data concerning extrajudicial executions, kidnapping and torture. Recently, the InformNapalm volunteers investigated the horrible execution of prisoners of war: https://goo.gl/fhl0hv
There is no Russian aggression, and the Kremlin officials had nothing to do with planning and organizing the Donbas war.	The Russian authorities are directly involved in the organization of the military aggression against Ukraine. There is evidence against top officials of the Russian Federation, in particular Vladislav Surkov, an aide to the President of Russia, Sergey Glazyev, an adviser to the President of Russia on regional economic integration, and Konstantin Zatulin, an ex-deputy of the Russian State Duma. Surkov's role is especially interesting as he is the de facto head of the "DPR" and "LPR" terrorist organizations.	- mailbox dump of Vladislav Surkov's reception office known as SurkovLeaks, obtained by the hacktivists of the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance (UCA) and provided to InformNapalm for analysis: https://goo.gl/Cm567e - the recordings of Glazyev's telephone conversations with the organizers of pro-Russian protests in Ukrainian cities, known as "Glazyev Tapes," were made public by the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine; they shed light on how the beginning of the war in Ukraine was orchestrated: youtu.be/0w78QuxBUe0

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources
Russia's actions in Ukraine violate no international laws.	In fact, Russia has violated: the UN Charter, the Declaration on Principles of International Law of 1970, the Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States, the Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Domestic Affairs of States of 1981, the Declaration on Protection of Independence and Sovereignty of 1965, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords), the Budapest Memorandum signed between Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the USA, and the Great Britain, ensuring sovereignty and protection of the territorial integrity of Ukraine of 1994. By providing support to the terrorist organizations in the east of Ukraine and in Crimea, Russia has violated the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism of 1999 and the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism of 1994. These are just a few of the international treaties violated by Russia's invasion into Ukraine and occupation of its territory.	Texts of the corresponding laws https://goo.gl/vw4buH

Kremlin's claim	Fact	Evidence and sources
Pro-Russian combatants in the Donbas cannot be considered war criminals	In November, 2016, the International Criminal Court in the Hague found the evidence of military crimes in the Donbas sufficient and passed a resolution on continuation of proceedings of over 800 documented incidents. Any violations of law during the Donbas war may be considered war crimes if they violate the Geneva Convention and the rules of international humanitarian law – both by the Ukrainian Army and by the Russian hybrid army.	Report of the International Criminal Court on Preliminary Examination Activities, 2016: https://goo.gl/hUHDfk, also the texts of the Geneva Conventions and other international laws.

Chapter 6. Russian Presence

Using the Internet to research the aggression

In the modern world, intelligence services of the world powers can use a wide range of sources of information, including satellite data. However, for a long time, the facts of Russian aggression against Ukraine were not being made public.

The information vacuum concerning the evidence of the aggression is being filled by journalists, analysts, and volunteers. They have also undertaken the systematization of the facts of the Russian presence. Civil intelligence communities have been actively forming based on the principle of "swarm intelligence". New types of communications easily cross national borders and attract participants with different knowledge and skill sets from around the world.

« ...We must organize the evidence of the presence of regular troops (or servicemen 'on business trips'), collect photos and other documents. This is what Bellingcat, InformNapalm, journalists like Simon Ostrovsky and individual activists like Vladimir Dyukov, a patriot from Torez, have been doing... Thanks to the efforts of these people, we now know that there are Russians, Chechens, and even Buryats with regular Russian Army units on the eastern front.

Taras Shumeyko, journalist

Among other things, these networks are engaged in open source intelligence (OSINT), fact-checking of news stories, identification of fake news, creating analytical content, and disclosure of the future plans of the aggressor, publishing the information that Russia tries to keep secret from the world.

InformNapalm international intelligence community has achieved notable success in this regard, bringing together OSINT researchers, analysts, bloggers, IT specialists, translators, and video and graphic designers. The InformNapalm web site is maintained by about 30 language-specific editorial teams reporting on the facts of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Syria, and other countries that have become targets of the hybrid warfare, including Belarus, Poland, Czechia, and the states in the Baltics and the Balkans.

August-September 2014. Anton Dmitriyev and Sergei Malafeyev, servicemen of the 44th training tank regiment of the Russian Army (military unit 30616-8, part of the 467th District Training Center), next to the road sign on the village line of Chervonosilske, Amvrosiivka Raion, Donetsk Oblast. The village is located 12km away from Ilovaisk, where heavy fighting took place in August 2014.
https://goo.gl/FKskkT

The reports published by InformNapalm are cited by the mainstream media not only in Ukraine, but also in other countries. In addition to high-profile disclosures, InformNapalm offers analytical reports and presentations, which are used as evidence in the decision making process of international institutions.

On October 11, 2016, an analytical report and a video presentation by InformNapalm on the evidence of the Russian aggression was presented at the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg. PACE went on to adopt two resolutions on Ukraine, recognizing the fact of the Russian aggression and appealing to Russia directly to withdraw its troops from Donbas.

On November 19, 2016, the Ukrainian delegation presented two video reports based on the materials of InformNapalm investigations at a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Istanbul. Then on November 21, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing the fact of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

This kind of cooperation of volunteers, diplomats, and international organizations facilitated the breakthrough in the understanding of the situation in the Donbas by the international community.

Today, the systematic database of the evidence of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine gathered by InformNapalm is the largest publicly available resource on this subject. Therefore, it has been used in this guidebook to demonstrate the Russian presence in the Donbas.

October 2, 2014. A column of Russian T-90A tanks from the 136th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Russian Army (military unit 63354, located in Buynaksk, Dagestan) is moving along the road near Fabrichne in the area of Luhansk Airport. Photo was found by InformNapalm in the social profile of Russian tankman Vitali Marakasov. **https://goo.gl/U5eaYA**

The mechanics of the aggression

Russian Army servicemen appeared in the Donbas in the spring of 2014. Initially, they were mostly special forces officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the Russian Army and law enforcement officers from the North Caucasus republics. In the summer of that year, Russian armored vehicles, artillery, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) became increasingly visible. In August 2014, battalion tactical groups (BTG) of the Russian Army, which entered the territory of Ukraine, managed to turn the situation in favor of the militants, encircling ATO forces near Ilovaisk. Russian BTGs were also involved in the battles for Donetsk Airport and Debaltseve in late 2014 - early 2015.

In early 2015, Russian military command shifted to a different tactic of deploying its troops in the Donbas. With Minsk Agreements in effect, Moscow had to give up the use of entire battalion or company tactical groups, because large regular military units of the Russian Army could not remain unnoticed when operating in the Donbas. To cover up the activities of the Russian military in Ukraine, the two newly formed army corps (1st and 2nd AC) included both regular troops and militants in hybrid military formations..

Russian servicemen are posted to the militant units one by one or in small groups (up to a squad), dissolving among the local fighters and foreign mercenaries. The testimony of POWs (e.g. Russian Major Vladimir Starkov), intercepted telephone conversations (e.g. Russian Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Yershov) and OSINT investigations indicate that the so-called 12th Reserve Command of the Southern Military District of the Russian Ministry of Defense in Novocherkassk, Rostov Oblast serves as the cover for the deployment of Russian servicemen to the territory of Ukraine.

In its investigations, InformNapalm international volunteer community documented the participation of servicemen from 75 army and security units of the Russian Federation in the war in the Donbas. The following list of military units is accurate but likely incomplete.

Detailed list available at
http://russian-presence-in-ukraine.silk.co/

Ground troops

Servicemen of 45 Russian Army units were identified as participants in the fighting in the Donbas. These include infantry, artillery, armored, air defense, and aerial reconnaissance units. Most BTGs deployed for the war with Ukraine were formed from the assets of infantry units of the Southern Military District: the 136th, 18th, 17th, 8th, 19th, 205th, 33rd, and 34th Motorized Rifle Brigades, the 291st Artillery Brigade, and the 7th Military Base. They are staffed mainly with contract servicemen with combat experience gained in operations in the North Caucasus. There are also tactical groups deployed from the more remote regions of Russia.

Airborne troops

Servicemen from 12 military units were recorded. They were involved in the rapid response operations in critical situations and to maintain initiative primarily in offensive operations. The battles of Ilovaisk, Debaltseve, and Donetsk Airport - all these operations involved Russian paratroopers as parts of assault and support groups.

GRU special forces

Representatives of 7 special units of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of Russia (GRU) were identified. Russian special forces in Ukraine have been engaged in reconnaissance and sabotage operations. They seized administrative buildings, attacked Ukrainian military facilities, and ambushed military convoys. At the current stage, Russian special forces servicemen are integrated into the illegal armed groups. Under cover identities, they hold key positions - from deputy commanders to junior officers and specialists for operation and maintenance of the modern types of weapons and military equipment.

Navy, including Naval Infantry (marines) and coastal defense

Members of four military units were identified: the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade and the 200th Special Forces Brigade of The Northern Fleet were active in Luhansk Oblast in 2014-2015, the 99th Tactical Group of the Northern Fleet - in Donetsk Oblast in 2015, the 810th Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet (based in occupied Crimea) - in the area of Mariupol in October 2016.

January 28, 2015. Special forces soldier of the 3rd Brigade of GRU poses with the Russian "Val" rifle. The photo had this comment added: "Before the assault on a height... In 2 hours I will be 300." ("300" denotes troops wounded in action.) The soldier was wounded at 15:30 while attacking the height 307.9 near the village of Sanzharivka, Donetsk Oblast.
https://goo.gl/Uw4Whf

National Guard (Russian Guard)

Members of five of these units were identified, all contract servicemen with combat experience from the North Caucasus: 46th Separate Operations Brigade, 451th Operations Regiment, and 15th Special Operations Unit "Vyatich" directly participated in the hostilities and also trained the illegal armed groups.

Air Force

Servicemen of air defense and electronic warfare units, which are structurally included in the Russian Air Force, have been identified. In spring 2015, units of the 338th Electronic Regiment of the 4th Army were spotted in the Donbas. Their task is airfield security and control of air space (operating Kasta and Nebo radar types). Also Pantsir-S1, the modern surface-to-air missile and gun systems, were spotted. One of these vehicles was identified as belonging to the 606th Air Defense Missile Regiment. The Buk surface-to-air missile system that brought down Flight MH17 is probably another Russian delivery to the Donbas.

Some Russian servicemen have been coming to Ukraine from units stationed in the Far East, in the Arctic, and even Tajikistan. Military units based in the occupied Abkhazia and Crimea as well as Transnistria have also been involved in the war in the Donbas. Russian military and political leadership are using the military conflicts in the Donbas and in Syria to test new weaponry and operational capabilities of Russian troops, for both conventional and non-conventional or hybrid warfare.

More information is available at
https://goo.gl/ifftv3

February 2, 2016. Fire range exercise by Russian militants at the village of Manuilivka, near Chystiakove / Torez, Donetsk Oblast. The photo shows the Russian 2B26 MLRS based on Kamaz-5350 truck, which is not in service in the Ukrainian Army and is a direct proof of weapon deliveries from Russia.
https://goo.gl/RuhNj6

Ukrainian soldiers inspect the firing position of a Russian team armed with mortars that crossed the border on the night of July 7, 2014, and fired on the positions of the 79th Separate Air Assault Brigade of the Ukrainian Army. Under return fire, the unit left their personal belongings and the plate of a 120mm mortar and escaped across the border. Photo provided by Lieutenant Viktor Mykhailyuk, the commander of the NBC platoon of the 79th Brigade. **https://goo.gl/eQ9rnw**

DPR militants with the two destroyed Russian T-72B tanks of the 1989 model that belonged to the 5th Separate Tank Brigade of the Russian Army (military unit 46108). The tanks were destroyed during the fighting for the village of Logvinove that was the key position during the battle for Debaltseve. The attribution of the tanks was made based on InformNapalm research. The loss of Russian T-72B tanks was also confirmed in the interview of the 5th Brigade soldier Dorzhi Batomunkuyev, which he gave to the Russian newspaper "Novaya Gazeta" on March 2, 2015.
https://goo.gl/MjOofE

Russian weaponry in the Donbas

Another important component of the Russian aggression in the Donbas is the supply of weapons and military equipment to the militants. The saturation of the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts with Russian military equipment has led to the situation where by some indicators (e.g. the numbers of tanks or artillery systems) the military formations of the DPR and the LPR surpass such NATO countries as France or Germany.

InformNapalm community has conducted more than 45 specific OSINT investigations, which identified more than 40 types of Russian military equipment.

Most of the equipment listed below are modern types, which were adopted by the Russian Armed Forces from 2004 to 2015. This military equipment is not produced in Ukraine, and was never imported by Ukraine, therefore could not have been captured by the militants. Operation and maintenance of modern military equipment also requires qualified staff, which also suggests the participation of Russian military personnel in the war in the Donbas.

The following list is accurate, but likely incomplete. The investigations do not answer the question about the numbers of pieces of each equipment type detected in the ATO zone. Most of the listed hardware are electronic warfare and signals intelligence systems.

While using the Donbas as the proving grounds for new types of weaponry, Russia is also flooding the occupied territory of Ukraine with the legacy weapons from Soviet times, which have also been repeatedly recorded in InformNapalm investigations. Proving the direct deliveries of these types of equipment to the militants from the Russian Federation require different methods. Therefore such discussion is outside the scope of this report.

List of equipment types

GAZ-233014 Tigr, infantry mobility vehicle

Approved for service by the Russian Ministry of Defense in 2005. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk Oblast and described in numerous InformNapalm investigations. This infantry mobility vehicle (IMV) belongs to the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the of the 58th Army of the Southern Military District of the Russian Federation

Tigr has level 3 ballistic protection according to the Russian GOST R 50963-96 technical standard.

## GAZ-39371 Vodnik, infantry mobility vehicle
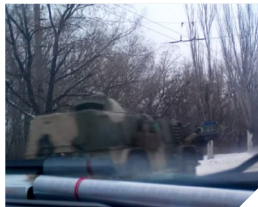
Russian multipurpose all-terrain armored vehicle designed for personnel and cargo transportation. It provides protection for the crew from small arms. Entered service with the Russian Army in 2005. Never supplied to Ukraine. It features on the video from Sorokyne / Krasnodon (Luhansk Oblast) made on January 10, 2015.

KAMAZ-43269 Vystrel, infantry mobility vehicle

Russian light-armored vehicle. It passed the experimental test at the 7th Military Base in Gudauta. Since 2009, vehicles of this type were recorded in Georgia at Russian military bases in Abkhazia and Samachablo (Tskhinvali region). Also used by regional special operation units of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) of Russia. Was spotted in Luhansk and Luhansk Oblast. More than 10 vehicles of this type were recorded in Donbas.

BTR-82A, armored personnel carrier
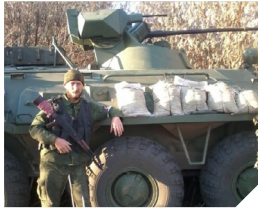
Russian armored personnel carrier (APC) is a deep modernization of the BTR-80. Armament: integrated turret system armed with a 30 mm 2A42 automatic cannon aligned with a 7.62 mm PKTM machine gun. Entered service with the Russian Army in 2013. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk Oblast and described in numerous InformNapalm investigations. It was identified as belonging to the 18th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Russian army.

T-72B, main battle tank, 1989 model

Modernized version of the T-72 equipped with new armament and fire control systems, Kontakt-5 explosive reactive armor (ERA), 9K120 Svir laser-guided antitank guided missile system (ATGM), B-84 engine, 1A40 fire control system and 2A46M smoothbore gun. Not operated by Ukrainian Army, never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk, Debaltseve and Makiivka. The 5th Armored Brigade of the Eastern Military District of Russia was identified as its operator.

T-72BA, main battle tank, 1999 model

A modernized modification of the T-72B, modernization is performed at the Uralvagonzavod factory within an overhaul. First tanks were delivered in 1999-2000. The modified vehicle is set apart from the regular B model through treads, ERA and a distinctive wind sensor on the turret. Never supplied to Ukraine. The destruction of Russian tanks of this modification was recorded near Starobesheve (Donetsk Oblast). Their operator was identified as the 21st Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Russian Army.

T-72B3, main battle tank, 2011 model

The upgraded version of the T-72. Supplied to the Russian Army from 2012. Never supplied to Ukraine. It has been identified in Luhansk, Ilovaisk and Debaltseve. A MBT of this modification was destroyed in the area Debaltseve. In service with 6th Armored Brigade of the Russian Armed Forces.

T-90A, main battle tank, 2006 model

Modification of the T-90. It was fitted with up-to-date second-generation ESSA thermal imaging scope, stabilized in two planes and integrated with the main scope and its range-finding channel. This enhanced the night vision range from 1800 to 4000 m. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk Oblast. In service with the 136-th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Russian Armed Forces.

T-72S1, main battle tank

The export version of the T-72B1, was supplied by Russia to Iran and Venezuela in 2011-2012. The main external difference from the T-72B is the night sight and the DVE-BS wind sensor. It was introduced into the Russian army in 1993, after the cancellation of a number of export sales. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified at a factory in Bile village (Luhansk Oblast) not far from the M04 motorway, 3 km west of Zbirna railway station.

Mustang KamAZ-5350 Armored Truck

Russian military truck with 6x6 wheel drive. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. A vehicle of this type with an additional protection kit and the MM-501 multi-functional module to transport personnel was recorded destroyed in Khrustalnyi / Krasnyi Luch (Luhansk Oblast)

Ural-632301, military truck

Russian multi-purpose 8x8 military truck with load capacity up to 14 tons. Approved for service in 2004. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Donetsk Oblast in numerous InformNapalm investigations.

Ural-43206, military truck
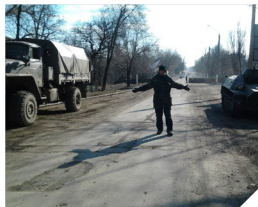
Russian multi-purpose 4x4 truck. Initially issued to the Russian army in 2008. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk Oblast in numerous InformNapalm investigations.

2B26 Grad-K, multiple launch rocket system

Modernized version of the Grad multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) mounted on KamAZ-5350 chassis, instead of the dated Ural-375D. Entered service with the Russian army in 2011. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Chystiakove / Torez (Donetsk Oblast).

9K58 Smerch, multiple launch rocket system

The 300mm multiple launch rocket system. It is in service both with the Russian and the Ukrainian army. However, there are no registered facts of the militants capturing this MRLS. On the January 22, 2015, a Smerch launcher was spotted in the occupied city of Makiivka (Donetsk Oblast). On the February 10, 2015 the pro-Russain militants launched a rocket attack on the military airfield and residential areas of Kramatorsk.

## 1RL232-2M Leopard, battlefield surveillance radar

This sophisticated ground-based battlefield surveillance radar is capable of detecting ground and marine surface targets as well as artillery shell bursts. The high positioning accuracy for targets and shell bursts allows for precision fire adjustment. Its radio-electronic equipment enables the station to monitor the situation in range from 200 m to 40 km. Unveiled at the Oboronexpo 2014. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Debaltseve, Donetsk Oblast.

9K330 Tor, 9K331 Tor M-1 and 9K332 Tor M-2, tactical surface-to-air missile systems

This is an all-weather low to medium altitude, short-range surface-to-air missile system designed for engaging airplanes, helicopters, cruise missiles, guided munitions, drones and short-range ballistic threats. 9K330 Tor was phased out from service in Ukraine in 2001. No evidence of capture of this type of SAM by militants. 9K330 was identified in Donetsk and its latest Russian modification 9K332 was recorded in Shahtarsk, Donetsk Oblast on January 20, 2015.

96K6 Pantsir-S1, surface-to-air missile and gun system
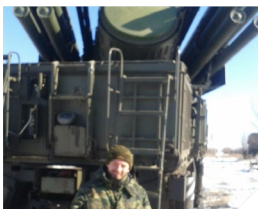
Russian self-propelled land-based surface-to-air missile and gun system (SAMG). Designed to provide point air defense of military, industrial and administrative installations against aircraft, helicopters, precision munitions, cruise missiles and UAV's, as well as additional protection to air defense units from air and surface threats. Approved for service by the Russian Defense Ministry in 2012. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk and Shakhtarsk, Donetsk Oblast.

P-166-0,5 radio station

Mobile military medium-power HF/VHF radio station based on K1Sh1 versatile wheel chassis. Entered service with the Russian Army in 2005. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Debaltseve, Donetsk Oblast.

R-441-OV Liven, radio station

Designed to provide countermeasures-safe satellite communication for military units and separate objects of operational and operational-strategic command levels. Entered service with the Russian Army in 2007. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Luhansk.

R-149BMR Kushetka-B, command vehicle

Russian command vehicle of the operational and tactical level based on K1Sh1 chassis. It is designed to ensure monitoring of the combat zone operational environment. It is fitted with HF and VHF radios and navigation equipment. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Luhansk Oblast.

RB-341V Leer-3, EW system

Russian system featuring a control truck on KAMAZ-5350 chassis and an Orlan-10 drone. Objectives: jamming of mobile communication; simulation of GSM 900 and GSM 1800 base stations and sending faked signals (messages); signals intelligence by detecting emission points of GSM phones. Unveiled in early October 2015. Never supplied to Ukraine.

R-378B Borisoglebsk-2, EW system

Russian automated jamming station based on the MT-LB. The system is designed to jam mobile satellite communication and navigation systems in an integrated tactical command and control system. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Kadiivka / Stakhanov and Luhansk.

R-934UM, EW system

Russian radio jamming station. It provides automated detection, direction finding and signal intelligence of radio sources in the frequency range between 100 and 2000 MHz; it also jams VHF radiotelephone and mobile trunked radio systems. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Luhansk in InformNapalm investigations.

R-330Zh Zhitel, EW system

Russian radio jamming station. It provides automated detection, direction finding and signal intelligence of radio sources in the frequency range between 100 and 2000 MHz; it also jams portable and mobile ground stations of satellite communication systems and base stations of GSM-900/1800 cellular communication systems. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Makiivka and Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast.

Torn, EW system

Russian radio jamming station. Specifications are not known. Currently in testing with the Russian Armed Forces. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted by the InformNapalm investigators in Donetsk.

Rtut-BM, EW system

Russian radio proximity fuse jamming station. Designed for the protection of personnel and military equipment from various types of shells and missiles equipped with proximity fuses. In addition, the system can be used to jam communication and radar systems. Was released in 2011. First entered service with the Russian Army in 2013. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Donetsk.

RB-636AM2 Svet-KU, EW system

Designed for monitoring of the airwaves and tracking various radio emitting sources. The system is able to monitor the radio environment and to protect the data transmitted over wireless channels against interception. Entered service with the Russian Armed Forces in 2012. Never supplied to Ukraine. Spotted in Luhansk.

Granat-1, UAV

Russian unmanned aerial vehicle, part of a remote monitoring and relay system, capable of air surveillance by photo, video and thermal imaging equipment at a distance of 15 km. The development of the system was completed in 2010. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Debaltseve in an InformNapalm investigation.

Granat-2, UAV
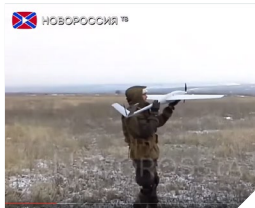
Russian unmanned aerial vehicle, part of the of a remote monitoring and relay system, capable of air surveillance by photo, video and thermal imaging equipment at a distance of 15 km. The development of the system was completed in 2010. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Debaltseve in an InformNapalm investigation.

Forpost, UAV
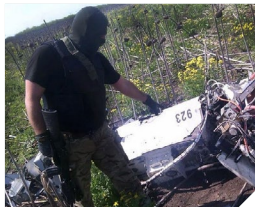
Russian unmanned aerial vehicle. A licensed copy of an Israeli Searcher 2 drone. Manufactured at the Ural Works of Civil Aviation since 2012 Never supplied to Ukraine. In 2015, the UAV of this type, with the side number 923 was shot down by Ukrainian forces in Donetsk Oblast. The Forpost UAV is in service with only 5 units of the Russian Armed Forces as of 2015. Totally, 10 UAV's (2 pieces per each military unit).

Orlan-10, UAV

Russian unmanned aerial vehicle. Its maximum operating range is 120 km. The system entered operation in 2010. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Zelenopillia, Luhansk Oblast and Amvrosiivka, Donetsk Oblast.

Eleron-3SV, UAV

Russian unmanned aerial vehicle. Its maximum operating range is 25 km. Never supplied to Ukraine. Identified in Olenivka village, Donetsk Oblast by the InformNapalm investigatiors.

Zastava, UAV

Russian unmanned aerial vehicle. A licensed copy of the Israeli UAV manufactured by IAI. Manufactured at the Ural Works of Civil Aviation since 2010 Its maximum operating range is 10 km. It is in service with the Russian Armed Forces. Never supplied to Ukraine. It was shot down by Ukrainian border guards near Harasymivka village, Luhansk Oblast.

December 19, 2014. The photo was taken at the Russian military range "Kuzminskiy" in Rostov Oblast and uploaded by Aleksandr "Terek" Vdovenko, a citizen of Russia and a DPR militant, who participated in the fighting in the Donbas since July 2014, in such places as Shakhtarsk, Nikishino, Faschivka, Vuhlehirsk, and others. In the photo, he is holding a recent model "Granat-2" UAV. The photo is titled, "Our birds". These Russian UAVs were also employed in the battle for Debaltseve.
https://goo.gl/JPFPSj

Examples of the Soviet period military equipment supplied by Russia to the conflict area:

- ↗ T-64 main battle tanks
- ↗ Early modifications of T-72B tanks
- ↗ 2S1 "Gvozdika" self-propelled howitzers
- ↗ "Strela-10" surface-to-air missile systems
- ↗ BMP-1 and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles
- ↗ MT-LB multipurpose armored vehicles
- ↗ D-30 122mm towed howitzers
- ↗ "Msta-B" 152mm howitzers
- ↗ MT-12 "Rapira" anti-tank guns

More information is available at
https://goo.gl/iUYYkA

Summer 2015. The photo shows the modern Russian EW system RB-314B "Leer-3" in Donetsk. It was also seen in videos taken in March 2016 in Donetsk suburbs. The system includes Russian "Orlan-10" UAVs. It is used for jamming GSM end user devices, signals intelligence, and imitation of cell tower operation. It is also used to send text messages. **https://goo.gl/qQ4Dmf**

Kirill Demenkov, a serviceman from the 46th Separate Operational Purpose Brigade of the Russian Interior Ministry. He is in the Donbas on a regular basis, fights in the illegal armed formations of the DPR in the industrial zone near Avdiivka and Donetsk Airport. Often he takes photos in front of burning and destroyed houses, has many pictures with the Russian "Shmel" portable rocket launcher and other weapons. He is suspected of arson and looting.
https://goo.gl/sqFBRS

Afterword

Many people participate in the discussions about the Donbas. Far fewer of them actually went there. The lack of real experts on the region is noticeable. However, the Donbas is now an integral part of the geopolitical standoff that in the future will require even more comprehensive attention.

Maps and historic records present the Donbas as a monolithic conglomeration of legacy industry and a part of Ukraine. Statistics and official reports show that the everyday problems of its residents are close to the heart of every Ukrainian. The interviews of independent experts tell us about the contradictions of life in the Donbas and near the border that are typical for the new century (nostalgia and European aspirations, overblown economic ambitions, and at the same time significant achievements in sports that became the pride of the whole nation in the last several years).

It is only in masterfully built political speeches and reports by Russian media where Donbas appears as a special, separate reality. This ultimately gave the strongest impulse to the flare up of the fighting there.

The chronicles of the information and real wars, the mechanics of the Russian aggression, new solutions to opposing it made possible by the Internet, international missions - all of that necessitated the creation of this guide to the Donbas, a collection of reference points, norms, and the survival rules in the region. However, during its creation it became obvious that this guidebook can't pretend to be complete, as long as the war continues and the numbers of dead, wounded, and wronged require constant adjustments...

We plan to continue research in the other projects of the Prometheus Center in order to find the answers to the difficult and still unaddressed questions about Donbas. This will include further updates to our website, www.prometheus.ngo. The already diverse Donbas, like all militarized zones, is changing and breaking apart - into the occupied, frontline, and free sections, into the ruined, damaged, and viable ones, into the retrograde and modern ones... Traveling along those landscapes can be dangerous, but unavoidable on the way to the goal of restoring the mutual trust in the modern post-truth world.

Appendixes

Toponyms changed in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the process of decommunization

Renamed raions of Donetsk Oblast

New name	Old name	Occupation
Bakhmut	Artemivsk	
Boikivske	Telmanivske	occupied
Lyman	Krasnyi Lyman	
Manhush	Pershotravneve	
Nikolske	Volodarske	
Pokrovsk	Krasnoarmiisk	

Renamed localities of Donetsk Oblast

Type	New name	Old name	Raion / subordination	Occupation
village	Azov	Dzerzhynske	Novoazovsk	occupied
town	Bakhmut	Artemivsk	Bakhmut	
settlement	Balka	Chervonyi Zhovten	Snizhne city council	occupied
settlement	Betmanove	Krasnyi Partyzan	Yasynuvata	occupied
village	Bilokrynychne	Kalinine	Boikivske	occupied
urban-type settlement	Blagodatne	Voikove	Khartsyzk city council	occupied
settlement	Blahodatne	Oktiabr	Velyka Novosilka	
urban-type settlement	Boikivske	Telmanove	Boikivske	occupied

town	Bunge	Yunokomunarivsk	Yenakiieve city council	occupied
village	Chyrylanske	Oktiabrske	Boikivske / Michurine village council	occupied
town	Chystiakove	Torez		occupied
settlement	Dachne	Horkoho	Toretsk city council	
village	Debaltsivske	Komuna	Bakhmut	occupied
village	Dianivka	Kirovske	Volnovakha	
settlement	Dovha Balka	Artema	Kostiantynivka	
village	Druzhkivske	Chervonozoriane	Druzhkivka city council	
village	Fedorivka	Lunacharske	Pokrovsk	
village	Horikhove	Petrovskogo	Pokrovsk	
urban-type settlement	Hrafske	Komsomolskyi	Volnovakha	
village	Hryhorivka	Leninske	Pokrovsk	
village	Illinivka	Illicha	Kostiantynivka	
village	Ivanivske	Krasne	Bakhmut	
town	Kalmiuske	Komsomolske	Starobesheve	occupied
settlement	Kalynivka	Kalinina	Bakhmut	
village	Kalynivka	Kalinine	Pokrovsk	
village	Kalynove	Kalinine	Volnovakha	
settlement	Kalynove	Kotovskogo	Amvrosiivka	occupied
village	Kamiane	Voikove	Starobesheve	occupied
village	Kellerivka	Kirove	Nikolske	
settlement	Kermenchyk	Oktiabrske	Velyka Novosilka	
urban-type settlement	Kholodne	Sverdlove	Makiivka city council	occupied
village	Khreshchatytske	Krasnoarmiiske	Novoazovsk	occupied
town	Khrestivka	Kirovske		occupied
settlement	Khromove	Artemivske	Bakhmut	
urban-type settlement	Kopani	Voikovskyi	Amvrosiivka	occupied
village	Kostiantynopolske	Ostrovskogo	Marinka	
settlement	Kotlyne	Dymytrove	Pokrovsk	
village	Krynychky	Petrivske	Yenakiieve city council	occupied
village	Krynychne	Oktiabrske	Nikolske	
village	Kyslyche	Oktiabrske	Mospyne city council, Donetsk	occupied
village	Lavrynove	Radianske	Boikivske	occupied
village	Liubivka	Leninske	Starobesheve	occupied
town	Lyman	Krasnyi Lyman	Lyman	
urban-type settlement	Lypske	Krasnyi Oktiabr	Makiivka city council	occupied

village	Maiachka	Oktiabrske	Sloviansk	
village	Maiorove	Krasnyi Oktiabr	Boikivske	occupied
village	Malynivka	Ulianivka	Pokrovsk	
settlement	Manzhykiv Kut	Kalinina	Starobesheve	occupied
village	Molodetske	Lenine	Pokrovsk	
settlement	Myrne	Dzerzhynske	Lyman	
village	Myrne	Karla Marksa	Velyka Novosilka	
village	Myrne	Lenina	Dobropillia	
town	Myrnohrad	Dymytrov		
village	Nadiia	Artema	Dobropillia	
urban-type settlement	Nikolske	Volodarske	Nikolske	
settlement	Nova Olenivka	Petrivske	Volnovakha / Olenivka village council	
village	Nove Shakhove	Rozy Liuksemburh	Dobropillia	
village	Novoapostolivka	Chycherine	Volnovakha	
village	Novoselivka	Krasnoarmiiske	Sloviansk	
village	Oleksandrivske	Oktiabrske	Boikivske / Konkove village council	occupied
village	Oleksandrivske	Rozy Liuksemburh	Novoazovsk	occupied
village	Oleksandropil	Rozivka	Yasynuvata	
settlement	Ozerianivka	Pershe Travnia	Toretsk city council	
village	Ozerne	Illichivka	Lyman	
village	Pazeno	Petrivske	Bakhmut	
village	Petrivka	Petrivske	Volnovakha / Stritenka village council	
village	Petrivka	Petrivske	Dobropillia / Zolotyi Kolodiaz village council	
urban-type settlement	Piatypillia	Proletarske	Makiivka city council	occupied
village	Pikuzy	Kominternove	Volnovakha	occupied
urban-type settlement	Pivdenne	Leninske	Toretsk city council	
urban-type settlement	Pivnichne	Kirove	Toretsk city council	
town	Pokrovsk	Krasnoarmiisk	Pokrovsk	
village	Pokrovske	Illichivske	Manhush	
village	Prymiske	Radianska Ukraina	Manhush	
village	Sadove	Novopetrivske	Amvrosiivka, Blahodatne village council	occupied
village	Sarabash	Komunarivka	Starobesheve	occupied
village	Shakhove	Oktiabrske	Dobropillia	
village	Sofiivka	Artemivka	Kostiantynivka	
urban-type settlement	Sofiivka	Karlo-Marksove	Yenakiieve city council	occupied

village	Soniachne	Krasnivka	Volnovakha	
village	Sontsivka	Krasne	Pokrovsk	
village	Stara Mykolaivka	Pravdivka	Kostiantynivka	
settlement	Stepove	Petrivske	Yasynuvata	
village	Stritenka	Oktiabrske	Volnovakha	
settlement	Stupakove	Krasnyi Pakhar	Bakhmut	occupied
village	Sviato-Pokrovske	Kirove	Bakhmut	
village	Temriuk	Starchenkove	Nikolske	
town	Toretsk	Dzerzhynsk		
village	Ukrainka	Chervona Ukraina	Manhush	
village	Uzhivka	Leninske	Novoazovsk	occupied
settlement	Verezamske	Kirove	Starobesheve	occupied
village	Verkhnioielanchyk	Leninske	Amvrosiivka	occupied
settlement	Verkhnioosykove	Volodarskogo	Amvrosiivka	occupied
village	Verkhnioshyrokivske	Oktiabr	Novoazovsk	occupied
village	Verkhokamianka	Vorovske	Starobesheve	occupied
village	Vesna	Urytske	Dobropillia	
village	Vidrodzhennia	Dymytrova	Shakhtarsk	occupied
village	Vilkhivchyk	Novopetrivske	Amvrosiivka,Oleksiivske village council	occupied
village	Vozdvyzhenka	Krasnyi Pakhar	Bakhmut	
village	Yurivka	Vorovske	Pokrovsk	
town	Zalizne	Artemove	Toretsk city council	
urban-type settlement	Zarichne	Kirovsk	Lyman	
village	Zirka	Chervona Zirka	Velyka Novosilka	

Renamed raions of Luhansk Oblast

New name	Old name	Occupation
Sorokyne	Krasnodon	occupied
Dovzhansk	Sverdlovsk	occupied

Renamed localities of Luhansk Oblast

Type	New name	Old name	Raion / subordination	Occupation
village	Andriivka	Rozivka	Svatove	
village	Berezove	Dzerzhynske	Milove	
town	Bokovo-Khrustalne	Vakhrusheve	Khrustalnyi city council	occupied
urban-type settlement	Buran	Enhelsove	Sorokyne city council	occupied

village	Chapliiivka	Krasna Chapliivka	Troitske
village	Chornohorivka	Krasna Zoria	Perevalsk	occupied
village	Derkulove	Komuna	Markivka
settlement	Dibrova	Chervona Dibrova	Kreminna
town	Dovzhansk	Sverdlovsk	Dovzhansk	occupied
urban-type settlement	Dubove	Komsomolskyi	Dovzhansk city council	occupied
village	Dzherelne	Kalinine	Troitske
village	Dzherelne	Zhovtneve	Svatove
town	Holubivka	Kirovsk		occupied
village	Horikhova Balka	Radianske	Sorokyne	occupied
village	Hrekivka	Petrivske	Kreminna
urban-type settlement	Ivanivske	Lotykove	Slovianoserbsk	occupied
town	Kadiivka	Stakhanov		occupied
settlement	Kamianyi Plast	Komsomolets	Lutuhyne	occupied
urban-type settlement	Kartushyne	Proletarskyi	Rovenky city council	occupied
urban-type settlement	Katerynivka	Yuvileine	Luhansk city council	occupied
town	Khrustalnyi	Krasnyi Luch		occupied
village	Korzhove	Petrivka	Svatove
urban-type settlement	Krynychanske	Chervonohvardiiske	Holubivka city council	occupied
urban-type settlement	Krynychne	Biriukove	Dovzhansk	occupied
urban-type settlement	Kundriuche	Kalininskyi	Dovzhansk	occupied
town	Kypuche	Artemivsk	Perevalsk	occupied
settlement	Lahidne	Komsomolskyi	Svatove
village	Leonove	Chervonyi Zhovten	Antratsyt	occupied
urban-type settlement	Liubymivka	Dzerzhynskyi	Rovenky city council	occupied
village	Lobivski Kopalni	Krasnyi Kolos	Rovenky city council
village	Makariv Yar	Parkhomenko	Sorokyne	occupied
settlement	Malokalynove	Radhospnyi	Sorokyne	occupied
village	Mamusheve	Krasnyi Luch	Slovianoserbsk	occupied
urban-type settlement	Mariia	Lenina	Lutuhyne	occupied
village	Marivka	Karla Libknechta	Lutuhyne	occupied
village	Miasozharivka	Artemivka	Svatove
settlement	Myrne	Chervonoarmiiske	Bilokurakyne
village	Novoiehorivka	Sverdlovka	Svatove / Raihorodka village council
settlement	Nyzhnia Shevyrivka	Ordzhonikidze	Sorokyne	occupied
urban-type settlement	Petropavlivka	Petrivka	Stanytsia-Luhanska
town	Petrovo-Krasnosillia	Petrivske	Khrustalnyi city council	occupied

village	Pivneve	Industrialne	Kreminna	
village	Rannia Zoria	Chervona Zirka	Milove	
settlement	Seleznivske	Radhospnyi	Perevalsk	occupied
urban-type settlement	Sentianivka	Frunze	Slovianoserbsk	occupied
village	Shelestivka	Chervona Zoria	Milove	
town	Sorokyne	Krasnodon	Sorokyne	occupied
village	Sotenne	Chervonyj Zhovten	Stanytsia-Luhanska	
settlement	Stare	Chervonyj Prapor	Perevalsk	occupied
village	Storozhivka	Kalynivka	Svatove	
village	Sukhodil	Pionerske	Stanytsia-Luhanska	occupied
urban-type settlement	Teple	Krasnodon	Sorokyne city council	occupied
village	Travneve	Pervomaisk	Svatove	
village	Tverdokhlibove	Sverdlovka	Svatove / Nyzhnia Duvanka village council	
urban-type settlement	Valianivske	Leninske	Dovzhansk city council	occupied
urban-type settlement	Vedmezhe	Volodarsk	Dovzhansk city council	occupied
village	Vestativka	Petrivske	Svatove	
town	Voznesenivka	Chervonopartyzansk	Dovzhansk city council	occupied
village	Zaitseve	Illichivka	Troitske	
village	Zaliznychne	Chapaievka	Rovenky city council	occupied
settlement	Zelenyj Hai	Radhospnyi	Novopskov	
village	Zherebiache	Artema	Khrustalnyi city council	occupied
settlement	Zrazkove	Dzerzhynske	Luhansk city council	occupied

War lexicon

Descriptions of the conflict

Ukrainian legal acts	ATO; terrorist war against Ukraine; military conflict; armed conflict; armed conflict in the east of Ukraine; Russian information warfare against Ukraine; armed aggression and violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine (temporary occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the city of Sevastopol) by the Russian Federation; Russian military aggression in the particular districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts); armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine
International legal acts and official statements	The armed conflict in the east of Ukraine; the conflict in Ukraine; Russian military aggression against Ukraine; illegal military operations; Russia's armed intervention into Ukraine; participation of the regular units of the Russian Army in direct military operations on the territory of Ukraine; aggression and hybrid warfare on the part of the Russian Federation; Russian aggression in Ukraine; armed conflict in the particular districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts; military operations on the territory of Ukraine
Ukrainian media	Military conflict; armed conflict; the conflict in the east of Ukraine; military aggression of the Russian Federation; hybrid warfare; anti-terrorist operation
International media	Ukrainian crisis; Ukrainian conflict; civil war in Ukraine; Russian aggression in Ukraine; Russian military intervention in Ukraine; Russian war against Ukraine; hybrid warfare; separatist uprising
Russian propaganda / media	Civil war; war in Ukraine; war of Independence of the DPR and the LPR; internal conflict; the conflict in Ukraine

Parties to the conflict

The conflict area

Ukrainian Army	Russia-backed mercenaries; illegal armed groups; Russian occupation forces; militants; separatist groups controlling occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts	DPR and LPR terrorist organizations; temporarily occupied territories
Ukrainian Army; government forces	Armed groups; armed separatists; members of armed groups; separatists; foreign fighters	The self-proclaimed DPR and LPR; the territory under the control of armed groups; territory controlled by the government; areas controlled by armed groups
Ukrainian military; Ukrainian Army; ATO forces; ATO fighters	Terrorists; militants; gangs; pro-Russian mercenaries / militants; pro-Russian separatists; Russian terrorist groups; terrorist groups; illegal armed groups; Russian occupation forces; occupiers; invaders; hybrid forces of the Russian Federation	ATO / Occupied Territories; conflict zone; particular districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (PDDLO); territory not controlled by Ukrainian authorities; the so-called DPR and LPR
Ukrainian troops; government troops; Ukrainian army	Rebels; separatist rebels; Russian speaking rebels; Russian hybrid army; Russian terrorist forces; rebel freedom movement; Russia-supported fighters; Russian mercenaries; Russian terrorist army	Ukrainian territory outside the control of the Government; the so-called DPR, LPR
Ukies; junta; punishers; fascists; neo-Nazis; foreign mercenaries; enemy; Ukrainian security officials	Militia; armed forces of the DPR and the LPR; militias; defenders of Donbass; representatives of the republics; representatives of Donbass	The self-proclaimed DPR and LPR; Novorossiya; Kiev-controlled territory of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts

Acknowledgements of the Russian aggression by international institutions

NATO–Ukraine Commission

Date	Main message	Reference	
March 2, 2014 Brussels	Extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Russia's actions in the territory of Ukraine are condemned and considered a breach of international law.		
April 2014 Brussels	Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of foreign affairs ministers. The topics discussed included the political and security situation in Ukraine against the background of Russian aggression.	Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission https://goo.gl/trHcuU	
August 29 2014 Brussels	Extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission was held due to a serious military escalation by Russia against Ukraine. At the meeting, the NATO member states unanimously found Russia's illegal actions to be an act of aggression against Ukraine.	Statement of NATO Secretary General https://goo.gl/8SPi21	
September 4, 2014 Wales	NATO summit, meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of Heads of State and Governments with the participation of President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko. Acknowledgment of Russia's intervention into Ukraine and the fact of participation of the regular units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in direct military operation in Ukraine; official acknowledgment of the fact that Russia's actions are intended and have serious implications for the stability and security of the entire Euro-Atlantic area; acknowledgment of Russia's support of militants in eastern Ukraine; joint support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and strong non-recognition and condemnation of Russia's annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea; call on Russia to end its support for militants, withdraw its troops and stop its military activities along and across the Ukrainian border, engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities.	Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of Heads of State and Governments https://goo.gl/ynPkzC	

December 2, 2014, Brussels	Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of foreign ministers. Approval of the Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission on urgent measures of the Alliance's support of Ukraine in fighting the unprecedented aggression and hybrid war with the Russian Federation.	Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission https://goo.gl/WeZlNd	
January 26, 2015 Brussels	Extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of ambassadors. Terrorists' attack at civilians, militants' shelling of a regular bus near Volnovakha, a trolley-bus stop in Donetsk, and residential areas of Mariupol. The meeting participants strongly condemned the actions of pro-Russian terrorists of the "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic", primarily, for their attacks on civilians, as well as the Kremlin's aggressive policy. The members of the Alliance again firmly called on Russia to stop financing the terrorists, supplying them with advanced equipment and human resources and urged Russia to return to negotiations.	Statement of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg https://goo.gl/TmmJEf	
May 13, 2015 Antalya	Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of foreign ministers. Condemnation of Russia's aggressive actions and continued violation of international law and its international obligations.	Statement https://goo.gl/nfeFz2	
July 9, 2016 Warsaw	Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of Heads of State and Governments with the participation of President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko. Russia has continued its aggressive actions undermining Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security, in violation of international law. These developments have serious implications for the stability and security of the entire Euro-Atlantic area. Russia continues to foment a persistent state of instability in eastern Ukraine, which has led to the loss of nearly 10,000 lives in the Donbas and deprived Ukraine of a considerable part of its economic output.	Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of Heads of State and Governments https://goo.gl/v0NKIx	

UN General Assembly

Date	Main message	Reference	
March 27, 2014 New York	The referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on 16 March 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol.	Resolution 68/262 Territorial integrity of Ukraine https://goo.gl/n5pjzH	
November 15, 2016 New York	The document affirms the territorial integrity of Ukraine; the Russian Federation is referred to as the occupying Power and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are found temporary occupied territory.	Draft resolution Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine) https://goo.gl/81vUas	
December 19, 2016 New York	Russia's status of occupying Power is affirmed and the entire responsibility for serious violation of human rights in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.	Resolution Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)	

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Date	Main message	Reference	
November 21, 2016 Istanbul	The resolution condemns Russia's military, economic and information aggression against Ukraine, and expresses concern about the persistent failure to implement the Minsk Agreements due to the almost daily violation of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine by Russia and its proxies.	Resolution 431 Supporting Nato's Post-Warsaw Defence and Deterrence Posture https://goo.gl/ozrOnl	

Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Date	Main message	Reference	
September 17, 2014 Strasbourg	The presence of Russian troops in Ukraine and the Russian influence on the escalation in the east of Ukraine were acknowledged.	Decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Situation in Ukraine https://goo.gl/fmv6Gz	

March 25, 2014 Strasbourg	Non-acknowledgment of the so-called referendum in the Autonomous republic of Crimea on March 16, condemnation of Russia's use of military power to move borders, support of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine	Declaration https://goo.gl/2YbqPP
October 16, 2014 Strasbourg	Condemnation of Russia's military intervention in the east of Ukraine and of all forms of pressure on the neighbours; statement that the security of this continent is gravely threatened by the by Russia's repeated failure to comply with international rules, principles and values of the Council of Europe; call for the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity; emphasis of the fact that armed separatism, supported by mercenaries and the intervention of foreign troops, is the antithesis of all that the Congress stands for.	Declaration 3 (2014) Separatist tensions in Ukraine and neighbouring countries https://goo.gl/ddLGHD

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Date	Main message	Reference
April 9, 2014 Strasbourg	The Assembly considers that the drive for secession and integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation was instigated and incited by the Russian authorities, under the cover of a military intervention.	Resolution 1988 (2014) Recent developments in Ukraine: threats to the functioning of democratic institutions https://goo.gl/kUsC5q
October 2, 2014 Strasbourg	The Assembly recognizes direct military intervention of Russia into Ukraine and calls on the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal annexation of Crimea; to cease any military aid to the insurgents in eastern Ukraine, as well as to withdraw its military forces from that area; to refrain from any actions that could aggravate the situation in that area.	Resolution 2018(2014) The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (October 2013-September 2014) https://goo.gl/1XI4DB
January 28, 2015 Strasbourg	The resolution contains a list of requirements of the Assembly to the Russian Federation: stop the escalation of violence in the east of Ukraine, the support of illegal armed groups; withdraw its troops from Ukraine as well as the requirements in respect of frozen conflicts in other neighboring countries. The following rights were suspended for the Russian delegation: voting rights and the right to be represented in the PACE boards; the right to represent the Assembly at the Council of Europe bodies, external institutions and organizations, to sit on ad hoc committees on observation of elections, to be appointed rapporteur.	Resolution 2034 Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the delegation of the Russian Federation https://goo.gl/AMcgPV

June 22-26, 2015 Strasbourg	The resolution contains an important political element in the form of statement that the Russian aggression against Ukraine is the cause of the missing persons problem.	Resolution 2067 (2015) Missing persons during the conflict in Ukraine https://goo.gl/Wp0lVm
April 21, 2016 Strasbourg	The Assembly believes that without the strong determination of all sides to stop this war, a solution to the problem of people captured during the Russian military aggressions in Ukraine is not possible. Therefore, it urges Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the separatist groups controlling the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to stop all military operations in the east of Ukraine, withdraw all weapons and restore peace in this region.	Resolution 2112 (2016) The humanitarian concerns with regard to people captured during the war in Ukraine https://goo.gl/x6A573
October 12, 2016 Strasbourg	PACE reaffirms its position that the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the military intervention by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine violate international law and the principles upheld by the Council of Europe, as stated in Assembly Resolution 2112 (2016), Resolution 2063 (2015), Resolution 1990 (2014) and Resolution 1988 (2014).	Resolution 2133 (2016) Legal remedies for human rights violations on the Ukrainian territories outside the control of the Ukrainian authorities https://goo.gl/7lwAcY
August 31, 2016 Strasbourg	The Donbas conflict is recognized as Russian aggression	Report 14130 Political consequences of the conflict in Ukraine https://goo.gl/fB3zN2

International Criminal Court in the Hague

Date	Main message	Reference
November 14, 2016 The Hague	The Prosecution of the International Criminal Court in The Hague in its preliminary report referred to the events in Crimea as an international armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, and stated that the situation within the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol factually amounts to an on-going state of occupation.	Preliminary report The situation in Ukraine https://goo.gl/mOEAVd

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Date	Main message	Reference	
July 1, 2014 Baku	Condemnation of Russia's annexation of Crimea and support of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Since February 2014, the Russian Federation in its relations with Ukraine violated every one of the ten Helsinki principles in its relations with Ukraine, some in a clear, gross, and thus far uncorrected manner, and is in violation with the commitments it undertook in the Budapest Memorandum, as well as other international obligations. The Assembly "Views the 16 March 2014 referendum in Crimea as an illegitimate and illegal act, the results of which have no validity whatsoever" and calls upon all participating States to refuse to recognize the forced annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.	Resolution on Clear, gross and uncorrected violations of Helsinki principles by the Russian Federation https://goo.gl/Zh2o6p	
July 8, 2015 Helsinki	The Assembly considers that the actions by the Russian Federation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, constitute acts of military aggression against Ukraine.	Resolution The Continuation of Clear, Gross and Uncorrected Violations of OSCE Commitments and International Norms by the Russian Federation https://goo.gl/lH0Eqe	

Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Date	Main message	Reference	
January 27, 2015 Kyiv	Ukraine remains subject of the military aggression of the Russian Federation performed, among others, in the form of support and equipment of massive terrorist attacks.	Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, No. 129-VIII On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine https://goo.gl/EJKGRp	
July 22, 2014 Kyiv	Since February 2014, Ukraine has been suffering the aggression from a state guaranteeing its independence and territorial integrity. The Russian Federation occupied two regions of Ukraine – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol – and proceeded with active destabilization of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. Unsupported by the Ukrainian citizens in the south and east of the country, the government of the Russian Federation started organizing a terrorist war against Ukraine.	Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, No. 1597-VII On Measures to Prevent Expansion of International Terrorist Supported by the Russian Federation https://goo.gl/svqdwB	

March 17, 2015 Kyiv	To recognize the districts, cities, towns, and villages of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts where, subject to the Law of Ukraine "On the Special Rules of Local Administration in Particular Regions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts" the special rules of local administration are introduced, as temporarily occupied until the withdrawal of all illegal armed groups, Russian occupation units, their military equipment as well as militants and mercenaries, from the territory of Ukraine and restoration of Ukraine's full control over the state border of Ukraine.	Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, No. 254-VIII On Recognizing Particular Districts, Cities, Towns and Villages of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts Temporarily Occupied" https://goo.gl/HR7Wuq	
April 21, 2015 Kyiv	Should the Russian Federation refuse to cease military aggression against Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine calls to the international community to enhance the sanctions against the Russian Federation as the aggressor state and to accelerate the provision of increased financial aid and supply of weapons to Ukraine in view of the fact that in its resistance against the Russian armed aggression, Ukraine protects the united democratic Europe and the rest of the free world.	Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, No. 337-VIII On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine "About Resistance Against the Armed Aggression by the Russian Federation and Overcoming Its Consequences" https://goo.gl/PfZB7G	

« This is a concise and excellent guide to the Donbas, essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the war-torn region. Highly recommended.

Hiroaki Kuromiya,
Professor at Indiana University (USA),
Author of books on history and politics in the Donbas