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Background paper by
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Ukrainian Crisis: The Most Frequent Myths and Lies

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European Values Think-Tank is a non-governmental institution which promotes raising of political culture in the Czech Republic as well as on the European level.

The Central European Policy Institute's mission is to help decision-makers and opinion-makers in Central Europe to craft common responses to current challenges, and to improve the quality of their contributions to the EU and NATO debates.

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THE AIM OF THIS DOCUMENT

Disinformation, falsehoods and facts taken out of context thwart Czech and Slovak debates on the Ukrainian crisis and the Russian aggressive involvement. The public is exposed to unprecedented volume of propaganda distorting the truth, and having pathological effects on our societies and political systems.

This is why the European Values Think-Tank and the Central European Policy Institute put together a group of prominent Czech and Slovak experts to come up with a document refuting the most frequent myths and falsehoods about Ukraine and set the record straight.

We believe that this publication will also help journalists, commentators, editors, analysts, and politicians to better understand the topic. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of their employers or of the publisher.

1. WHY THE UKRAINIAN EUROMAIDAN WAS NOT A COUP D'ÉTAT?

The Ukrainian protest movement Euromaidan arose from [a spontaneous student protest](#) against President Viktor Yanukovych's unexpected withdrawal from signing The Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement. On 30 November, the non-violent and still relatively small protest was forcefully dispersed by Ukrainian Berkut special police units. After this brutal attack, the protesters were pushed out to Michailivska Square where intensely organizing the first self-defence units, the Euromaidan “army” numbering hundreds of thousands of persons. At the same time, the Euromaidan mobile unit was created, being in charge of street patrols, escort as well as evacuation of civilians and the administration buildings blockade. Besides, its members organized protest parades to the family residences of President Viktor Yanukovych, Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka and other state representatives. On 1 December, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians gathered at Independence Square to protest against the brutal Berkut attack. They demanded that the Interior Minister was ousted and the persons responsible for the intervention were punished. The protesters started occupying the first administration buildings in the Kiev city centre. On the same day, the first provocations occurred at the Presidential Administration Building, which ended up in brutal beating of innocent demonstrators. The Berkut units had no respect for journalists. Two days later, the protesters blocked all the access roads to the Administration and demanded the government's resignation. Yanukovych kept silent and on 6 December he departed for Sochi to meet Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Several times, the police tried to scatter the protests in which hundreds of thousands had been already participating, but the attempts were unsuccessful. In the Kiev city centre, the number of demonstrators was increasing every day. According to sociological surveys, all social classes as well as the representatives and the supporters of various political parties, chiefly those of the Ukrainian opposition, were participating in the Maidan. The growing protest movement was also supported by some influential Ukrainian oligarchs such as Petro Poroshenko or Ihor Kolomoyskyi. Others such as Rinat Achmetov or Dmytro Firtash remained neutral or took the President's side. The pressure on the demonstrators was increasing. On 16 January, without a debate and breaking the parliamentary law, the Ukrainian parliament passed several bills later known as dictatorship laws. The electronic system for vote counting Rada was switched off, so the members of parliament voted raising their hands. Some of them later denied voting for the laws. According to Ukrainian constitutional lawyers, the bills were infringing twelve norms of the Ukrainian constitution. On the same day, Yanukovych signed the laws which limited considerably the civil liberties and had been prepared with forceful suppression of the protests in mind.



The goal was to intimidate Ukrainians and to provide the police, the Prosecutor's Office and the courts with a sufficient number of tools to pacify the President's enemies. The protesters' reaction was quick, all the more so because the negotiations between the Euromaidan representatives, the opposition and the President were getting nowhere. The sides were unable to agree on minimal requirements such as the punishment of the November attack on the students and the Interior Minister ouster.

The following Sunday, 19 January, a part of the demonstrators decided to protest in front of the Parliament and call for the abolition of the dictatorship laws. The peaceful demonstration grew into fierce fighting. The Right Sector, up to that point an unknown and unofficial grouping of the most radical Ukrainian right-wing parties, claimed responsibility for the violent attacks. It is a question whether the young men with Molotov cocktails were really members of this platform. Anyway, the claim gained the Right Sector media publicity and trust of the demonstrators. As a result, the Right Sector became, slightly undeservedly, a symbol of the Kiev Maidan even though it represented only a small part of the movement. Its members formed only one hundred of more than three thousand members of the Kiev Self-Defence. The Right Sector propagation was also facilitated by Russian media coverage for which the masked gunmen were the best image of the Bandera opposition that "deposed the legitimate Ukrainian president and took power in Kiev by force".

The oppositional leaders were unable to stop escalation and radicalization in their own ranks, which discredited them to a large extent. As a result of the three-day long fierce clashes five people died, hundreds were injured and tens were detained. The police became [more and more ruthless](#) when treating the demonstrators. Their methods, including [unnecessarily brutal violence](#) and attacks aimed at journalists, were increasingly humiliating. Some protesters were [kidnapped, tortured and murdered](#). On 21 January, Ihor Lucenko and Yuriy Verbitskyi were kidnapped right from the hospital. The body of the fifty-year-old Lvov academic and seismologist Yuriy Verbitskyi was later found in a forest near Kiev, showing signs of torture. In Kiev, a field hospital was established and doctors were offering treatments at home to prevent the kidnappings from hospitals.

The number of clashes in which [titushky were](#) involved was increasing. These brutes, mercenaries according to some sources, were harshly attacking the anti-government protesters or provoking the police interventions.

Meanwhile, both the Ukrainian and the Russian media under the government control covered the protests as if it was only **radicals' and neo-Nazis' street riots**. The important facts were twisted or missing completely. On the other hand, especially the Russian media published the conspiracy theories claiming that the Euromaidan was an action coordinated and supported by the United States and the European Union.

On 19 February 2014, the reports of the opposition supporters' attacks on government buildings in several Ukrainian regions, including police buildings and garrisons, occurred. In Lviv, unknown offenders stole about [1200 weapons](#), handguns or Kalashnikov machine guns, big part of which later disappeared. However, no evidence exists that these weapons were used against the police or the government authorities in Lviv and Kiev.

The fights peaked in mid-February 2014 when the police and security forces tried to [disperse](#) the Maidan for good. Their efforts resulted in bloody [street clashes](#) between 18 a 20 February during which almost ninety [people](#), mostly the protesters, died. On 20 February, fifty demonstrators were literally shot dead by police snipers on Institutska Street. Also [seventeen riot police members died](#) during those three days. Within the opposition movement and the Ukrainian elites, these events caused the biggest uproar. President Yanukovich started losing support of the Parliament, [influential businessmen](#) and people from security forces as well.

The day after the Kiev massacre, the Polish, German and French foreign ministers tried to calm the situation. The opposition and the President were made to sign [the Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis](#) which obliged the

government to restore the 2004 Constitution (the 2004 amendments were removed in 2010), call an early presidential election as well as to end and investigate the acts of violence. The Russian special envoy Vladimir Lukin, who was present during the negotiations, refused to sign the document. While the Ukrainian parliament voted immediately to change the Constitution, the President did not sign it. Instead, [with the aid of Russian secret services](#) he [fled](#) the country at night. The later published shots taken by the [security cameras](#) in his Mezhyhirya Residence prove that **he had been preparing for the escape since 19 February 2014**, before the Kiev Massacre and the peace agreement.

The next morning, the demonstrators occupied **several government buildings** including Presidential Administration in Kiev. However, **no violence or looting** took place. The demonstrators just secured the buildings when the security guard and other security forces had fled. The Ukrainian parliament remained in the form established by the 2012 elections, including the deputies of Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions. Despite its democratic legitimacy, some of the following parliamentary measures must have been rather questionable with respect to the crisis situation. The President's ouster voted [328-0](#) is one of such decisions. Two problems are related to the vote. Firstly, according to the Constitution, 338 votes were necessary to oust Yanukovich. Secondly, the 1996 Constitution had clearly defined when the president can be ousted, the deposition and the escape abroad not representing the possible circumstances. In case of treason, consultations with the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court would be necessary, but they did not take place.

Another problematic point was the office of the Acting President. On 22 February, Oleksandr Turchynov was [elected the Parliament Chairman](#) by 314 of 329 votes. According to the 2004 Constitution, in case of absence of the duly appointed president, the prime minister was to take the presidential office. However, given that Yanukovich had not signed the 2004 amendments restoration before his escape, the 1996 Constitution was theoretically still in force. According to this document, the Prime Minister Mykol Azarov, who had also fled the country, should have been appointed. On 27 February, Arseniy Yatsenyuk's government was [voted by 371 of 372 votes](#). Vladimir Putin declared that Russia did not accept the new order. He called the government illegitimate, puppet and under control of foreign grey eminencies, local radicals and Maidan "putschists" whom he [accused](#) of nationalism, neo-Nazism, Russophobia, antisemitism as well as of organizing murders and pogroms.

It is obvious that all decisions, including the changes at the top political level, were made during a serious constitutional crisis. The following process towards the early presidential and parliamentary elections as well as the meantime events relied only on the Parliament's legitimacy. However, by no means was it an organized coup d'état or a putsch, let alone supported from abroad as it is often heard.

Concerning the so-called coup d'état in Ukraine, the Kremlin often mentions these arguments:

I. NOT RESPECTING THE 21 FEBRUARY 2014 PEACE PLAN

In fact, the first person to break the agreement was President Yanukovich who refused to sign the Constitution change (see Radek Sikorski's testimony). Moreover, the Russian envoy Vladimir Lukin had not signed the document, so Russia formally kept its hands off it. Besides, Yanukovich fled unexpectedly the country and most of the deputies from his own political party – the Party of Regions – later agreed with his ouster.



II. THE KIEV MASSACRE WAS ALLEGEDLY ORGANIZED BY THE OPPOSITION

The investigation of this tragic event is still under way, but according to the available information, most of the victims died due to the Ukrainian police gunfire or the gunfire from the sector of the forces controlled by President Yanukovych.

According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine that is in charge of the investigation, several people were shot from another angle, which might indicate that other persons besides the policemen were involved in the gunfire.

III. THE LANGUAGE LAW REPEAL

On 18 March 2014, President Putin accused Ukraine of trying to revise the position of languages in the country, which he considered to result in offending the national minorities' rights. He was speaking about the 2012 language law repealed by the Ukrainian parliament on 23 February 2014 after Yanukovych's escape. Even though the Parliament supported the proposal, it never came into force as the Acting President [Turchynov did not sign it](#). Even if it came into force, no language minority would be deprived of its rights as they are recorded in article 10 of the Constitution. Besides, the 1989 language law, the 1992 national minorities law and the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages were still in force. Concerning Crimea where Russians represent 58 % of the population, Russian as well as Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian is an official language. This is included in the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

The passing of the 2012 language law was largely controversial. In fact, the law privileged Russian to Ukrainian even though it could theoretically concern also Romanian and Hungarian. It allowed an unspecified "regional government" to decide on which language will be official in the "region", but the law did not define clearly whether the region was a village, a district or an area. If the language was spoken by more than 10 % of the population, it could become official. The law did not take into account the situation when several languages in the region exceeded the limit and, actually, it enabled the Russian minority to dominate the Ukrainian majority.

IV. THE MURDERS OF THE ODESSA ANTI-MAIDAN PARTICIPANTS

On 2 May, one of the bloodiest chapters of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis was written. In Odessa, pro-Ukrainian demonstrators, football ultras and the Right Sector supporters [clashed](#) with a pro-Russian crowd after the friendly match between Odessa and Kharkov. Both sides were [armed with](#) shields, bars, stones, cobbles, improvised explosives and firearms. According to the [reports](#) and the [video](#) from the spot, the attack was organized and started by the pro-Russian activists. The situation got out of police control completely. During the gunfire, several pro-Ukrainian demonstrators were killed. Provocations and fighting grew into the pursuit of the pro-Russian activists who started running away to their headquarters in the Trade Unions House on Kulikovo Field. Under the still unclear circumstances, a fire started there during which 31 pro-Russian activists died. During the clashes, 12 more people died, 25 were injured heavily and 150 slightly. One of the Odessa police commanders Dmytro Futsedzhi fled to Transnistria. Up to now, he has been hiding from the Ukrainian authorities.



V. THE ALLEGED MASS POGROMS AGAINST THE RUSSOPHONE POPULATION IN UKRAINE

There is no evidence of such events.

2. WHY THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA CANNOT BE COMPARED TO KOSOVO?

By the end of February 2014, the Kremlin denied vehemently having sent soldiers to Crimea. However, Russia later admitted the action, justifying it by the Russophone minority's worries about its security and its right for self-determination (17 February 2014 – *for the first time, Vladimir Putin admitted officially that Russian soldiers were in Crimea "to secure the order and enable the people to [express freely](#)"*). Later on, this resulted in Russia's annexation of Crimea. The new Ukrainian [government found this act](#) illegitimate, breaking the [1994 Budapest Memorandum](#) and the United Nations Charter. The government called upon the international community for defence.

The EU and [the United States](#) identified with this opinion and imposed the economic as well as personal sanctions on Russia. During a recent visit to Moscow, German Chancellor Angela Merkel [showed again](#) the Western negative feelings about the events. "The criminal and illegal annexation of Crimea as well as the military actions in Ukraine damaged heavily the (Russian-German) cooperation."

However, the Russian president and other high representatives of the Russian Federation defend the annexation and [keep comparing](#) the situation to that in Kosovo. "The precedent created by our Western colleagues in a very similar situation when they approved the one-sided declaration of independence of Kosovo from Serbia. They called it legitimate and not needing the authorities' approval. It is exactly what Crimea is doing just now."

Nevertheless, the events in Crimea differ significantly:

I. ABSENCE OF REAL DANGER AND MASS ACTS OF VIOLENCE

The separation of Kosovo from Serbia was preceded by fierce armed clashes and [internationally documented crimes](#) committed by Serbian troops. The United Nations including the Security Council had been discussing the tense situation in Kosovo for a long time. In [resolution 1199](#) issued on 23 September 1998, the Security Council [worried about](#) "the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Serbian security forces and the Yugoslav Army which have resulted in numerous civilian casualties" and escapes of almost 250,000 inhabitants from the region.

At that time, Russia voted for this resolution too. The manslaughters of Albanian civilians in Kosovo between 1998 and 1999 are also described in the 2001 [document of the International Criminal Tribunal](#) for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

When the Serbian army refused to change its methods in Kosovo, the NATO bombing stopped the worst killing. Afterwards, Kosovo existed as a UN protectorate approved by Russia as well. No sooner than in 2008 did the newly elected parliament vote to separate from Serbia and declare independence. At that time, Russia protested against this act and called it an illegal breaking of the Serbian territorial integrity and sovereignty.

However, in case of Crimea, no internationally documented crimes preceding the Russian invasion exist. Neither the massacres, nor the mass departures of the population had been happening there. The situation was not



discussed by the Security Council. On the contrary, the United Nations General Assembly [described the annexation as defying the international law](#).

The Kosovo separation was, among others, a consequence of an ethnic conflict. In Ukraine, the situation is about differences in values between the conflicting sides, namely the pro-Western bloc and the pro-Russian activists. The ethnic aspect of the conflict is now marginal. Ukrainians, Russians, Georgians and many other nationalities are fighting on both sides.

Comparing Crimea to Kosovo, Russia gets into an absurd situation. In case of Kosovo, it kept declaring that an external power could not break the territorial integrity of a country, even if the massacres were going on there. In case of Crimea, the Russian Federation claims that it is possible, even without the evidence of similar violent acts.

II. DISREGARD FOR INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND RULES

In 1994, three permanent members of the United Nations Security Council guaranteed the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for giving up the post-Soviet nuclear weapons stockpile. [The Budapest Memorandum](#) was signed by Russia, Great Britain and the USA.

Virtually immediately after the referendum, the newly declared but [internationally unrecognized](#) Crimean Republic tried to [join](#) the Russian Federation, which was soon after [approved](#) by the State Duma and President Putin. Besides, the Russian Foreign Ministry proposed that the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution guaranteeing the Ukrainian neutrality. However, the Kiev diplomacy refuses it vigorously. Regarding the international law, such a decision would be unprecedented.

The referendum is questioned also due to the absence of international observers. Moscow claims the opposite, but the profiles of the alleged observers speak for themselves. The Russian agency ITAR-TASS published [Mateusz Piskorski's](#) statement: "What we witnessed in Crimea was by no means different from plebiscites in any other European democratic country." Actually, Piskorski, the Polish head of the international observers, is a well-known antisemitist and a former editor-in-chief of the neo-Nazi magazine Odala. Other members of the mission claim an active allegiance to radical movements all around Europe.

III. THE INTERNATIONAL TERRITORY GUARANTEE

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Kosovo became an autonomous region of Serbia. However, his presence within the state was not guaranteed by any international agreements. By contrast, on 30 November 1991 Ukraine held a referendum in which [92 %](#) of Ukrainians (including 56 % of the Crimean population) voted to separate from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the territorial integrity of new Ukraine was clearly guaranteed by the 1994 [Budapest Memorandum](#).

IV. THE OCCUPATION BY RUSSIAN SOLDIERS

When defending the presence of Russian soldiers in Crimea since 27 February 2014, Russia refers to the 1997 [treaty](#) with the Ukrainian government. It permitted the country to station up to 25,000 Russian soldiers in the Black Sea Fleet Crimean bases. Moreover, Russia declares that during the period concerned, the number of soldiers did not pass the limit.



Nevertheless, the Black Sea Fleet was not involved in the annexation. Special Russian forces were operating there, acting against the Ukrainian laws and the Constitution. Having entered Crimea on 27 February 2014, the masked soldiers occupied and blocked immediately the autonomous Crimean parliament. Afterwards, they helped to replace the Prime Minister as well as the autonomous government and the parliament members, and assisted in separating from Ukraine. Without serious and provable reasons, Russia created a crisis situation in order to take control over the region.

The direct participation of Russian authorities in the escalation of the situation and Crimea's illegal separation from Ukraine is proved by many testimonies, for example by the [interview](#) of the former Deputy Chairman of the autonomous Crimean government Rustam Termigaliev for the Russian daily *Vedomosti*.

"I do not want to say who the organizers were, but the role of Crimean elites was secondary."

"When you look back, there is no doubt that it was a carefully planned operation, from Moscow and the Kremlin. It impressed me tremendously how perfectly they knew the psychology of the actors and the public on the peninsula. If we realize that the whole process had a director, the person should get an excellent mark."

V. DISRESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHER NATIONALITIES

While Albanians represented 88 % of the Kosovo population at the time of the separation from Serbia, the Crimean population consisted of much more nationalities. It is true that ethnic Russians represented the majority, but other nationalities constituted almost 40 % of the population. According to the 2001 census, there were 2.3 billion people living in Crimea of which 58 % were Russians, 24 % were Ukrainians, 10 % represented Crimean Tatars and the rest were Belarussians, Armenians, and Jews etc.

Within Ukraine, Crimea had a strongly autonomous position, disposing of its own government and parliament. Sevastopol had the special status of the Black Sea Fleet base. The Russian community was strong, but having the Russian nationality did not mean the agreement with the separation from Ukraine. Before the annexation, only three parliamentarians of the then 100 members of the Crimean parliament demanded that Ukraine joined Russia (they were affiliated with the Russian Unity Party representing 4 % of voters). After the Kiev government crisis in the mid-February, the Crimean Prime Minister Anatoliy Mohyliov recognized the new interim government. The atmosphere on the peninsula was heterogeneous. Only after the 27 February [Russian soldiers'](#) arrival did the situation change and escalate. The soldiers blocked the Crimean parliament and cut it off from the rest of the world. They assisted in pro-Russian [Sergey Aksyonov's](#) becoming the prime minister as well as in all the following events resulting in the [separation](#) from [Ukraine](#).

VI. THE ILLEGAL REFERENDUM

Russia is trying to justify the Crimean referendum through the comparison to Kosovo. However, the cases differ and, paradoxically, Russia has been criticizing this way of separation for a long time. The [Open Democracy](#) website published a detailed analysis on the topic. The basic difference between Crimea and Kosovo is that the latter was not occupied by any foreign superpower and no [acts of violence](#) took place in the former.

During the referendum, only a minimum of foreign observers were present on the peninsula. Considering the referendum illegitimate with respect to the international law, [the OSCE and the EU](#) had refused to send their observers. On the contrary, the pro-Russian sources were informing about the [foreign observers](#) who claimed the referendum regular. The problem is that they were not given any mandate. At the beginning of 2015, the



illegitimacy was confirmed by Igor Girkin, a Russian agent and a former pro-Russian rebels' commander in Ukraine. According to him, Russians gathered the Crimean deputies against their will and forced them to approve the referendum. "I did not see any support of the authorities in Simferopol," said Girkin. The illegitimacy of the vote is also suggested by the fact that several opposition activists and journalists criticizing the Russian annexation of Crimea [disappeared](#) at the time around the referendum.

3. WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT ORDINARY RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, THEIR TROOPS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT, OPERATE IN EASTERN UKRAINE?

Just as in case of the troops in Crimea, Russia **denies having sent the soldiers to eastern Ukraine**. Unlike the Crimean case, Russia **does not admit** the soldiers' presence despite the irrefutable evidence. Most frequently, Russia declares that the soldiers are either [volunteers](#) engaged in "the civil war", soldiers [on holiday](#) or that the evidence of [Russian military equipment](#) and staff in eastern Ukraine is [missing](#). *"We did not managed to understand how these dark grainy stains on the photos, posted by the American ambassador in Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt on his Twitter account, can confirm anything," said Major General Igor Konashenkov, the Russian Defence Ministry spokesperson, when commenting on several [satellite images](#) that prove the presence of Russian army systems in Ukraine. Some Russian media publish information on [Western secret](#) services operating in the country, but provide no evidence for such allegations.*

Despite the Kremlin intense efforts to hide the facts behind its declarations and the world-wide media coverage, the range of convincing evidence is so vast that the Russian efforts reached the point at which they just provide the Kremlin official negotiating position with content.

Besides, in mid-May 2015, the Ukrainian security forces captured the armed men who confessed that they were [the Russian Federation Army soldiers](#). "My name is Aleksandr Anatolyevich Aleksandrov, I am a sergeant of the third brigade of special forces from Togliatti. The commanding officer of the brigade is Colonel Shchepin and Company Sergeant Major Kudimov is in charge of the company," stated one of the [soldiers](#). In eastern Ukraine, the brigade is said to have been operating since 5 March 2015. Moscow admitted that the soldiers are Russian citizens, but denied their being on active service.

Unlike Russia, the Ukrainian weaponry does not dispose of such equipment as specific drones, air defence systems, artillery radars, modern tanks and other heavy military weapons. According to the [Armadni Noviny analysis](#), which is in accordance with the then [Ukrainian](#) and [NATO](#) reports, the equipment deliveries, either with or without staff, have been going on since the mid-June 2014. Especially since autumn, such a sophisticated technology has been delivered that to control it requires specially trained staff, not volunteers. It is necessary to remark that the deliveries began when the anti-terrorist operations started being successful. Anyway, in mid-August it still seemed that the Ukrainian army would suppress the rebellion in several weeks or months. At that time, the first large cross-border Russian offensive began and forced Ukraine to retreat.

In March 2015, the respected British security institute RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) published a [report](#) based on a detailed analysis of provable facts. It says that since mid-2014, 42,000 Russian soldiers from 117 combat units of the Russian Federation have engaged in the Ukrainian conflict. They were rotating around the Russian-Ukrainian border or attacking the Ukrainian territory by artillery fire from Russia, and so on. According to the

report, the first reconnaissance troops entered Ukraine in mid-July 2014. The bigger transports of Russian equipment and staff began at the end of August (ca. 3,500 soldiers). By the end of December 2014, the number has reached [10,000](#). Many of them left for Ukraine under pressure of their [officers](#).

In February 2015, the Russian troops crossed the border again and engaged in the Battle of Debaltseve. Both in [August](#) and in [February](#), Russians withdrew after the end of the operations and local authorities took control over the situation.

The information on Russian involvement in the conflict was also confirmed by [NATO](#), German and [the US](#) secret services as well as by other [sources](#) including the [OSCE](#) or the February 2015 [report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#). „The high numbers of foreign fighters including the Russian Federation soldiers and the presence of sophisticated military equipment affect directly the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine.”

Furthermore, the RUSI report states that at their officers' command, Russian soldiers usually head for a military exercise near the Ukrainian border. The marks on their equipment are preventively covered and, right before the departure, the soldiers are officially discharged. However, they continue the military service under the command of their officers. Those who oppose the orders face disciplinary actions or other punishments. Recently, Reuters has reported on several [specific cases](#).

Describing the [Battle of Debaltseve](#) or the fighting [around Donetsk](#), Russian opposition journalists also confirm that Russian army operates in eastern Ukraine. The [Russian soldiers' mothers](#), whose sons died last year and who were not informed about the [circumstances](#) of their deaths, make the same statements. Most frequently they are told that their children died during a [military exercise](#) near the Ukrainian border.

The RUSI report and the investigative work of the Russian server RBC have also [identified the particular Russian troops](#) operating in eastern Ukraine. Independently of the RUSI, the US [Atlantic Council](#) Think-Tank came to the same conclusions.

As the [Bellingcat analysis](#) proves, some other Russian troops were attacking the Ukrainian army by artillery fire from the Russian territory. Operating the guidance system, they participated on the July [downing of MH-17](#) during which 298 people died.

The recently published report called [Putin.War](#), written by the murdered oppositional politician Boris Nemtsov and his colleagues, estimates that **during the first ten months**, Russia spent about **53 billion roubles (2.3 billion USD)** on the war in eastern Ukraine. The country spent 21 billion roubles on soldiers' salaries, 25 billion on financial support of the pro-Russian separatists and 7 billion on the military equipment reparation and maintenance.



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