

**THE CITY WHERE
THE WAR BEGAN**

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This report aims to shed light on violations of human rights in Slovyansk and the restoration of peace in eastern Ukraine after 2014. The book is based on testimonies of civilians who witnessed violations of human rights or were affected by military hostilities in the city of Slovyansk from April to July 2014. The report analyzes the functioning of illegal prisons, persecution of residents for religious beliefs, minors' involvement in armed groups, forced labor, and human trafficking in places of detention, as well as problems of shelling and mining of civil infrastructure. It also discusses the deployment of pro-Russian propaganda in the city, problems of access to medical care during the city's capture, and the search for ways to reconcile after the Ukrainian government regained control over Slovyansk.

The publication is addressed to public activists, representatives of international organizations, law enforcement agencies, the media, and a wide range of readers who are not indifferent to the war in eastern Ukraine.

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← ВДАІ Слов`янського МВ
ГУМВС област

← State Traffic Inspection
of Slavyansk

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
APC	armored personnel carrier
CCU	Criminal Code of Ukraine
CPU	Communist Party of Ukraine
NGO	non-governmental organization
DLSP	Department of Labor and Social Protection
“DPR”	“Donetsk People’s Republic”
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECnHR	European Convention on Human Rights
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ICC	International Criminal Court
IAG	illegal armed groups; armed formations controlled by the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine
“LPR”	“Luhansk People’s Republic”
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine
MPADS	man-portable air-defense system
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
RF	Russian Federation
SES	State Emergency Service of Ukraine
SPG	self-propelled gun
SSU	Security Service of Ukraine
TDF	temporary detention facility
UN	United Nations
UNA-UNSO	Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People’s Self-Defense
UOC-MP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate

For three months, starting from April 12 until July 5, 2014, Slovyansk was captured by Russian-supported illegal armed groups. During this time, the insurgents occupied government buildings and established dictatorial quasi-structures in the city. Slovyansk was the first captured city in eastern Ukraine. The fate of Slovyansk marks the beginning of an armed conflict between illegal armed groups controlled by the Russian Federation and the Ukrainian military. The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine still claims lives today.



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Semenivka, Slovyansk.
Photo credit: Oleksandra Romantsova, July 18, 2014

After the collapse of Viktor Yanukovich's authoritarian regime in February 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, Ukrainians had to face a new challenge—a wave of pro-Russian protests in the east and south of the country. These protests were often held with the support of local politicians. At that time, law enforcement agencies preferred not to interfere. Later, these protests turned into armed aggression against the Ukrainian statehood, attempting to seize police departments and government buildings. The inaction of the local authorities and the detached position of law enforcement officers created the preconditions for the capture of Slovyansk by Russian invasion units supported by locals who repeatedly participated in anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in February–April 2014. The capture of Slovyansk lasted from April 13 to July 5—until the day when the formations of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” and the Russian units of Girkin (Strelkov) withdrew from the city.

Slovyansk became the epicenter of the first war in the history of independent Ukraine. The flames of the armed conflict later spread to other cities in the Donbas region. The armed militants brought not only a “new regime” but also terror and lawlessness. Innocent people were thrown into illegal prisons and tortured, while pro-Russian propaganda slogans and flags of the “People’s Republic” spread throughout the city. In addition to creating a bridgehead for the offensive, Slovyansk became a role model for capturing other cities in the Donbas.

Each section of this book describes a particular aspect of the war, which is relevant for nearly every captured city in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The data collected in this book reveal the repressive methods of the self-proclaimed republics, the social background, and the nature of collaboration in eastern Ukraine. This report is designed that readers can focus on a specific episode, or follow the conflict in its entirety, starting from the pro-Russian protests in February 2014 to the post-conflict settlement in Slovyansk.

According to a study of the *Human Rights Information Center*, more than 70 percent of respondents in the Donbas believe that

their fundamental rights have never been violated.’ This is striking because it demonstrates that knowledge about humanitarian law in those areas should be spread immediately. Otherwise, there will never be an understanding of who the criminals are and why they should be held accountable for their actions.

For five years in a row, documentation experts of the Coalition *Justice for Peace in Donbas* have been recording interviews with victims or witnesses of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in eastern Ukraine. During this time, the Coalition members accumulated many civilian testimonies and memories of the insurgency of Slovyansk and the lawlessness that ruled the city for almost three months. In December 2018, the team of authors made several trips to Slovyansk where the human rights defenders could communicate with local activists, representatives of Slovyansk City Council, and residents who were injured during the hostilities in 2014. We often had to deal with people who had experienced torture, detention, and forced labor. We had to change their names for the safety of the respondents. The authors express their sincere gratitude to all those people who decided to go back to the past, relive their traumatic experience, and tell their story; to the Security Service (SSU) Administration in Donetsk region for consultations about the Program “Waiting for You at Home”; to the staff of Slovyansk City Council and activists for the insights into the life in Slovyansk back in 2014.

We knew that we could only show a complete picture of the war if we began to put together the untold stories of human pain and loss. We are doing this now, while the memory of the conflict and the suffering is still vivid. That is why the cover of this book shows a destroyed armored personnel carrier—although the fighting is over, the memories of the war still weigh on the city, and many problems that need to be solved on the path to restoring justice and ensuring peaceful coexistence are still silenced. Members of the Coalition agree that impunity for those who violate human rights prevents long-term peace in the Donbas. Criminals must be brought to justice, regardless of whether they are currently in Ukraine, Russia, or elsewhere.

While working on the book, the authors managed to combine active cooperation and sharp discussions on how to write impartially about the conflict and how to maintain balanced opinions. In particular, the authors and editors dealt with the following questions in this context: How to avoid hate speech when reproducing the statements of respondents? How much propaganda influenced the locals, and should only propaganda be blamed for the events of 2014? Is the SSU program “They Are Waiting For You At Home” effective and

*Donbas: liudy ne hotovi prominiaty svobody na materialni blaha (doslidzhennia) [Donbas: people are not ready to exchange freedoms for material goods (research)], Radio Svoboda, 16.11.2018, <http://bit.ly/2MmbnRe>.

useful? What should the commemorative culture of the events of 2014 in Slovyansk and in Ukraine, in general, look like? These and many other questions do not have easy answers but the experience of working on this book proved that raising and discussing questions is the first step towards reconciliation between people with differing opinions.

The research presented in this book shows that war is a fertile ground for widespread abuse of power and violations of human rights. Unfortunately, due to a lack of information, we could not study the persecution on ethnic grounds (e.g., anti-Roma pogroms) in April 2014, the ineffective work of law enforcement agencies in the search for missing persons, and gender-based violence of the militants.

We would like to believe that every year brings more research and knowledge on the problems of the civilian population in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, their perception of events, and ways to overcome hostilities. Armed conflict is not only a confrontation between military units and violations of human rights. Armed conflict also means that families, collectives, and local communities are being divided. Discussions of complex and painful issues, awareness and acceptance of traumatic experiences, moving the conflict of ideas from the dimension of armed confrontation to the dimension of non-violent dialog where every reasoned opinion has the right to exist—all of this is possible if we start listening to each other.

Attempts to stay impartial and convey all the voices of the book's characters have not eliminated the contradictions in our interpretations of the war. Perhaps, this insight is a particular positive outcome of this book project. Some questions in this process have triggered debates between us: should we focus on the legal framework for the protection of the right of civilians, or should we concentrate on the stories of the victims? Sometimes, during our discussions, we also noticed that we often tend to use the term "*propaganda*", for example, to describe phenomena or facts that we do not like. At the same time, we tried to use the most neutral language possible for views and perspectives with which we sympathize.

In late 2019, the discussion on the reintegration of the non-government-controlled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions has significantly intensified in the Ukrainian society. In the book, the authors pay special attention to the problem of community reconciliation in Slovyansk immediately after the recapture of the city. Among them are examples of humanity and compassion, prejudice, and anger. The whole range of complex relationships among the residents presents a narrow corridor for reconciliation

methods. In July 2014, Slovyansk residents managed together to restore their city and create preconditions for a return to a peaceful life. At the same time, many problems are still silenced, including political polarization among residents, the role of local authorities during the capture of the city, and the restoration of justice. Even almost seven years after the recapture of Slovyansk, the stories of civilians who survived the insurgency are relevant for post-conflict reconciliation in eastern Ukraine.

The authors tried to maintain an impartial view of the events in Slovyansk. The collection features personal reflections of researchers and victims. When the wounds of war have not yet healed, when we have a dichotomy of *winners* and *losers*, it is quite natural that the authors paid attention to people and organizations with a proactive position and a clear view of the events of 2014. The best way to defuse prejudice is to allow the authors to argue for their perception of the hostilities, violations of human rights, and the capture of Slovyansk. We sincerely hope that the collection will allow us to look at the war through the eyes of the civilian population and avoid dehumanizing innocent people trapped by the war.

Anton Udovenko, Nataliia Kaplun, Simon Schlegel, Steffen Halling



IAG fortifications near the police station after the city's recapture.
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 19, 2014

“NOT OUR GUYS”

HOW LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESPONDED TO THE CAPTURE OF SLOVYANSK

SERHII PROTSENKO

Human Rights Civil Research Center

On April 15, 2014, a staff meeting of the Executive Committee of Slovyansk City Council took place in the Culture and Recreation Center (formerly the Railway Workers’ House of Culture). Usually, these meetings were held every Tuesday in the City Council. However, this time, after pro-Russian groups took over the City Council building on April 12, Nelia Shtepa moved the meeting to another place. “*We gathered for a meeting in the House of Culture*”, and the first thing she [Shtepa – ed.] said, “*They are not our guys*”, stated Borys who attended that meeting.¹

¹ Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

By *not our guys*, Shtepa meant the militants who managed to capture strategic city objects in a short time. The Mayor claimed that she did not know where they came from. Shtepa appealed to the city residents not to help separatist groups or go to their checkpoints.

Borys said the Mayor seemed concerned, as she understood that the situation was completely out of control. An employee of the Executive Committee of Slovyansk City Council also expressed her concern. Together with Shtepa, they discussed the latest changes in the city:

“*Employee: “I do not know what is going on...”*
Shtepa: “You do not understand what he is going to do here!”
Employee: “Who?”
Shtepa: “Putin.”

THE HIDDEN THREAT

2
Results of the election to Slovyansk City Council in Donetsk region, official website of the Central Election Commission, <http://bit.ly/2Mw3zib>.

Following the 2010 elections, the majority in Slovyansk City Council were 46 deputies from the pro-government Party of Regions and six pro-Russian deputies from the Communist Party of Ukraine (the total number of seats in the City Council was 60).² Nelia Shtepa, a representative of the Party of Regions, was the City Mayor.

From the beginning of the active phase of protests in the capital of Ukraine, police officers from Slovyansk were safeguarding public order in the center of Kyiv, and local citizens took part in anti-Maidan protests organized by the Party of Regions near the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Under these circumstances, and in the context of increasing Russian propaganda and pro-Russian demonstrations throughout Ukraine, the local authorities tried to counteract the revolutionary events in Kyiv and maintain the status quo in the city.

On December 18, 2013, a column of activists of Kyiv's AutoMaidan arrived in Slovyansk. The activists planned to hold a rally and explain their version of events at Maidan to local citizens. However, the city authorities did not allow the rally to happen: municipal vehicles blocked the city's central square. Officially, this was justified with preparations for the celebration of St. Nicholas Day.

However, the rally of the AutoMaidan activists took place. Mayor Nelia Shtepa, together with a significant number of supporters of the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, who aggressively opposed the Maidan movement, visited the rally. In an interview on-site, Shtepa immediately emphasized that she was concerned about stability, which had to be defended with grim determination:

“ *It was reported that a group of several cars was coming, a car rally, scouts who would come to Slovyansk. Immediately, everybody got on busses and trolleybuses and rushed to protect the existing stability in the city. We will not allow a battlefield on our field of stability.*³

3
Rally in Slovyansk, YouTube: TheSplus, December 18, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2HkW5KR>.

From early January 2014, the local branches of the Party of Regions, the Communist Party, and other pro-Russian organizations held rallies in support of Viktor Yanukovich. Participants of the demonstrations also supported the violent dispersal of protesters at Maidan in Kyiv.

Viktor Yanukovich was removed from power on February 22, 2014. Afterward, and with the “referendum” in Crimea in the background, the city's rallies became openly pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. Just on the day when Yanukovich was ousted, the Communist



Protesters greeting the Kislovodsk–Moscow train. Source: Slavgorod.com.ua

Party, the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, and the movement “Ukrainskyi Vybir” (Ukrainian Choice) led by Viktor Medvedchuk (a close ally of the Russian president Putin) held another rally in the city at Pryvokzalna Square. The participants supported friendly relations with Russia, demanded the dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) and some sort of “independence” referendum. During the event, picketers used flags of Russia and the USSR and posters saying, “*To President Putin—Save the Ukrainian people!*”⁴

The protesters planned to give the passengers of the Kislovodsk–Moscow train, which was passing through Slovyansk, a letter of appeal for help addressed to the President of the Russian Federation. The letter described the Euromaidan events in Kyiv as “*an unconstitutional movement to overthrow the Government in favor of unscrupulous Ukrainian politicians, the US Department of State, and the European Union.*” The signatories of the appeal hoped that the Russians “*would not leave their brothers and sisters alone with infuriated fascism, extremism, and terrorism*”, and Russia would not allow “*European and American aggressors*” to turn them into slaves on their land.⁵ Law enforcement officials attended the rally, but they did not react to calls for Russian interference. The rally was aggressive, says Denys, a resident of Slovyansk:

“ It was the first meeting of this kind with appeals “*Putin! Russia!*”, as I remember now (I was there with an SSU employee). I also remember people of all ages in tracksuits and with an untidy appearance at the rally. These people were not afraid of anything. Despite the presence of police and SSU employees. And that was a bad sign... I realized that those who organized the “*Russian spring*” will go until the end and shed blood. They were declaring war on the rule of law, on the state.”⁶

4
V Slovyanske proshel miting druzhby: ljudi prosilis' v Rossiju i plakali, provozhaja poezd Kislovodsk – Moskva [A friendship rally was held in Slovyansk: people asked to go to Russia and cried as they saw off the Kislovodsk – Moscow train] (photo, video), Slavgorod.com.ua, February 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Mw0ixw>.

5
Ibid.

6
Interview C--2, December 6, 2018.

7

Slavyansk podelen na rajony: muzhchiny budut zashhishhat' rodnoj gorod [Slovyansk is divided into districts: men will defend their hometown], Slavgorod.com.ua, February 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2HjJA21>.

8

Rally in Slovyansk, YouTube: TheSplus, <http://bit.ly/2PbwJFm>.

9

Rally in Slovyansk on March 1, 2017, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, March 1, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2P8EDiL>.

10

Na vsjakij sluchaj: na central'noj ploshhadi Slavyanska dobrovol'cy zapisyvalis' v rjady zashhitnikov goroda. Sredi zhelajushhih byli ne tol'ko muzhchiny [Just in case: on the central square of Slovyansk, volunteers signed up for the city's defenders. Not only men were among the volunteers], Slavgorod.com.ua, March 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zk1ywJ>.

On the same day, in the City Culture and Recreation Park, near the “Eternal Flame”, approximately 400 people (according to slavgorod.com.ua) got together and decided to *patrol* the city.⁷ Participants of the meeting declared that they were ready to “protect” the city’s territory and fight back against “uninvited guests”. Witnesses of the incident noted that the men gathered without any coordination with the local authorities and arbitrarily decided to control law and order in the city.

On February 23, the local office of the Svoboda Party organized a rally in the city’s central square to support the Maidan in Kyiv. During the event, a scuffle broke out between Svoboda supporters and its numerous opponents who had also gathered in the square. After some time, the police separated the two groups. At the event, Shtepa stated: “*Do not touch our Slovyansk! We live in peace, we have everything.*”⁸

After that, every Saturday, pro-Russian demonstrations took place in the city’s central square accompanied by aggressive calls for changing the state structure of Ukraine, a federalization, the rejection of the central government in Kyiv, and, later, the separation of eastern regions of Ukraine.⁹ At one of them, on March 6, more than 150 residents of Slovyansk joined the ranks of the so-called “*city defenders*”.¹⁰

Residents of Slovyansk are registering to join the “city defenders”. Source: Slavgorod.com.ua



AN “UNSPOKEN AGREEMENT”

Weekly rallies were a powerful tool for mobilization and propaganda. Following the “referendum” in Crimea on March 16, the protesters expected that the Donbas would be next. These events added to the confidence of the pro-Russian part of the community and disoriented its pro-Ukrainian part.

“ They followed the example of Crimea. The rhetoric was aggressive. Deputies from the CPU at rallies read excerpts from the internet that “Bandera” would come, that they would bite off fingers of babies with pliers, children would have their bellies ripped open... It was just some kind of mass psychosis. It was scary; we realized that people were losing control.¹¹

Local media spread information about the participation of Russians citizens in the events in the city: “It is worth noting that the representative of the Kuban All-Great Army of the Union of Cossacks of the Russian Federation continues to monitor order in Slovyansk and ensure the safety of civilians.”¹²

On March 30, clashes broke out at the stationary traffic police post in Slovyansk between representatives of “Dorozhnyi Kontrol” (Road Control) and AutoMaidan, on the one hand, and the city’s “Self-Defense Forces”, on the other.¹³ The latter intervened in the activities of the police allegedly to protect law enforcement officers from Maidan participants. Following those events, the “Self-Defense Units” appeared at every stationary traffic police post in the city. Together with the police, they were engaged in the so-called maintenance of law and order.

At the end of February 2014, Viacheslav Ponomariov, one of the “Self-Defense of Slovyansk” leaders,¹⁴ met with the Deputy Chief of the City Police Volodymyr Bielianin. They agreed to jointly patrol and support law and order in the city. Ponomariov also met with the leadership of the local traffic police and promised that he would strengthen the roadblocks with his people.

“ They came to the checkpoint and said they would protect the city from the Right Sector. It turned out that police and the Cossacks were at the checkpoint. They got bolder and bolder, and eventually pushed the police out.¹⁵

Questioned about the relationship with the local law enforcement bodies, Viacheslav Ponomariov told the correspondent of the newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda. Crimea”¹⁶ about an unspoken agreement: “They know what we are capable of and do not interfere with us. There will be a moment when they will start helping. The Donbas is friendly. How will a policeman shoot into a crowd when his brother or another relative is in the crowd?”

11
Interview C-2, December 6, 2018.

12
Na central'noj ploshhadi Slavjanska proshel miting v podderzhku vseukrainskogo referendumu, v ramkah kotorogo byl proveden socopros naselenija [On the central square of Slovyansk, a rally was held in support of the all-Ukrainian referendum, in which a public opinion poll was conducted], Slavgorod.com.ua, March 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2HKdQK6>.

13
How Ponomariov started his career, YouTube: Andrii Dzyndzia, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZmHHHY>.

14
Narodnyj mjer Slavjanska: “My ne dumali, chto dojdjot do vojny, tak kak nadejalis’ na pomoshh’ Rossii” [People’s Mayor of Slovyansk: We did not think that it would come to war, as we hoped for help from Russia], IA REGNUM, October 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NpCRaM>.

15
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

16
Samooborona Donbassa: Zashhishhat’ svoju zemlju budem do konca [Self-Defense of the Donbas: We Will Defend Our Land To The End], Komsomolskaya Pravda. Crimea, April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KPEXzq>.

“People’s Referendum”
on March 30, 2014 in Slovyansk.
Source: slavdelo.dn.ua



Detachments of the “Self-Defense of Slovyansk” participated in the takeover of the SSU building in Donetsk on April 6, 2014. They obtained weapons that allowed them to “legalize” other types of ammunition in the future. Moreover, they gained experience in taking over administrative buildings, which they later used in Slovyansk.¹⁷

17

Narodnyj mjer Slavjanska: “My ne dumali, chto dojdjot do vojny, tak kak nadejalis’ na pomoshh’ Rossii” [People’s Mayor of Slovyansk: We did not think that it would come to war, as we hoped for help from Russia], IA REGNUM, October 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NpCRaM>.

18

Pogovorili i razoshlis’. Miting na Central’noj ploskhadi proshel bez prinjatija rezoljucii [Talked and parted. The rally in the central square was held without a resolution] (photo, video), Slavgorod.com.ua, April 8, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2L4SNw4>.

19

Stella Khorosheva at the meeting on April 8, YouTube: AnnaBo, April 8, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2L4SO36>.

20

Interview C-1, December 6, 2018.

“GOING BOTH WAYS”

On April 8, the Communist Party of Ukraine organized a rally in support of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” in the central square of Slovyansk.¹⁸ The organizers of the event called for a change in the state structure of Ukraine and support for the “referendum” on May 11 on the declaration of *state independence* of the “DPR”. The rally also collected signatures for an appeal to the President of the Russian Federation on military intervention and peacekeeping assistance and help to resolve the situation in the country.¹⁹

The organizers of the pro-Russian demonstrations regularly notified the city authorities of their demonstrations. The latter decided not to interfere, which influenced the spread of pro-Russian sentiments and a general aggravation of the situation.

“ The local authorities were nervous. They had two statements going both ways. If you read these statements, they supported both sides: “Glory to Ukraine!” and “Glory to Russia!” I think they wanted to be part of Russia, but they were afraid.²⁰

Law enforcement agencies also ignored the spread of anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the city. Right after the fall of Yanukovich's regime, law enforcement agencies' officers returned from Kyiv to Slovyansk. The actual defeat in the confrontation with Euromaidan activists negatively affected the psychological state of these law enforcement officers and their perception of the new government. Moreover, some of them themselves had pro-Russian views.

“ *They just came from Maidan, and the “Russian spring” is starting. They do not understand what is happening, and they cannot use weapons. Many of them had pro-Russian sentiments. The police tried to withdraw themselves. Although they did not actively speak out in support of Russia, they did not express pro-Ukrainian views either. And this was the greatest tragedy. It should not be like this.*²¹

Local authorities and law enforcement agencies turned a blind eye to pro-Russian activities, which eventually led to the loss of control over the city. In early April 2014, the city was controlled by combat-ready and organized “Self-Defense Units” that seized weapons and had strong propaganda support. The city was actually “prepared” for an armed external intervention. “*We decided on Slovyansk by accident. We needed a city in the middle... And I was told that Slovyansk had the strongest local asset. We found this option to be optimal*”, said Igor Girkin (Strelkov) in an interview with the Russian newspaper “Zavtra” (Tomorrow).²² Girkin is a Russian army veteran and was, most likely, an officer of the Russian external military intelligence agency GRU. He played a crucial role in the annexation of Crimea and the capture of Slovyansk.²³

THE TAKEOVER

SLOVYANSK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

The first target of attack was the Slovyansk City Police Department. The takeover happened on April 12. There was almost no resistance from law enforcement officers; only three police officers received mild gas poisoning.²⁴ Local media reported that men in masks and camouflage were standing also next to the SSU building. Photos and videos were banned.²⁵

The armed group that captured the Slovyansk City Police Department also included “patriotic” police officers from Slovyansk.²⁶ The Ministry of Internal Affairs confirmed that the leadership of the City Police Department cooperated with the invaders. In particular, on April 12, 2014, forty armed police officers went “on a business trip” to Donetsk. The militants led by Girkin were aware of this trip.²⁷

21
Interview C-2, December 6, 2018.

22
Kto ty, “Strelok”? [“Who are you, ‘Strelok’?”], Zavtra.ru, November 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33RGpZ2>.

23
Pro-Russian Commander in Eastern Ukraine Sheds Light on Origin of Militants, The Wall Street Journal, April 26, 2014, <https://on.wsj.com/2PFsq5P>

24
Zahvatniki rajotdela v Slavjanske vooruzhajut ljudej na ploshhadi, – MVD [Invaders of Regional Department in Slovyansk arm people on the square – the Ministry of Internal Affairs], Censor.net, April 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TUWVCM>.

25
V Slavjanske zdanija SBU i gorotdel milicij pod kontrolem predstavitelej Narodnogo opolchenija Donbassa. Ljudi ustanavlivajut palatki i pojut pesni [In Slovyansk, the SSU buildings and the City Police Department are under the control of representatives of the Donbas People's Militia. People set up tents and sing songs], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Mz3AIs>.

26
Narodnyj mjer Slavjanska: “My ne dumali, chto dojdjot do vojny, tak kak nadejalis’ na pomoshh’ Rossii” [People's Mayor of Slovyansk: We did not think that it would come to war, as we hoped for help from Russia], IA REGNUM, October 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NpCRaM>.

27
Do zahvata gorotdela Slavjanska boeviki znali, chto chast’ milicionerov pokinula gorod [Before the capture of the City Department of Slovyansk, the militants knew that some of the policemen had left the city], Novosti Donbassa, April 12, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2KQdLZ2>.

Armed men on the barricades next to the captured Police Department.
 Source: Facebook photo by Oleksandr Rudomanov, <https://bit.ly/2JYtsE9>



Immediately after the capture, rallies began near the Slovyansk Police Department with barricades and tents.²⁸ Shtepa later made a statement that she was in no way involved. However, she met with the people who seized administrative buildings and passed their demands to the central authorities. According to Shtepa, the militants demanded a referendum.

28
 Citizens of Slovyansk set up tents,
 YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua,
 April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KLliiq>.

29
 Ex-Mayor of Slovyansk Nelia Shtepa
 at a rally on April 12 after the capture
 of Slovyansk by Strelkov ("DPR"),
 YouTube: Alex Rychkoff,
<http://bit.ly/2Zfkwfw>.

30
 Mayor of Slovyansk Nelia Shtepa on
 the phone about the demand for a
 referendum, April 12, 2014, YouTube:
 Domus Decorus, <http://bit.ly/2zaUuCP>.

“ I do not want anyone to die in my city. They [the insurgents – ed.] want to change the government in Ukraine. I have nothing to do with it. These people came from the Donbas. I looked today—and one, two, four are residents of Slovyansk, these are our Donbas guys. Let us not provoke them.”²⁹

In an interview with the Russian TV channel “LifeNews”, the Mayor of Slovyansk called the demands of the people who seized administrative buildings in the city adequate. She said she agreed with them and understood them: “The entire city of Slovyansk came out and supports the guys who captured the police.”³⁰ Shtepa also added that a referendum on federalization and the political future of Ukraine would take place in the city “in any case”.

Nelia Shtepa, Mayor of Slovyansk, gives an interview to the Russian TV channel “LifeNews”.
 Source: v-variant.com.ua, <https://bit.ly/3cg6sMK>



According to Volodymyr Yevdokimov, Deputy Head of the MIA, then acting Chief of Slovyansk Police Oleksandr Davydenko was negotiating with the militants on April 21 to resolve the situation.³¹

In fact, Viacheslav Ponomariov invited Davydenko to hold negotiations. Igor Girkin (Strelkov) began to pressure him to pledge allegiance to the “DPR”.³² Davydenko refused, and Girkin gave an order to take him “to the basement”.

On April 13, Nelia Shtepa confirmed Davydenko’s detention and said that “yesterday, until late at night, she was negotiating his release”.³³

THE SSU BUILDING

On April 12, armed groups captured the City Department of the Security Service of Ukraine without resistance. The building afterward became the headquarters of Igor Girkin (Strelkov). According to sources close to the city authorities in 2014, some of the SSU employees who did not betray their oath managed to remove secret materials and weapons from the building. They moved to one of the safe houses in Slovyansk and later joined the so-called “Anti-Terrorist Operation” forces in the district of Slovyansk. One of the SSU employees remained in the city “undercover” in the “Ministry of State Security” of the “DPR”.

PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE, COURT AND CITY COUNCIL

In contrast to the police and the SSU, during the city’s capture, the Prosecutor’s Office was not a priority for the militants, as it did not have a favorable location. According to Slovyansk public activists, the armed groups of the “DPR” entered the building in the first days of the insurgency and immediately left. Even during the capture of the city, the Prosecutor’s Office continued to carry out its work. A similar fate befell the building of Slovyansk City Court, which also had no strategic significance for the militants.

On April 13, pro-Russian groups seized the building of the Slovyansk City Council without any resistance. On the same day, the Ukrainian authorities announced the beginning of the so-called “Anti-Terrorist Operation” (ATO).

UNDER GUARD

On April 13, 2014, the leader of the “Self-Defense of Slovyansk”, Viacheslav Ponomariov, said Nelia Shtepa to “f*** off”. He accused her of collaborating with the Right Sector, and said that he received an order to “become the head of the city management”.³⁴

31
Nachal’nik milicii Slavjanska vedet peregovory s vooruzhennymi ljud’mi, zahvativshimi zdanie rajotdela – zamglavy MVD Ukrainy Evdokimov [Police Chief of Slovyansk holds negotiations with armed men who seized the building of the District Department, Deputy Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Evdokimov], Interfax-Ukraine, April 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Z9H5en>.

32
More information about Igor Girkin (Strelkov) is available in the report: Misto, z yakoho pochalasya viyna: na holovnu rol’ pryznacheno...[The City Where the War Began: the Lead Role is Assigned to...], https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Slov2_10.pdf.

33
Iz pervyh ust: gorodskoj golova Slavjanska Nelia Shtepa ne pokidala gorod. Ona nahoditsja na svoem rabochem meste [Firsthand: Mayor of Slovyansk, Nelia Shtepa, did not leave the city. She is at her workplace], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TV3I5d>.

34
Slovyansk today. Shtepa ran away, YouTube: Ukrainian Man, <http://bit.ly/2ZIKfH2>.

35
Interview R-2, December 6, 2018.

36
Iz pervyh ust: gorodskoj golova Slavjanska Nelja Shtepa ne pokidala gorod. Ona nahoditsja na svoem rabochem meste [Firsthand: Slovyansk City's Head Nelja Shtepa never left the city. She is at her workplace], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TV3I5d>.

37
Slovyansk, April 14, 2014, Rally 4 pm (People's Veche), YouTube: Vladimir Kotok, April 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KNRoLp>.

38
Mjer Slavjanska Nelja Shtepa rasskazala, chto v gorode nachalis' maroderstva [Slovyansk Mayor Nelja Shtepa said that looting began in the city], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Z6zCmp>.

39
Mjer Slavjanska objasnila, chto separatistov ne podderzhivala, a hitrila, chtoby osvobodit' zalozhnikov [Slovyansk Mayor explained that she did not support the separatists, but tricked them to release the hostages], Ostrov, April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TXYD0>.

40
SBU rassleduet dejstvija mjera Slavjanska po stat'e "separatizm" [SSU investigates actions of the Mayor of Slovyansk under the Article "separatism"], UNN, April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30qGGjx>.

41
V Slavjanske boeviki iz Kryma i Rossii zahvatyvajut zalozhnikov, – mer Shtepa, Audio, [In Slovyansk, militants from Crimea and Russia take hostages, – Mayor Shtepa], Audio, Censor.net, April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Hizeze>.

42
V Slavjanske rossijskie zahvatychiki oborudujut ognjevyje točki na gorsovete [In Slovyansk, Russian invaders equip firing points on the City Council – journalist], Censor.net, April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31RTAao>.

43
Mjer Slavjanska Nelja Shtepa so vcherashnego dnja ne vyhodit na svjaz'. Ee mestonahozhdenie ostaetsja poka neizvestnym [Slovyansk Mayor Nelja Shtepa has not been in touch since yesterday. Her whereabouts remain unknown], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30pQ8Ub>.

Denys, a resident of Slovyansk, described this as the actual establishment of armed control over the city:

“Who can give you an order if you are the “People’s Mayor”? They then established armed control over the city, “discarded” all the local elite. They stopped considering their opinion. Moreover, the local elite started to be taken “to the basement”, just like the Right Sector or the patriots.³⁵

The following day, Nelja Shtepa denied information that she fled the city and claimed to be at work.³⁶ On April 14, in front of the City Council building on the central square, protesters elected the coordinating Council of Slovyansk to “help manage the city”.³⁷ Flags of “Donetsk People’s Republic” and the Russian Federation were installed over the building of the City Council. In an interview with the city’s TV channel SAT+, Nelja Shtepa said that there were cases of looting in the city and urged the residents of Slovyansk to stay at home.³⁸

On April 15, during a conversation with journalists in Donetsk, Shtepa stated that she did not support the militants. Instead, she deliberately manipulated them for the sake of freeing the hostages: “I acted under the circumstances when I had 278 hostages, and everything that was done was aimed at releasing the hostages. I coordinated all my actions with Kyiv and Donetsk.”³⁹ Despite this, the SSU initiated criminal proceedings against the Mayor of Slovyansk under “separatism” charges.⁴⁰

In an interview with the TV channel “112 Ukraine”,⁴¹ Nelja Shtepa said that the building of the Slovyansk City Council was captured by “the green men who did not hide that they are from Crimea and Russia”, but the events in the city were not “our war and our revolution.” Meanwhile, the militants were already setting up firing positions on the roof of the City Council building.⁴²

On April 17, the “DPR” arrested Shtepa: she was held in an office in the building of the City Council under the supervision of armed guards until the recapture of the city on July 5, 2014. The media at that time spread information about the resignation of Nelja Shtepa.⁴³

On April 18, Volodymyr Pavlenko, Chief of the City’s Department of Labor and Social Protection, tried to calm people down. He said that

the Mayor “*had not been detained, she only cannot leave*”, but this was “*temporary*”.⁴⁴

On the same day, about 50 civilians approached armed men in camouflage and masks, seized the City Council, and asked the militants to vacate the building. They replied that they were protecting the residents of the city from the Right Sector.

During a rally on the central square of Slovyansk, Viacheslav Ponomariov confirmed the Mayor’s detention: “*Knowing that a criminal case was opened against Nelia Ihorivna [Shtepa – ed.] with charges of separatism, we decided not to hand out Nelia Ihorivna to anyone. We have her. She has written a letter of resignation.*”⁴⁵ He also announced a ban on the activities of the Ukrainian political parties “Udar”, “Batktivshchyna” and “Svoboda” in the city.⁴⁶ On April 20, the self-proclaimed “People’s Mayor” announced a curfew in the city between 12 and 6 am.⁴⁷

On April 22, Shtepa gave an interview to the Russian TV channel “Lifenews”. At that time, she was in custody in the building of the City Executive Committee.⁴⁸ The Russian journalists of the TV channel once again stressed that she voluntarily resigned. At the same time, the journalists claimed that she was all the time in the building of the City Council with the “militia”.

At a press conference on April 23, Ponomariov said that Nelia Shtepa was taken under guard and was safe. Allegedly, the ex-Mayor was provided with good living conditions, food, as well as access to medical care. Ponomariov stressed that she continued to work in the executive committee: “*De facto, Nelia Ihorivna has resigned her powers, but de jure she is still fulfilling her duties.*”⁴⁹

On April 25, Oleksandr Lukyanchenko, the Mayor of Donetsk, failed to secure the release of Nelia Shtepa: “*Attempts to negotiate her release not only as Mayor but also as a woman did not lead to anything.*”⁵⁰

On April 26, she gave an interview to the Russian newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, saying that she was glad about the arrival of the “militia” who “*stabilized the situation*” in the city. Moreover, Shtepa claimed to feel comfortable if Vladimir Putin was President of Ukraine instead of Turchynov (the Acting President of Ukraine at that time) because, in her eyes, the Russian President would be a real leader. She also noted the need for a referendum on “*the federalization within Ukraine or Russia.*”⁵¹

44
Zhiteli Slavjanska ishhut Nelju Shtepu [Residents of Slovyansk are looking for Nelia Shtepa], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NpdsxN>.

45
Separatysty zaiavyly, shcho Shtepa v pohanomu stani, tomu pobude z nymy [Separatists stated that Shtepa is not in good condition so she will have to remain with them], Ukrainska Pravda, April 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2P7Fv7q>.

46
V Slavjanske popali pod zapret tri politicheskie partii [Three political parties were banned in Slovyansk], Lenta.ru, April 19, 2014 <http://bit.ly/31ZExvl>.

47
Camoprovozglashennyj mjer Slavjanska vvel komendantskij chas [Self-proclaimed Mayor of Slovyansk imposed a curfew], UNIAN, April 21, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30nDgy4>.

48
Ex-Mayor of Slovyansk called Yarosh the main trouble in Ukraine, YouTube: Delovoy Slovyansk, April 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZgpQ5r>.

49
Vjacheslav Ponomariov zajavil, chto jeks-mjer Slavjanska Nelja Shtepa nahoditsja pod ohranoj, v horoshih uslovijah [Viacheslav Ponomariov said that Slovyansk ex-Mayor Nelia Shtepa is under protection, in good conditions], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31ZNBkb>.

50
Peregovory s “narodnym mjerom” ob osvobozhdenii Shtepy provalilis’, – Luk’janchenko [Negotiations with the “People’s Mayor” on the release of Shtepa failed], – Lukyanchenko, Delovoy Slovyansk, April 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zgxVMU>.

51
Slovyansk Mayor Nelia Shtepa: We are ready to go to Russia. Protect us! YouTube: Komsomolskaya Pravda, April 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zddOdx>.

“PEOPLE’S INVESTIGATION”

On April 14, the police were allowed to take personal belongings and office equipment from the building of the captured Police City Department. Law enforcement officers also returned their weapons and uniforms. The head of the “Self-Defense of Slovyansk” Ponomariov said that the police began patrolling the city.⁵²

Former leaders of Slovyansk Police were released, and the newly elected ones chose to cooperate with the invaders.

“ They released the chief and told him to take all his people from the City Department and that the City Department was theirs. The chief called Donetsk and described the situation. He was told that everything should be done without blood and peacefully. So he instructed the personnel, who were completely disarmed, to relocate to the building of the former District Department.⁵³

Formally, the police continued to patrol and accepted reports about violations from citizens and registered them in paper form. However, these reports were not entered in the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations (URPI). In particular, about 40 missing people’s reports were registered between April 12 and July 5.⁵⁴ However, according to Denys, the police did not react at all:

“ During the occupation, the police were working unarmed in the District Department. But the kind of work they did... People were coming to the police and saying, “Help, they have captured our belongings/property.” And they responded, “It is better to be quiet, otherwise the militants will shoot everyone.” That is, they seemed to be doing their job as usual; the investigative teams went out to the field, the traffic police dealt with accidents, as long as it was possible. But everything was in fact run by militants.⁵⁵

Their powers were entirely dependent on the will of those who had seized power by illegal means.

“ The picture was surreal. Before going on patrol, police officers came to the City Department to get their service weapons from the militants. Police arsenals remained in the captured building of the Slovyansk City Police Department.⁵⁶

Police officers who defected to the armed groups of the “DPR” continued to receive salaries and bonuses from the budget of Ukraine and took part in illegally detaining people on the orders of the leaders of the armed groups.⁵⁷ The media also reported about

52

Milicija Slavjanska rabotaet v shtatnom rezhime. Pravoohranitel'jam vernuli oruzhie i formu [Slovyansk Police are operating normally. Law enforcement got back their weapons and uniforms], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2PiGUbw>.

53

Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

54

Novyi nachalnyk militsii Slovjanska: Misto pochalo poveratysia do zhyttia [New chief of Police in Slovyansk: the city begins returning to life], Ukrainskaya Pravda, July 21, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31Ufz0v>.

55

Interview, C--2 as of December 6, 2018.

56

Mir v Slavjanske segodnja neodnoznachen, no vse zhe jeto mir [Peace in Slovyansk is ambiguous today, but it is still peace], Facts, April 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2PakPeZ>.

57

ibid.

the participation of Slovyansk police officers in illicit activities.⁵⁸ For example, this was the case when a police officer who defected to the militant's side detained civilians and forced them to work at the "DPR" checkpoints.

Police officers who refused to comply with the orders of the self-proclaimed authorities were harassed and detained. On April 25, Ponomariov announced the arrest of Oleh Prokhorov, Head of the Slovyansk Station Police Department: "*different political views... A person who harms our movement automatically ends up on the other side of the barricades*", explained the head of the "Self-Defense of Slovyansk."⁵⁹ When Ponomariov was asked how long Prokhorov would be held, he only responded: "*As long as necessary.*"

The militants also persecuted forensic experts. One of them, Yakimov, was detained and held for three hours in the captured building of the SSU.⁶⁰

On April 24, three unidentified masked gunmen took Yurii Zahrebelnyi, an employee of the Prosecutor's Office, directly out of the building of the Prosecutor's Office. He was taken to an unknown destination and released 40 minutes later.

In early June, militants captured the Deputy Prosecutor of the Slovyansk Interdistrict Prosecutor's Office, Serhii Myronenko, who was detained by force in the building of the City's SSU branch.⁶¹

"PEOPLE'S PATROL"

Together with the local militia, Cossacks⁶², detachments of veterans of the border troops, and, among others, Afghan war veterans patrolled the city.

On April 15, Viktor Vinnychenko asked local entrepreneurs at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Slovyansk City Council on behalf of the Cossacks to assist in the form of one ton of gasoline, allegedly for the organization of "public order protection." A ton of gasoline, which was stored in the City Police Department, was used by "*counteracting forces*" for "*Molotov cocktails.*" Vinnychenko also noted: "*Our headquarter is working, and we will do everything to ensure law and order in the city together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.*"⁶³

Armed detachments of the "Self-Defense of Slovyansk" also engaged in "protecting public order" established by the "DPR" militants. In agreement with the "People's Mayor" Ponomariov, the detachments checked whether city shops sold alcohol. They could detain violators, confiscate or destroy alcoholic beverages, and suspend retail units.⁶⁴

58
Na Donbasse milicioner-"oboroten"
cdaval v rabstvo zhitel'ej [In the Donbas,
a police officer called "werewolf"
handed residents into slavery], Today,
March 16, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2HgOwVi>.

59
Viacheslav Ponomariov about Oleg
Prokhorov, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua,
April 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30qK2TJ>.

60
Boeviki vzjali v plen zamprokurora
Slavjanskoj mezhrajonnoj prokuratury [V
Slavjanske vooruzhennye protestujushhie
pohitili i sudmedjeksperita, i prokurora
[In Slovyansk, armed protesters
kidnapped both a forensic expert and a
prosecutor], DonbassUa, April 23, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2HicXBW>.

61
Boeviki vzjali v plen zamprokurora
Slavjanskoj mezhrajonnoj prokuratury
[Militants captured the deputy
prosecutor of Slovyansk Interdistrict
Prosecutor's Office], Ostrov, June 4,
2014, <http://bit.ly/2HbuLb>.

62
This refers to paramilitary formations
of either Russian or pro-Russian
Cossacks ("Казакі").

63
Viktor Vinnychenko on the situation in
Slovyansk, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua,
April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TRNYKK>.

64
How prohibition is working in
Slovyansk, part 3, YouTube: Slavgorod.
com.ua, May 16, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2ZojaX4>.



Viktor Vinnychenko, deputy of
Slovyansk City Council. Source:
ord-ua.com, <https://bit.ly/34x5rxj>

SELF-GOVERNMENT UNDER SIEGE

On April 22, following Shtepa's detention, Volodymyr Kulmatytskyi, Deputy Mayor, conducted a staff meeting.⁶⁵ Borys, a former employee of the City Council, took part at this meeting:

“ We were just leaving the building when two Skoda cars without license plates arrived. Ponomariov, gunmen, and the Head of the Department of Labor and Social Protection (hereafter – the DLSP) Volodymyr Pavlenko got out of these cars. Ponomariov came to us and said, “Where are you all going?” He approached Kulmatytskyi with a machine gun and said, “Volodia, why didn't you call me? I am the “People's Mayor”, I am not?” Kulmatytskyi was stuttering, “A-a, ehh, hmmm”. Ponomariov ordered: “Everyone gets back inside. Let us have a meeting.” And we went back inside.⁶⁶

The City Council Press Secretary Tetiana Shulpa described that meeting with the leader of the “People's Militia” Viacheslav Ponomariov.⁶⁷ According to her, he promised safety to all employees and agreed that employees of the executive committee of the City Council would work on different premises.

On that same day, the militants arrested Vadym Sukhonos, City Council deputy, for alleged collaboration with Oleh Kotenko, an adviser to Oleksandr Turchynov (Acting President of Ukraine at that time). Ponomariov personally interviewed the detained deputy, who allegedly agreed to cooperate “with our investigation body”⁶⁸, which consisted of armed men in the basement of the SSU under the leadership of Igor Girkin (Strelkov). Sukhonos was detained in the SSU basement for 10 days. He was released along with detained journalists and OSCE representatives in early May. After being released, he left the city.⁶⁹

On April 26, the City Council held a meeting with Ponomariov and the deputy corps of Slovyansk. According to deputy Nadiia Kushakova, the deputies received “*exhaustive answers*” from Ponomariov.⁷⁰ Nelia Shtepa and 29 deputies of the City Council attended the meeting. Media representatives were not invited to the meeting.

“ There was no one who was unwilling to work with us, everyone clearly stated their position, that we are ready to work, fulfilling all the instructions for the city to continue to be viable, and that our citizens should not experience any trouble,” Ponomariov said during one of the press conferences.⁷¹

65

Staff meeting in Slovyansk, April 22, 2014, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, <http://bit.ly/2NjqzqQ>.

66

Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

67

Tetiana Shulga describes the meeting with Viacheslav Ponomariov, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, April 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31ZEUpJ>.

68

Viacheslav Ponomariov on the detention of Vadim Sukhonos, YouTube: AnnaBo, April 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Za6VT2>.

69

September 16, 2014. Media maidan. Guest Vadim Sukhonos, Deputy of Slovyansk City Council, YouTube: Public TV of Donbas, September 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33Qc62D>.

70

Nadiia Kushakova describes the meeting with V. Ponomariov, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, April 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zobnol>.

71

Vjacheslav Ponomariov zjavil, chto jeks-mjer Slavjanska Nelja Shtepa nahoditsja pod ohranoj, v horoshih uslovijah [Viacheslav Ponomariov said that the ex-Mayor of Slovyansk Nelia Shtepa is under protection, in good conditions], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31ZNBkb>.

Departments and offices of the Executive Committee of the City Council performed their functions to ensure the life of the city even when they moved to the municipal institutions of the city.⁷²

In particular, the Civil Protection Department informed the local population about the rules of conduct during military operations, as well as the existing protective structures on the territory of the city.⁷³ The City Department of Education decided to suspend schools and pre-schools until the situation in the city would normalize⁷⁴ and tried to organize an external independent evaluation in Slovyansk.⁷⁵ The DLSP continued to work.⁷⁶

The inconsistency in the actions of the authorities, reluctance, and a lack of understanding of the new circumstances sometimes led to anecdotal and rather protestque situations.

“*An order of the head of the Regional Administration came from Donetsk. The commemoration of the victims of Soviet repression takes place at the end of May. We received an order to hold a rally on that day, lowering the Ukrainian flags on administrative buildings. They said, “Try the best you can. The main point is to send a report.” Well, we wrote in this report that the national flags were lowered and that the rally was held. That is, people were completely disconnected from reality. And then I realized that our system was in chaos.*”⁷⁷

Employees of local self-government bodies of the city received wages until mid-May, as long as the Department of the State Treasury of Ukraine was in the city.

“And then the Treasury announced they were closing because they had no employees left. Everyone left. Some went on vacation, some ran away, some just disappeared...”, ex-City Council official Borys said during an interview.⁷⁸

Residents began to leave the city, including local government employees who went to work less often. Their duties were performed mainly formal and by inertia due to the need to occupy themselves with something during the siege.

Many judges and court employees also did not work and took vacations, also at their own expense. Civil and administrative cases were not adjudicated at that time. Only judges and employees involved in hearings of criminal cases where procedural issues regarding detentions were resolved came to work. Particular case files were taken out for the case that the building was seized.

72
Novoe mestonahozhdenie strukturnykh podrazdelenij Slavjanskogo gorodskogo Soveta [New location of structural divisions of Slovyansk City Council], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zos3Qq>.

73
Sireny vizzhat, na ploshhadi mamy hodjat, [Sirens are screaming, mothers are walking in the square], Slavgorod.com.ua, May 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Nq6ete>.

74
Rabota detskih sadov i shkol v Slavjanske priostanovlena do nachala funkcionirovanija obshhestvennogo transporta [The work of kindergartens and schools in Slovyansk is suspended until public transport starts functioning], Slavgorod.com.ua, May 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zpu0Ny>.

75
Oleksander Zubarev about the work of educational institutions, Part 1, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31UrfAn>.

76
The Head of the DLSP at a staff meeting, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Pa8F5Z>.

77
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

78
Ibid.

THE “PEOPLE’S MILITIA”

One of the features of the regime established by the militants was an attempt to legitimize their activities through procedures under Ukrainian legislation, in particular, the Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”.⁷⁹ Ponomariov himself noted that he regularly held meetings with deputies and the public “*to confirm the powers of the People’s Militia.*”⁸⁰

On April 28, forty-two deputies registered at the session of the City Council. That was enough to make important decisions. For the first time in many years, the meeting was held behind closed doors.⁸¹ Voropayev, a deputy of the City Council, was elected as chairman of the meeting. Ponomariov, who was listed in the minutes as the “People’s Mayor”, was also present. The session decided to create and approve the “Regulations on Slovyansk People’s Militia (Municipal Police) of the Territorial Community of Slovyansk.”

According to Article 17 of the Constitution of Ukraine, military formations shall not be used by anyone to restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens or with the intent to overthrow the constitutional order, subvert the bodies of power or obstruct their activity.⁸²

On Ukrainian territory, the creation and operations of any armed formations not envisioned by law shall be prohibited. The only legislative body in Ukraine shall be the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Article 260 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (CC) criminalizes the creation of paramilitary or armed formations that are not provided for by law.⁸³ Despite this, the city council decision was an attempt to provide legal definition and status to armed groups that had already established control over the city.

The regulation on Slovyansk People’s Militia (Municipal Police) contained numerous references to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. Members of the squad should be required to “*cultivate a sense of respect for the Laws of Ukraine, protect the constitutional rights and legitimate interests of citizens, and strictly adhere to the current legislation of Ukraine.*”⁸⁴

The regulation adopted during the session also allowed representatives of the governing body of the “Slovyansk People’s Militia” to carry firearms because they would be “*subject to legal registration under the current legislation.*” Simplified permissions to carry firearms for the personnel of the “People’s Militia” would be provided for “*when the state of emergency is introduced in the country.*”

79

Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”, the official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/31UoAXn>.

80

V. Ponomariov’s press conference on April 26, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, April 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2HyJ807>.

81

On April 28, an extraordinary session of Slovyansk City Council was held in Slovyansk, YouTube: Delovoy Slavyansk, April 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zcIMIS>.

82

Constitution of Ukraine, the official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/31STQpR>.

83

Criminal Code of Ukraine, the official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

84

Kak deputaty Slavjanskogo gorodskogo soveta Ukrainu predavali [How deputies of Slovyansk City Council betrayed Ukraine], 6262com.ua, September 24, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2zdkcXe>.

Ironically, Shtepa also signed the session’s decision to create an armed group that had detained her.

Later, at a press conference on May 16, Ponomariov claimed that the “Slovyansk People’s Militia” received official status and was registered by the State Registration Service of Ukraine in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs.⁸⁵

Another important point on the session’s agenda was the attempt to legitimize the “People’s Mayor” Ponomariov himself. Deputies raised the question about his appointment as the chairman of Slovyansk City Council before the elections.

After discussions and consultations, Ponomariov was finally appointed as “Chairman of the Executive Committee of the City Council”, which directly contradicts Article 42(4) of the Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”: only a lawfully elected mayor can have the authority to lead the executive committee.⁸⁶

One of the city council’s decisions on April 28 was to instruct the local election commission to organize a “referendum” on May 11, 2014.

All these decisions were adopted unanimously in the session.

The deputies also raised the question of the resignation of Nelia Shtepa. However, they did not make any decision. On April 30, the militants needed to hold another closed session of the City Council, which 42 deputies attended. Ivanenko, deputy of the city council, was elected as chairman of the meeting.⁸⁷

85
Slovyansk People’s Militia has received official status, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zh9yyB>.

86
Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”, the official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/31UoAXn>.

87
Deputies of Slovyansk City Council accepted the resignation of Mayor Nelia Shtepa, YouTube: Delovoy Slavyansk, April 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zl3aoP>.



Viacheslav Ponomariov in the building of Slovyansk City Council.
Source: vp.donetsk.ua

On the same day, the city council received an application from mayor Shtepa for the early release of her duties starting from April 29, 2014. The city council session decided to approve that this application was personally written and signed by Shtepa.

“ They tried to integrate into the Ukrainian authorities. But it was somehow illiterate... for example, they started forcing Nelia Shtepa to write a resignation letter. And they succeeded. Then, the deputies gathered for the session. The deputies, like sheep, joined because everyone has a family, some have property... Some joined for ideological reasons, some out of fear or traditional submission. They gathered, and Shtepa wrote a letter of resignation. And the deputies voted on it.⁸⁸

After Shtepa's early resignation, the powers of the mayor were to pass to the then Secretary of the City Council, representative of the Party of Regions Oleksandr Samsonov.⁸⁹ He did not participate in the sessions on April 28 and 30 and practically withdrew from the exercise of his powers. The Secretary was allegedly on sick leave.

88
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

The right to sign financial documents instead of Shtepa was handed to deputy Oleh Tytianin. “In fact, it turned out that financial documents were signed. The local government body was working, the police were formally working, but people with weapons controlled everything”, Denys said during an interview.⁹⁰

89
Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”, the official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/31UoAXn>.

90
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

The deputies decided to provide the premises for the headquarters of the “People's Militia of Slovyansk” at no cost for one year.

91
Ibid.

They also decided to create a coordinating council for local self-government and approved the personnel that they had previously chosen on April 14 at a rally at the central square. The coordinating council was headed by Anatolii Khmeliovyi, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine in Slovyansk.

“ The “DPR” people established a coordinating council under local governmental control. They included some deputies of the City Council from the KPU and SPU, as well as pro-Russian activists, and tried to establish the rules. For instance, they came to the Head of the Financial Office and said it was necessary to fund something. It was funny. They did not even know how it worked. They thought they had seized power—that is all that was needed.⁹¹

THE “REFERENDUM”

One of the key decisions during the session on April 28 was to organize a “referendum” on the state independence of “Donetsk People’s Republic”.

Liliia Bartashevych was in charge of the city’s Territorial Election Commission.

“Before the war, she was in charge of some women’s public organization. Why she decided to get involved in this, I do not understand. She is a... conformist. She decided to make some money. Now she is in Crimea... she is on the wanted list in Ukraine”, Borys explained.⁹²

On May 7, Anatolii Khmeliovyi, leader of the Communist Party in Slovyansk and Chairman of the Coordination Council, reported that ballots arrived in the city, invitations, and premises for the “referendum” were being prepared.

To organize this “referendum”, the so-called “Chairman of the Executive Committee” Ponomariov held meetings with the heads of the City’s Street Committees. The latter had different attitudes towards participation in the “referendum”. Some employees of local authorities took a position of non-interference.

“ *Some of the street committee heads refused. Even despite their pro-Russian position. The head of the organization unit said they called her with a question: “What should we do?” She told them she did not know what to do. So it was decided: everyone would decide for themselves. Officials in this situation mostly withdrew. They just did not know how to act.*”⁹³

92
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

93
Ibid.



Lilia Bartashevych, chairman of the Election Commission for the “referendum” in Slovyansk.
Source: 6262.com.ua

The ballot boxes were stored in the warehouse of the City Council.

“ Igor came, a very arrogant “DPR” guy. He came to the employee of the city council who had the keys to the warehouse with all the ballot boxes and said, “Come on, open up! We need the boxes!” And the employee said, “I forgot my keys at home.” But Igor said that he had a machine gun and that he would break the lock with his gun. However, the employee went home to get the keys and opened the warehouse. They brought a “Gazel” which was stolen from some entrepreneur at a checkpoint. They loaded the bins and began to deliver them to the polling stations.⁹⁴

94
Ibid.

According to resident Denys, the militants did not care how many citizens would vote.

“ They did not care—they would carry out the “referendum” anyway, no matter who would come to vote or not. That was the perception. The main point was to organize something. But how it would turn out—that was a different question. The main goal was to create the picture that everyone supported the “referendum”. That was their main task.

The premises of the executive committees of local councils, which functioned as local self-government bodies, were used during the “referendum” as voting places in addition to the polling stations usually placed in schools and other institutions.

On May 9, during the Victory Day celebration, Nelia Shtepa, still in custody at the building of the City Council, took part in a rally on the central square of the city. The ex-Mayor called for support for the

A “referendum” campaign leaflet,
May 11, 2014.
Source: Slavgorod.com.ua

**11 МАЯ
РЕФЕРЕНДУМ**

Твой праздник 9 мая!
Твои герои Жуков, Суворов, Нахимов!
Ты потомок победителей
в Великой Отечественной Войне!

**ПОДДЕРЖИ САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ
ДОНЕЦКОЙ НАРОДНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ**

Голосование состоится с 8⁰⁰ до 22⁰⁰ на избирательных участках по месту жительства. В случае возможных провокаций, дополнительные урны будут установлены на территории исполкомов, поселковых и сельских советов.

“referendum”: *“We must not let anyone into our city. We must come to the “referendum” on May 11.”*⁹⁵

During the “referendum” on May 11, the police of Slovyansk monitored public order at the polling stations.⁹⁶

*“The police placed one–two unarmed officers per station, who just stood there like furniture. Those policemen, on the other hand, who defected to the “DPR” [representatives of the newly created “Municipal Police” – ed.] were carrying machine guns”, recalls Denys, a resident of Slovyansk.*⁹⁷

THE “CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE”

Following his “appointment” by the City Council to the position of the “Chairman of the Executive Committee” of Slovyansk, Viacheslav Ponomariov began issuing orders and instructions which were mandatory on the territory of the city.

In particular, on April 29, he instructed the head of the Department of Education to conduct talks with the directors of schools and kindergartens of the city,⁹⁸ on April 30, he imposed a ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages from 8 pm to 10 am.⁹⁹

During meetings with deputies, the “People’s Mayor” tried to solve the issues of the activities of the local police, in particular, the problem with the police deployment for the acknowledgment of the facts of death.¹⁰⁰

At a press conference on May 12, Ponomariov noted that he was the Chairman of the Executive Committee: *“Since Nelia Ihorivna Shtepa has resigned, no one minds that I am dealing with the city now. If necessary, we will hold elections. All in its own time.”* When asked about the fate of the “ex-mayor”, he replied: *“She said she grew tired of all this and wanted a vacation. As soon as we claim the victory, she will leave.”*¹⁰¹



95

Den' Pobedy v Slavjanske Nelia Shtepa [Victory Day in Slovyansk Nelia Shtepa], YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 9, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2P9aQqm>.

96

Golosujshhiih zhitelej Slavjanska zashhishhajut milicionery, opolchency i kazaki [Voting residents of Slovyansk are protected by police, militia, and cossacks], NTV, May 11, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zkjcvd>.

97

Interview C--2, December 6, 2018.

98

Predsedatel' ispolniteľ'nogo komiteta Slavjanska Vjacheslav Ponomariov soobshhil, chto opasnostej dlja detej v cherte goroda net [Chairman of the Executive Committee of Slovyansk Viacheslav Ponomariov said that there are no dangers for children in the city, Slavgorod.com.ua, April 29, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2zeC1oP>.

99

V Slavjanske suhoj zakon: posle 20.00 prodazha spirtnyh napitkov zapreshhena [Prohibition in Slovyansk: sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited after 8 pm], Slavgorod.com.ua, April 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33TUBAA>.

100

Nadiia Kushakova describes the meeting with V. Ponomariov, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, April 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zobnol>.

101

Viacheslav Ponomariov about Nelia Shtepa on May 12, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2HkCpqd>.

Nelia Shtepa and Viacheslav Ponomariov during a commemoration on May 9, 2014 in Slovyansk. Source: Slavgorod.com.ua

Ponomariov also noted the need to hold new city council elections: *“All this will be slightly changed. Currently, out of 66 deputies, 42-43 attend—this is an extra ballast. There will be changes in the previous composition because many things do not reflect the reality...”*

He also announced plans to create municipal transport, free for preferential categories of passengers, assured of timely wages and pensions, and shared plans for the future where *“everything new will be created, based on the ‘people’s management.’”*¹⁰² Later the “Chairman of the Executive Committee” said that the city had introduced a system for licensing the activities of private transport (taxi services). To obtain a license, carriers had to contact the Transport Department of the Executive Committee. Providers without a license could not provide passenger transportation services on the territory of Slovyansk and Slovyansk district.¹⁰³

On May 13, Mykola Levchenko, Head of Donetsk regional organization of the Party of Regions, addressed the “People’s Mayor” Ponomariov with a request to release Nelia Shtepa: *“I kindly ask you, you do not need her. She has nothing to do with the Right Sector, nationalism, or neo-fascism. You are just holding her.”*¹⁰⁴ Levchenko’s initiative was unsuccessful.

On May 13, at the staff meeting of the “Executive Committee of the City Council”, “People’s Mayor” Ponomariov addressed the judges and prosecutors of the city:

“*From the first day, I always wanted to talk to our prosecutors and someone from the judicial corps. I think the judicial corps of Slovyansk will hear me, because you are holding a neutral position, hiding in a hole, and waiting for it to end somehow... Fellow judges and prosecutors! I would like to see you here on the executive committee. If you do not understand the Russian language, but only Ukrainian, then you will have to vacate our territory. We will find our own judges.*”¹⁰⁵

On May 14, Ponomariov noted that the city stopped paying taxes to the Ukrainian budget: *“We pay the Pension Fund; but we do not pay taxes to Kyiv because the city forms its own budget. I suspend all tax payments to Kyiv... We will not feed them. It is enough.”*¹⁰⁶

At a press conference on May 20, the “Chairman of the Executive Committee” said that the presidential elections of Ukraine would not be held in the city on May 25. He also called all men to protect the city.¹⁰⁷

102

Ponomariov on the issue of municipal transport, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZokJ3r>.

103

Ponomariov’s press conference on May 14, Part 1, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/330uECA>.

104

Lider doneckih “regionalov” prosit “narodnogo mjera Slavjanska” otpustit’ nenuzhnuju Nelju Shtepu, [The leader of Donetsk “regionals” asks the “People’s Mayor of Slovyansk” to release Nelia Shtepa], Ostrov, May 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2MvxbfJ>.

105

Viacheslav Ponomariov addressed the court and the Prosecutor’s Office, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31TrBHw>.

106

Ponomariov’s press conference on May 14, Part 3, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33Rkykt>.

107

Viacheslav Ponomariov’s press conference on 20 May, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2HiGues>.

After seizing power in the city, the militants made public statements about the victims of attacks. During a regular meeting with the media, Ponomariov informed about the possibility of financing summer holidays for children in the pioneer camps of Sviatohirsk and in Crimea, “until the tension decreases”. The victims of shelling¹⁰⁸ were promised repairs to their homes, and those whose homes were destroyed were promised a new one: “We have both apartments and houses.”¹⁰⁹

At the end of May, during a staff meeting, following the escalation of the armed confrontation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the “Chairman of the Executive Committee” instructed the city housing authorities to check the condition of basements and bomb shelters and advised residents of apartment buildings to organize guards to prevent looting.¹¹⁰

“We offer to prepare for the evacuation of children and adults who do not want to stay in the city. We have the opportunity to move them to Sviatohirsk district... to Russia, to Crimea”, Ponomariov stated during the staff meeting of the executive committee on May 27. It was unclear how this evacuation would take place.¹¹¹

STRELKOV’S “MAYOR”

On June 10, Ponomariov was arrested and removed from the office by the decision of the “Commander of the People’s Militia of Slovyansk” Igor Girkin (Strelkov) “for conducting activities incompatible with the goals and objectives of the civilian administration.”¹¹² Ponomariov was detained at the SSU building, where he was held until July 5, the day of the city’s liberation from the “DPR” militants.

On June 12, Girkin appointed a new “Acting Chairman of the Executive Committee”—Volodymyr Pavlenko, a former KGB officer and Head of the DLSP.¹¹³ He became the “Mayor” of the city by

108

For more information about the attacks on the city, see the section of Mariia Biliakova and Nataliia Kaplun “85 Days under Fire”.

109

Viacheslav Ponomariov on improving the health of children in Slovyansk on May 20, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KP5Jrh>.

110

Viacheslav Ponomariov entrusted housing services to check all basements and bomb shelters in Slovyansk, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NvfrAR>.

111

Viacheslav Ponomariov about the evacuation, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, May 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Mw0vTe>.

112

Ponomariov smeshhen s dolzhnosti – Strelkov [Ponomariov was removed from his post – Strelkov], Korrespondent.net, June 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31YclUa>.

113

KP’s Exclusive. New Slovyansk Mayor Volodymyr Pavlenko, YouTube: Radio Komsomolskaya Pravda, April 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KP4Peb>.



The new “Mayor” Volodymyr Pavlenko. Source: tsn.ua

accident—“Strelkov’s men” stopped his car and he was told that he would have to manage the city.¹¹⁴

Nelia Shtepa was the deputy “Mayor” and held meetings with employees of public utilities. At the same time, she was still under arrest in the building of the City Council.¹¹⁵

Pavlenko led the city during intense hostilities. However, he only held the position for a month. There were significant problems with communication and electricity in the city. There were also interruptions in the supply of other vital resources, especially water shortages.

At the end of June, when the Ukrainian army was preparing for the offense, the city council stopped its activities due to the military operations at the initiative of Samsonov, Secretary of the City Council.

“*Oleksandr Samsonov came in and said that we should leave the city, because there is nothing to do here, and there would be fighting... He also told us to prepare the order on temporary termination of the activity of the City Council. He would sign it. And we needed to leave. Then we quickly typed this order, printed it out, Samsonov signed it, and that was it. We left.*¹¹⁶

Due to the collapse of the mobile phone network in the city, the City Council employees who remained in Slovyansk developed a special communication plan among themselves. “*We agreed that those who remain should meet in Shovkovychnyi Park at a specific spot. But I immediately said that I was leaving and would not come so that they would not think that I was dead. But someone stayed, and I know that they went to have meetings*”, Borys recalls.¹¹⁷

EPILOGUE

After the recapture of the city by the Ukrainian army, “mayor” Volodymyr Pavlenko left for Belarus. Later, in 2015 he became “Minister of State Security of the DPR”.

The former “Chairman of the Executive Committee” Oleksandr Ponomariov retreated to Donetsk with the “DPR” groups and then left for Russia.

Nelia Shtepa remained in Slovyansk. “*On July 5, when the militants left, she was still in captivity. She broke down the door. It was clear that the doors had been broken from the inside. And she went*

114

I became a “Mayor” by an accident, my car was stopped by the “DPR” and they said that I will have to lead the city”, Vesti, September 4, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2L5e9JK>.

115

Nelia Shtepa started working for terrorists, YouTube: TSN, June 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZuuGAt>.

116

Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

117

ibid.



Remains of IAG fortifications next to the police department (inside and outside).
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 18, 2014

through the city, where she was met by a policeman. She told him that she wanted to go home to Zvanivka”, Denys describes the release of Shtepa.¹¹⁸

On July 11, 2014, Shtepa was eventually detained by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. On July 13, 2014, the ex-mayor was arrested by the Prosecutor’s Office of Kharkiv region. In the ongoing court case, she is charged with encroachment on the territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine, resulting in the death of people and other serious consequences.

The return of local self-government bodies began immediately after the recapture of the city from the IAG of the “DPR”. Oleksandr Samsonov, Secretary of the City Council, returned to the city and took the position of the mayor.¹¹⁹

“ Then, one thing led to another... The task was to restore life in the city. Everyone began to gather in the city council. Nothing was working. The city’s gas service—was it alive or not? Were the doctors alive or not? What a mess! It was so chaotic. Gradually, people began to pull themselves together and started to coordinate each other... An ambulance came and said that the militants had taken 12 cars from them when they retreated to Donetsk. Then the transport workers came and said that their buses had been stolen. Someone else had something taken from them... However, gradually we recovered.¹²⁰

On August 22, 2014, at a session of the city council, deputies decided to cancel the decision of April 28 and 30, 2014, considering that “the city was under the control of militants and decisions were made under the influence of armed threats.”¹²¹

The example of Slovyansk shows how the inaction and non-intervention of local authorities led to the loss of control over the city and created favorable conditions for external attacks. From early April 2014, the city was de facto controlled by combat-ready and organized self-defense units, which gained access to weapons, controlled strategic communications infrastructure, and had strong propaganda support.

Violent and armed interference from Russia and the legal chaos in the self-proclaimed “republics” once again emphasized the

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ibid.

119
SML: i.o. mjera Slavjanska stal
“regional” Aleksandr Samsonov
[Media: Acting Mayor of Slovyansk
became “regional” Oleksandr
Samsonov] UNIAN, July 9, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/31UqDe3>.

120
Interview C--1, December 6, 2018.

121
Decision of the City Council as of
August 22, 2014 No. 2-LXV-6, the
official website of Slovyansk City
Council, <http://bit.ly/2Hm6SUV>.

negative role of the local elites in the events of the spring of 2014. The “creators of the Russian spring” skillfully exploited the weaknesses and political immaturity of the local authorities and caused irreparable harm to the civilian population of Slovyansk. The activities of the Mayor, the City Council, and its executive bodies created the ground for legitimizing the established regime at the local level. Subsequently, the “Chairman of the Executive Committee” and his successor, who illegally obtained power, carried out illegal activities.

During the capture of the city by the militants, there were gross violations of the Constitution of Ukraine, the Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” and international law regarding the rights and freedoms of the civilian population. Adequate legal assessment and qualification of the events should play an important role in the context of recreating historical truth and overcoming impunity for the perpetrators of crimes.

Медио-
отдел

An inscription by the IAG members in an office at the captured SSU building.
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 19, 2014

“THE OTHER CITY”: SLOVYANSK AS A BATTLEFIELD OF THE INFORMATION WAR

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«Слов’янськ» (“Sloviansk”), «Славянск» (“Slaviansk”), “Sloviansk”—in the spring of 2014, Sloviansk burst into the Ukrainian and global information space. Sloviansk was the first captured city in the Donbas and marks the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine. At that time, the world’s leading media were covering Sloviansk: the BBC, the Telegraph, the Guardian, etc.¹²² In less than three months of the hostilities, Ukrainian and Russian online media mentioned more than 26 thousand* times “Sloviansk”. But they were all about “the other city”.¹²³

*Monitoring of internet sources and automatic information collection of data from a search engine, resulted in a collection of 26,165 hits of Ukrainian and Russian internet resources from April 12 to July 5, 2014 mentioning Sloviansk. After the data collection, each article was further checked to make sure that it mentioned Sloviansk.

In total, more than 738 Internet publications were analyzed. These publications can be categorized into three groups: Ukrainian nationwide publications (222 publications), local (226 publications), and Russian (290 publications). From local publications, a separate group was distinguished for analysis, namely Donetsk regional media.

The categorization of publications into certain groups was determined by analyzing the content of the site, the location of the editorial office, as well as using the resources Whois and SimilarWeb.

Through the analysis of the publication titles, it was possible to identify semantic structures and those individuals who were most often quoted and mentioned by online media in their headlines. Authors of the study “Social clicks: Who reads on Twitter and what?” concluded that only 41% of people read a text in full, and 59% of users only read the headline.¹²⁴ It is very likely that this trend is also present in other online publications, so it can be argued that headlines have a significant impact on the reader. Indeed, some respondents in Sloviansk mentioned that they only read the headlines about their city.

This section describes the mechanism of influence of the Russian propaganda on the events in Sloviansk and its residents. The author, along with other researchers from the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives, spoke with residents of Sloviansk, who had remained in the city during the insurgency, and with local journalists.

The names of the respondents mentioned in this section have been altered.

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Ukraine crisis: Military observer freed in Sloviansk, BBC, 27.04.2014, <https://bbc.in/2LMH7QL>; Frontline Slavyansk: inside an occupied Ukrainian town, 21.04.2014, The Telegraph, <http://bit.ly/2JBaKlb>, Ukraine crisis: Vladimir Putin warns of ‘consequences’ after Slavyansk skirmish, The Guardian, 24.04.2014, <http://bit.ly/2XXXeBk>.

123

Interview C--3, November 8, 2018.

124

Pokolenie internet-homjachkov: 59% novostej chitajut ne dal’she zagolovka [Generation of internet hamsters: 59% read no further than the headline], Pravda.ru, August 15, 2016, <http://bit.ly/203oFWX>; Shokuiuchi zaholovky ta nudni pres-relizy: yak odeski ZMI manipuliuiut iz nazvamy novyn [Shocking headlines and boring press releases: how mass media in Odesa manipulates with headlines], IMI, July 30, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2LP6BNk>.

Olha Serhiienko complained of disorientation and discomfort due to the news in the Ukrainian media: “You switch the TV on and see Olia Freimut checking the cleanliness and order in a restaurant. You are watching it as if nothing happened anywhere. Sometimes they show that some events occur somewhere else in a brief overview.”¹²⁵

The woman adds that residents of Donetsk and other nearby cities often did not know about the events in Slovyansk. “We called Donetsk. And they asked, ‘What are you talking about? What war?’”

Pro-Ukrainian citizens received information about the events in the city from their own observations, trusted people, and social networks. The telephone apps “Perehovorka” and “Zello” were actively used to transmit and receive information about the events in the city.

They visited websites of Ukrainian national media (in particular, *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Censor.net*, the news feed “UkrNet”),¹²⁶ but this applies only to the pro-Ukrainian population. Others mainly consumed news produced by the Russian state propaganda.

Propaganda is information that is not objective. It is used to influence the audience and pursue further agendas by selectively presenting facts to support a specific synthesis or perception or using emotionally colored speech to invoke an irrational response to the information.¹²⁷

Oles Antypenko, media expert and head of the monitoring group of the NGO “Belarus Association of Journalists”, identified 14 characteristics of propaganda.¹²⁸ Some of them were typical for the coverage of the events in Slovyansk:

- “Black and white” reporting;
- Exaggerations; creating a sense of anxiety, danger, fear, hysteria, or, conversely, a sense of euphoria, pride of having power over the economy and the political system—an essential element of this technique is the cultivation of the image of the enemy and its demonization;
- Cultivating a positive image of the person in whose interest propaganda is carried out and representing the provided information as a source of truth, high human qualities, various professional skills, perspicacity, or even genius;
- Reinforcement by appealing to authority, religion, history, and other sources to confirm propaganda messages; discrediting opponents and depriving people with critical opinions of their voices; the use of a specific vocabulary, of clichés, hate speech, and labeling; ignoring ethical principles of journalism;

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Interview C-3, November 8, 2018.

126

Interview C-4, December 17, 2018;

Interview C-3, November 8, 2018;

Interview C-5, December 12, 2018;

Interview C-6, December 14, 2018;

Interview C--7 as of December 13, 2018.

127

Propaganda, Encyclopedia Britannica,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/>.

128

14 signs of propaganda that everyone
should know, mediakritika.by,
January 18, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2JEDFVo>.

- The creation of a dominant position in the information sphere for the media that carry out propaganda; monopolization of the media; explicit or implicit censorship and self-censorship of journalists.

Russian media resources had relatively high credibility among the population of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. According to a survey by Internews, in 2014, 71% of the respondents in the Donetsk region watched Russian television—the highest score in entire Ukraine without Russian annexed Crimea.¹²⁹ According to the results of another survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in fall 2014, only 7% of the respondents fully trusted Ukrainian television, 50% – partially, and 34.5% – had no trust at all. Full confidence in Russian television was reported by 20.5% of the respondents, 67% partially trusted Russian TV, and only 7% had no trust at all.¹³⁰

The most vivid example of Russian propaganda was “the boy crucified in Slovyansk”. In July 2014, the Russian state TV channel Pervyi Kanal (First Channel) released a news story. In this story, a woman who introduced herself as a “refugee from Slovyansk” said that the Ukrainian military on the day of the recapture of Slovyansk drove residents to the central square and staged a public execution of a three-year-old boy and his mother. He was allegedly crucified on a bulletin board, while his mother was tied to a tank and dragged along the street to death.¹³¹ Journalists of the Russian TV channel Dozhd and the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta promptly proved the story was falsified.¹³²

However, the story of the “crucified boy” appeared only after the recapture of Slovyansk. But the interviewed residents told the author about widespread shelling of residential buildings, schools, and kindergartens carried out by the IAG members during the city’s capture. While exercising control over Slovyansk, the Russian propaganda machine could easily blame the Ukrainian military for these attacks.

According to the local resident Andrii Petrenko, the captured Slovyansk became a film set of its own, where the Russian media distorted information “in the direction” and “in the form, in which it was convenient and necessary.”¹³³

“ *The militants themselves fired mortars in the city. Because a regular mine could not reach here—a mortar from any Ukrainian position could not reach here. They were pounding from the city somewhere... Then, just five minutes later, a crew of Russian channels arrived and started to film the whole thing: here are the dead people, there are the broken windows or injured.*”¹³⁴

129
Media consumption and trust in the media in the Donbas: Internews research, media Detector, March 9, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2Juc0wo>.

130
Mediaspozhyvannia ta dovira do ZMI na Donbasi: doslidzhennia [Media and trust in Ukrainian and Russian media], research by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, October 29, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30rMpFl>.

131
Bezhenka iz Slavjanska vspominaet, kak pri nej kaznili malen'kogo syna i zhenu opolchenca [A refugee from Slovyansk recalls how a young boy and the wife of a militiaman were executed], Pervyi Kanal (First Channel), July 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2G9bfC4>;

Istoriuu pro “rozp’iatoho khlopchyka” dlia Pershoho kanalu vyhadala druzhynna boiovyka DNR [The story about the “crucified boy” for the Pervyi Kanal was invented by the wife of a “DPR” militant], Fakty, July 14, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3igCeNM>;
Fejk: Geroinja sjuzheta o “raspjatom mal’chike” v Slavjanske okazalas’ sredi “zhertv” vzryva v Donecke, [Fake: the heroine of the story about the “crucified boy” in Slovyansk was among the “victims” of the explosion in Donetsk], StopFake, January 24, 2015, <http://bit.ly/30xAFB1>.

132
Residents of Slovyansk – whether the crucified boy of the Pervyi kanal was real, YouTube: Evgenii Feldman, July 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2JrTNe1>;
A byl li raspjatyj mal’chik? Timur Olevskij o tom, kak zhurnalisty spekulirujut na detjah vojny [Was there a crucified boy? Timur Olevsky on how journalists speculate on war children], Dozhd, July 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Jckgof>.

132
Interview C-5, December 12, 2018.

133
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

Olena Melnyk, a resident of Slovyansk, also recalls how Russian journalists and “witnesses to events” immediately appeared after the attacks, giving interviews and accusing the Ukrainian military:

“ When they fired at the school, many people fled into shelters. We were forced to go there, too. Although I do not know if it is safe to be in a bomb shelter when a school is being shelled; there were children, adults, and people fleeing from the surrounding houses. And together with these people Russian film crews came running. They were there with us. They were filming. Shalda [a teacher from Slovyansk, convicted of separatism – ed.], gave an interview. He suddenly appeared with a child in his arms and started telling that the Ukrainian army was firing with “grads”. We started shouting at that film crew: “Why do you not ask us?”¹³⁵

Kostiantyn Stetsenko noted that the presence of Russian TV journalists wearing helmets indicated the possibility of an upcoming attack by the IAG at that location: “It flew straight to the nine-story building, several people were killed nearby. It was supposed to come from Karachun, but the separatists shot from the railway station, so it flew into this courtyard, hit the entrance, and they [Russian journalists – ed.] were sitting behind the house. Twenty minutes before that, they had already been sitting there.”¹³⁶

In its “White Book of Special Information Operations against Ukraine 2014–2018” the Ukrainian Ministry of Information Policy describes cases when photos of a boy and a girl allegedly killed during shelling in Slovyansk by the Ukrainian military were disseminated on social media. In fact, the boy in the photo was killed in 2010 in Dzhankoi [a city in the north of Crimea – ed.], and the girl died following a balcony collapse in the building of the Crimean sanatorium “Yunist” in 2013.¹³⁷

135
Interview C--8 as of January 15, 2018.

136
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

137
“White Book of Special Information Operations against Ukraine 2014–2018”, Zolotukhin Dmytro, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2LOd5w4>.

Screenshot of the news about Diana Sidelnyk (left) who died in 2013, and its propaganda version (right). Source: White Book of Special Information Operations against Ukraine 2014–2018

Все подозреваемые в гибели 10-летней девочки в санатории Крыма гуляют на свободе

22 июля 2013, 16:52 | Происшествия | 1033



Главный инженер санатория “Юность” будет ждать приговора суда дома



© 2013 Коммуналы © 2013 11 113

Lisa Khustenko, another resident of Slovyansk, noted the discrepancies of the Russian media coverage of Slovyansk: *“They bombed a school with children, but the picture was not from Slovyansk.”*¹³⁸

In one particular case, the Russian media accused the National Guard of Ukraine of firing phosphorus bombs at the neighborhood of Slovyansk-Semenivka. The charges turned out to be false, which was proved by experts of Human Rights Watch.¹³⁹ The alleged shelling of Semenivka, which Russian TV channels showed, turned out to be a video of an attack that took place in 2004 near Fallujah in Iraq.¹⁴⁰

Russian TV channels also repeatedly mounted fake stories about the capture of mount Karachun: *“They reported and shot a video here, roughly with content like this: ‘The militia of Slovyansk took Karachun.’ This was spread through social networks and all sorts of different media. So it turned out to be false, Karachun was not taken.”*¹⁴¹

In the information war, the capture of mount Karachun became a symbol of the “victory” of one side over the other. Not only because of the TV broadcasting tower on the mount but also because Karachun has an important view of both Kramatorsk and Slovyansk, *“all the way up to Raihorodok.”*¹⁴² In Russian media and social networks, even the fall of the TV tower from mount Karachun (July 1, 2014) was equated to its conquest.¹⁴³

Russian television also showed fake broadcasts of attacks on Slovyansk:

“ A friend from St. Petersburg contacted me via Skype and says:

– Listen, they are showing us on TV what a nightmare Slovyansk is now.

– Nothing is going on here, nothing at all.

– No, we have “Russia-24” live broadcasting now. You have explosions there!

I said, “Wait!”. I opened the window and started filming the street, live on Skype.

– Look, birds are singing, everything is quiet. Here, look!

And I asked him, “Where?”. I heard him snuffling. “Well, tell me, where? Here you can see the entire city. Where do you see at least one explosion? Where?”¹⁴⁴

Propaganda stories were also actively using hate speech. The local respondents noted that the news was filled with words and phrases

138
Interview C-9, January 24, 2019.

139
Dispatches: White Phosphorus, White Lies, or What? Human Rights Watch, June 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xKd1oB>.

140
Deza dnia, 12 chervnia. “Natshvardiia obstriliuie Sloviansk fosfornymy bombamy”. Disinformation of the day, June 12. “National Guard fires phosphorus bombs at Slovyansk”, Radio Svoboda, June 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2JAKozZ>.

141
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

142
Ibid.

143
Ibid.

144
Ibid.

like «укры» (“*ukry*”, a derogatory term for Ukrainians), «укропы» (“*ukropy*”, a derogatory term for Ukrainians), «фашизм не пройдет» (fascism will not pass), «нацисты тут» (nazis are here) and «бандеровцы» (“Banderites”).

In August 2015, the media outlet colta.ru published stories of former employees of Russian national TV channels about creating propaganda stories on Ukraine since 2014. A former employee of the Russian state television and radio broadcasting company noted that, since February 2014, the entire process of producing TV news was controlled manually. The Administration of the President of the Russian Federation gave orders to stop the competition between channels for the “exclusivity” of publications. Afterward, there was no competition between the channels anymore; everyone now exchanged their contents: pictures, stickers, and contacts. TV holdings, shareholders, media structures—all became one, “a joint propaganda body appeared.”¹⁴⁵

They also manipulated the vocabulary used in the stories:

*“During the first Minsk meetings [meetings in the Belarusian capital Minsk of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine – ed.], it was said that there would be some kind of peace, there was a ban on the use of the words like “fascists”, “Banderivtsi”, “junta”. Afterward, the situation rolled back, and everything started again.”*¹⁴⁶

An employee of Russian television recalls that journalists during editorial meetings were required to “create more hell” in Ukraine news.

Even stories with weather forecasts were used to escalate the situation:

“*The manual mode extended even to the weather. There were direct instructions regarding it. It is necessary to urgently invite Vifand [director of the Hydrometeorological Center of Russia – ed.]. I want him to say that it will be a terrible winter, and we will all freeze. “And if there is no cold winter?” We understand that the winter is warm. However, there is a general tendency to escalate, that they depend on us—we will not give you gas, and you will all freeze. Then they talked about it all the time: “A cold winter is coming.”*¹⁴⁷

Russian online media also used hate speech to directly escalate the situation. This was done with the help of vocabulary that conveys a sense of fear and pain. Russian online media used such emotionally loaded words as: «ад» (hell), «страх» (fear), «горе» (grief), «паника» (panic), «насилие» (violence), «кризис» (crisis), «напряженность» (tension), «трупы» (corpses), «грозит» (threatens), «гремят» (rattle), «крови» (blood), «кровавую» (bloody), «разгром» (rout),

145
Kak delajut TV-propagandu: chetyre svidetel'stva [How to make TV propaganda: four testimonies], Colta.ru, August 6, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2xJbFuq>.

146
Ibid.

147
Ibid.

«боль» (pain), «зараза» (infection), «заражение» (contagion), «катастрофа» (catastrophe), «выживание», (survival), «ожесточенные» (fierce), «безоружное», (unarmed), «беспросветная» (pitch-dark), «чудовищная» (monstrous), «хладнокровно» (cold-blooded), «голод» (famine) and «геноцид» (genocide) [see Fig. 1].

In the report “Words and Wars: Ukraine in the Fight against Kremlin Propaganda”, researchers of the Ukrainian organization Internews note that the term “genocide” has lost its meaning in the Russian propaganda—there are constant accusations of either genocide of Russian-speakers, language genocide, or some other type of genocide. At the same time, the term has not lost its effectiveness by triggering clear negative reactions.¹⁴⁸

Petro Burkovskiy, an analyst at the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, notes that the constant repetition of the term “genocide” by the Russian propaganda machine in the media, on the one hand, justifies Russia’s support and sympathy for the participants of the armed conflict. On the other hand, for the Western audience, it serves as a potential justification for an open-armed intervention of the Russian Federation in the Donbas.¹⁴⁹

The emotional presentation of information is a characteristic feature of propaganda. Through the constant portrayal of destroyed homes and civilians’ suffering, Russian media appeal to sympathy, thus reducing viewers’ ability to perceive and analyze the information critically.¹⁵⁰

To refer to the pro-Russian side, publications about Slovyansk used in particular the terms «ополченцы» (militants), «повстанцы» (rebels) and «протестующие», (protesters) [see Fig. 1].

Through this language, the Russian propaganda tried to legitimize and justify the illegal actions of the IAG against the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In this context, expert Petro Burkovskiy emphasizes the importance of heroizing the IAG:

“ The term “militants” is associated with the struggle of the Soviet people against German aggression during World War II. The actions of “militants” are positioned as feats that repeat the feats of Soviet soldiers and partisans. The reconstruction of this term took place to legitimize the fighting of the “republics” against the “fascists” and thus to justify a rebellion against the Ukrainian power.¹⁵¹

Internews Ukraine notes in its report that the Russian propaganda tries to legitimize the illegal republics by emphasizing the creation of these new “states” as a result of the citizens’ own will. Therefore it uses specific terms which refer to alleged self-determination of

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Slova ta viiny: Ukraina v borotbi z rosiiskoiu propahandoiu [Words and wars: Ukraine in the fight against Russian propaganda], Internews, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2XlfxGo>.

149

Rosiiska propahanda pro podii v Ukraini: tendentsii 2014–2016 rokiv [Russian propaganda about the events in Ukraine: trends of 2014–2016], Detector media, July 4, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Sa9sl3>.

150

Slova ta viiny: Ukraina v borotbi z rosiiskoiu propahandoiu [Words and wars: Ukraine in the fight against Russian propaganda], Internews, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2XlfxGo>.

151

Rosiiska propahanda pro podii v Ukraini: tendentsii 2014–2016 rokiv [Russian propaganda about the events in Ukraine: trends of 2014–2016], Detector media, July 4, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Sa9sl3>.



Fig. 1: The vocabulary of headlines in Russian online media about Slovyansk

the people: «народный референдум» (People's Referendum), «народный губернатор» (People's Governor), «самооборона» (Self-Defense), «ополчение», (militia), etc.¹⁵²

In Russian publications on the events in Slovyansk, we see both the term «референдум» (referendum), and «самооборона» (Self-Defense), and the epithets «народный», «народная», «народного» (people's), «народноизбранный» (popularly elected) [see Fig.1].

The use of such words gives the impression of horizontal bottom-up initiatives, i.e., “movements from below”, which legitimize their illegal activities also on a subconscious level.

Simultaneously with the “legitimization” of separatist movements, the new Ukrainian government and volunteers were demonized. To this end, in April–June 2014, the Russian media began to exaggerate the influence of Ukrainian nationalist organizations, such as Svoboda and the Right Sector, which allegedly seized or were exercising control over state authorities. Simultaneously, the Russian media attributed signs of Nazi SS units to special detachments of the Right Sector, which would harass the local Russian-speaking population and threaten to kill them.¹⁵³

In the context of publications about Slovyansk, Russian online media mentioned «Правый сектор» (Right Sector) as often as «ОБСЕ» (OSCE), «Киев» (Kiev) [referring to the official Government in Kyiv – ed.] and «ДНР» (“DPR”) [see Fig. 2.].

For demonizing the pro-Ukrainian side, Russian internet media frequently used the terms «фашисты» (fascists), «бандеровцы», «бандеры» (Banderites), «хунта» (junta) as well as «каратели» (punishers), «нео-нацисты» (neo-Nazis), «неофашисты» (neo-fascists), and «галичане» (Galicians) in the news about Slovyansk [see Fig. 1].

Besides, Russian propagandists in April–June 2014 often recalled mass crimes allegedly committed by Ukrainian soldiers. Petro Burkovskiy believes that the use of propaganda terms from the Second World War was in particular intended to create an image of Ukrainian military criminals who terrorized the civilian population.

“ For this purpose, another term from the Second World War was reconstructed: «каратели» (punishers). This umbrella concept, previously associated with the Nazi war crimes against the civilian population of the USSR, is used to describe any real or falsified fact.¹⁵⁴

Also the use of the word «укроп» (a derogatory slang term for Ukrainians) is a method of dehumanization. Dehumanizing the

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Slova ta viiny: Ukraina v borotbi z rosiiskoiu propahandoiu [Words and wars: Ukraine in the fight against Russian propaganda], Internews, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2XlfxGo>.

153

Rosiiska propahanda pro podii v Ukraini: tendentsii 2014–2016 rokiv [Russian propaganda about the events in Ukraine: trends of 2014–2016], Detector media, July 4, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Sa9sl3>.

154

Ibid.

enemy is one of the most critical tasks of propaganda because, before the killing begins, people need to be convinced that the enemy is evil; that they have no dignity or right to life. A well-known example of this propaganda technique is the 1994 Rwanda genocide, which was committed by members of the Hutu people, the ethnic majority, against the Tutsi, the ethnic minority. The number of people killed in 100 days amounted to at least 500,000 people. Due to the low literacy rates, radio had the most significant influence on the population. Journalists of “One Thousand Hills Free Radio and Television” systematically used the word “cockroaches” instead of “Tutsi” and the verb “to process” instead of “to kill” to create an association between processing cockroaches and killing Tutsis. During the international tribunal proceedings in The Hague, radio hosts noted that they did not call for murder but only stated the fact of hostility between two ethnic groups. At the same time, researcher David Yanagizawa-Drott proved the direct link between radio propaganda and the level of violence in rural Rwanda. The country has a hilly landscape, and there were places beyond the hills where the radio signal was poor or absent. Yanagisawa-Drott calculated the signal strength at each inhabited point and compared it with how many people in each settlement were convicted of participating in the genocide. In areas with radio reception, the number of convictions was 60% higher than in places where there was no or little reception.¹⁵⁵

The Russian propaganda signal reached Slovyansk well. This is confirmed by the local residents Kostiantyn Stetsenko and Yurii Trofimov.

“ *What was missing is that Russian television had to be cut off. I do not know how they managed to brainwash ninety percent of the city’s population. That is what I still do not understand. Indeed, it worked like hypnosis. Everyone was afraid of Bandera. It was horriſi.*¹⁵⁶

Here is an example of how Russian propaganda and people worked. It was July 6, I think, I went out the front door, the city was already liberated. A girl is sitting on a bench sobbing. Crying. I ask her, “Why are you crying?” She says, “Aah, pravoseki [Right Sector – ed.] will come, they will kill everyone here, they will rape everyone here.”¹⁵⁷

Halyna Pryshchepa, a spokesperson and assistant to the chief of the main SSU Department for media relation in Luhansk and Donetsk regions, noted that persons who used the SSU Program “They Are Waiting For Your At Home” and voluntarily refused to participate in the IAG of “DPR/LPR”, mentioned the Russian propaganda as one of the reasons to join these structures.¹⁵⁸

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Tysjacha mertvyh na tysjachu slov. Kak rabotala propaganda v Ruande [A thousand dead in a thousand words. How propaganda worked in Rwanda], Snob, October 3, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xK1DZW>; Uroky “Radio Ruandy” dlia Ukrainy i rosiiskykh ZMI [Radio Rwanda lessons for Ukraine and Russian media], Ukrainska Pravda, July 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2LOHx98>.

156

Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

157

Interview C-10, December 17, 2018.

158

Meeting with the author in Slovyansk.

159
Okkupacija. Pravda i mify [Occupation. Truth and myths], Borys Sokolov, 2002, <http://bit.ly/2LeTJAL>.

160
Propaganda 2.0, Georgiy Pocheptsov, 2018.

161
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

162
Interview C-5, December 12, 2018.

163
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

164
Interview C--10 as of December 17, 2018.

165
Results of the day, 5 Kanal, June 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2JtLcYr>.

166
U Slovi'iansku v ozery vodolaz znaishov sotni til terorystiv – general Minoborony [In Slovyansk, a diver found hundreds of bodies of terrorists in a lake – General of the Ministry of Defense], TSN, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2XFdk3n>;
U Slovi'iansku na dni ozera vodolaz znaishov sotni til terorystiv [In Slovyansk, a diver found hundreds of bodies of terrorists at the bottom of a lake], UNIAN, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xLu21C>;
V Slavjanske v ozere nashli nesko'l'ko soten trupov boevikov, – general Minoborony [In Slovyansk, several hundred bodies of militants were found in the lake – General of the Ministry of Defense], Censor.net, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/32kTfyd>.

167
General: Ukrainskij vodolaz nashel v ozere sotni tel terorystov [General: Ukrainian diver found hundreds of bodies of terrorists in the lake], Euroradio, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xFUj1s>; Hundreds of bodies of pro-Russian militants found in a lake in Slovyansk, Naviny.by, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2G6sRPa>; V Slavjanske v ozere nashli sotni trupov prorossijskikh boevikov [Hundreds of bodies of pro-Russian militants found in a lake in Slovyansk, Belorusskiy partisan, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30siT29>.

168
Najdeny tela na dne ozera v Slavjanske [Bodies found at the bottom of a lake in Slovyansk], Time News, June 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xLuoW0>.

Also, during the capture of the city, fake rumors were actively spread. Rumors as a means of propaganda were actively used by the German Nazi troops during the Second World War. They called these rumors “propaganda whispers”. One of the German instructions for working behind the enemy lines mentioned: “*Propaganda in whispers is one of the most effective means of oral propaganda. Agents should handle it. Propaganda material will be regularly provided to the district commandant's offices. Unauthorized whisper propaganda is prohibited.*”¹⁵⁹ The spread of rumors was also carried out by the British, who had sufficiently developed propaganda rules during the Second World War, and later during the Cold War.¹⁶⁰

In Slovyansk, there were a lot of such rumors, for example about «*незру*» [derogatory terms for people of color – ed.] “*on armored vehicles*”¹⁶¹, «*незру*» “*who stand at the checkpoint and shoot*”,¹⁶² about “*a truck with a box for burning bodies*”, that “*more than two hundred corpses were dropped into the lake on Slavkurort*”, and that “*nearly two hundred members of the Right Sector with ripped stomachs were buried behind Karachun.*”¹⁶³ Yuri Trofimov, a journalist and resident of Slovyansk, also recalls the fake reports about the US private military company “Black Water” which would have been supposed to shoot everyone.¹⁶⁴

The rumor about the “lake with corpses” went beyond the borders of Slovyansk. On June 24, 2014, the Acting Head of the Main Department for Personnel of the AFU, Major General Oleksandr Rozmaznin, reproduced the rumor about dead bodies in the lake when he was talking to a Ukrainian TV channel:

“*During an appearance on one of our TV channels, I received the comment that there was Rozmaznin's comment about the victims. Our dead soldiers—yes, it is a significant loss. We bow our heads to the fallen servicemen soldiers of our state. But we are commemorating all deceased with honors. But he [Rozmaznin – ed.] provided an example when a diver dove into the lake there, in Slovyansk, and saw hundreds of corpses...*”¹⁶⁵

Ukrainian journalists later presented information about “the dead bodies” in the lake of Slovyansk as a proven fact and distorted the words of the Major General. They did not mention that Rozmaznin received this information only through a comment and shared it as his own words.¹⁶⁶

With reference to a credible source, a general of the AFU, this information not only appeared in leading Ukrainian publications but also in Belarus.¹⁶⁷ Of course, it was also used by pro-Russian propaganda internet resources.¹⁶⁸



Fig. 3: The vocabulary of headlines about Slovyansk in national Ukrainian online media



Fig. 4: Persons and structures frequently referred to by Ukrainian online media

“MAYBE, IT IS NOT JOURNALIST-LIKE, BUT PEOPLE WANT TO SURVIVE”: HOW MEDIA WORKED DURING THE CAPTURE OF SLOVYANSK

The pro-Russian side not only spread propaganda but also hindered the everyday activities of journalists. In April–July 2014, more than ten journalists went through illegal detention and captivity of the “DPR” in Slovyansk: Yevheniia Suprycheva, correspondent of the newspaper KP v Ukraine, Artem Daineha, Serhii Lefter, journalist of the Polish Open Dialogue Foundation, Irma Krat, the Italian journalists Paul Gogo and Kossimo Attanasio, Dmytro Galka, correspondent of the Belarus newspaper Novy Chas, Yevhen Hapych, photojournalist of the Ivano-Frankivsk Reporter, Simon Ostrovsky, journalist of Vice News, Yuriy Leliavskiy, correspondent of the ZIK channel, Ruslan Kukharchuk, journalist from the Novomedia Association, as well as BuzzFeed’s Mike Gioglio and film crews of the channels SkyNews and CBS TV.¹⁶⁹

It is worth noting that not all journalists were detained for their work. For example, Leliavskiy was detained because they thought he was a spy and “pretended to be a journalist.”¹⁷⁰ Simultaneously, members of the IAG were looking for Simon Ostrovsky, because they felt directly threatened by his journalistic work.

“*This was the early stage of the conflict in the Donbas when everything changed every day, new villages and cities in eastern Ukraine were captured every day. At that time, the “People’s Mayor” of Slovyansk was Ponomariov. No one ever heard of him before. Not about him or the city, to be honest. And, apparently, he and his team followed our reports, so they issued a warrant with our details to the checkpoints. When I once drove through a checkpoint, they checked my photo because I was driving a rental car. Perhaps if I had not been driving, I would not even have been recognized.*

Ostrovsky was illegally detained for three days in the basement of the SSU building with his hands tied and blindfolded. He was intimidated and beaten.

“*I think the whole point was to scare me and other journalists. For them to know you could not say everything you wanted about the events in eastern Ukraine. If journalists wanted to cooperate with pro-Russian forces, they had to follow their political line. A very strict form of censorship.*¹⁷¹

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Za try misiatsi u poloni boiovykiv pobuvalo ponad 40 zhurnalistiv [In three months, more than 40 journalists have been captured by the militants], Ukrainysky Tyzhden, July 2, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xFX086>; Korrespondent “KP” dvoe sutok provela v plenu v Slavjanske [“KP” correspondent spent two days in captivity in Slovyansk], KP v Ukraine, April 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30syKhg>.

170

Yuriy Leliavskiy: Polon – tse ne kinets zhyttia, a element biohrafii [Yuriy Leliavsky: Captivity is not the end of life, but an element of biography], ZIK, October 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Y0qq16>.

171

Kak Sajmon Ostrovskij nashel na Donbasse rossijan [How Simon Ostrovsky found Russians in the Donbas], BBC, October 28, 2016, <https://bbc.in/2S74HZs>.

172
Slov'iansk. Kativnia Strelkova
[Slovyansk. Strelkov's Torture House],
Hromadske, July 23, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2LhdveG>.

173
Liakalo navit ne te, shcho striliat
i vbyvaiut, a te, shcho pochalysia
kydannia "na pidval", - zghadiuie
pro viiskovi podii zhurnalistka zi
Slovyanska Svitlana Viunichenko
[What scared the most is not even
that they shoot and kill, but that
they start putting people to "the
basement", Svitlana Viunichenko, a
journalist from Slovyansk, recalls the
military actions], NAJU, May 2016,
No. 5, pp. 6-8.

174
Potasovka pered Slavjanskim
gorotdelom milicii [Scuffle in front
of Slovyansk City Police Department],
Business Slovyansk, May 12, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2XGT5T2>.

175
Den' ne kosmonavtiki. Tret'ja
godovshhina okkupacii Slavjanska,
[Not Cosmonautics Day. Third
anniversary of the occupation of
Slovyansk], Focus, April 12, 2017,
<http://bit.ly/2LFtUc>.

176
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

177
Liakalo navit ne te, shcho striliat
i vbyvaiut, a te, shcho pochalysia
kydannia "na pidval", - zghadiuie
pro viiskovi podii zhurnalistka zi
Slovyanska Svitlana Viunichenko
[What scared the most is not even
that they shoot and kill, but that
they start putting people to "the
basement", Svitlana Viunichenko, a
journalist from Slovyansk, recalls the
military actions], NAJU, May 2016,
<http://bit.ly/2S9LCWl>.

A list of "anti-Russian media" banned from working in the city was later found in the SSU building in Slovyansk after the recapture of the city. This list included several Russian media outlets: Echo Moskvy, the TV channel Dozhd, the newspaper Novaya Gazeta, the online resources the New Times, NewsRu.com, Slon.ru as well as Radio Svoboda, RIA "Novy Region", RBK, RBK daily and Vedomosti.¹⁷²

There were also reported threats to local journalists.

On April 12, 2014, during the takeover of the City Police Department, local journalists were in the park planting the Aleksandrov Alley [Ihor Aleksandrov was a journalist and editor who was killed in Slovyansk in front of the newsroom in 2001 – ed.]. The journalist Svitlana Viunichenko recalls:

“ *All the press was there. We heard shots from there, then someone ran, said that they were capturing the regional police department. Nobody even knew what to do—continue planting trees or run. Some colleagues stayed in the alley, and some went to track the news.*¹⁷³

On the same day, members of the IAG arrested the deputy of Slovyansk City Council and the journalist Oleg Zontov. He was released after an intervention of the city's mayor Nelia Shtepa.¹⁷⁴ Members of the IAG also detained Roman Huba, a local journalist.

“*Already in the hallway of the captured building, one of the 'seniors' was indignant, saying, 'what the hell', we do not have time to deal with him now. A journalist of the Slovyansk TV channel also helped by loudly and boldly telling the separatists that I was a local journalist, and therefore I should be released*”, Huba recalls his detention and notes that under the same pretext, Nelia Shtepa fought off Oleg Zontov.¹⁷⁵

Yurii Trofimov, a local journalist, noted that the members of the IAG usually thought that only non-locals could be against them.¹⁷⁶

Nevertheless, local media journalists were not able to work as usual.

Svitlana Viunichenko recalls that on Monday, April 14, all the employees of her media outlet were working. But on the following day the management decided to stop the work. “*On Tuesday, the chief gathered everyone and said: 'We do not need dead heroes—we will not work, we close everything, and no one will be getting any news.'*”

She also notes that for some time “*male journalists went to events at their own risk, recording information 'in a notebook'. They still tried to put the news on the website, but only dry messages, because any accents were simply too dangerous*”.¹⁷⁷

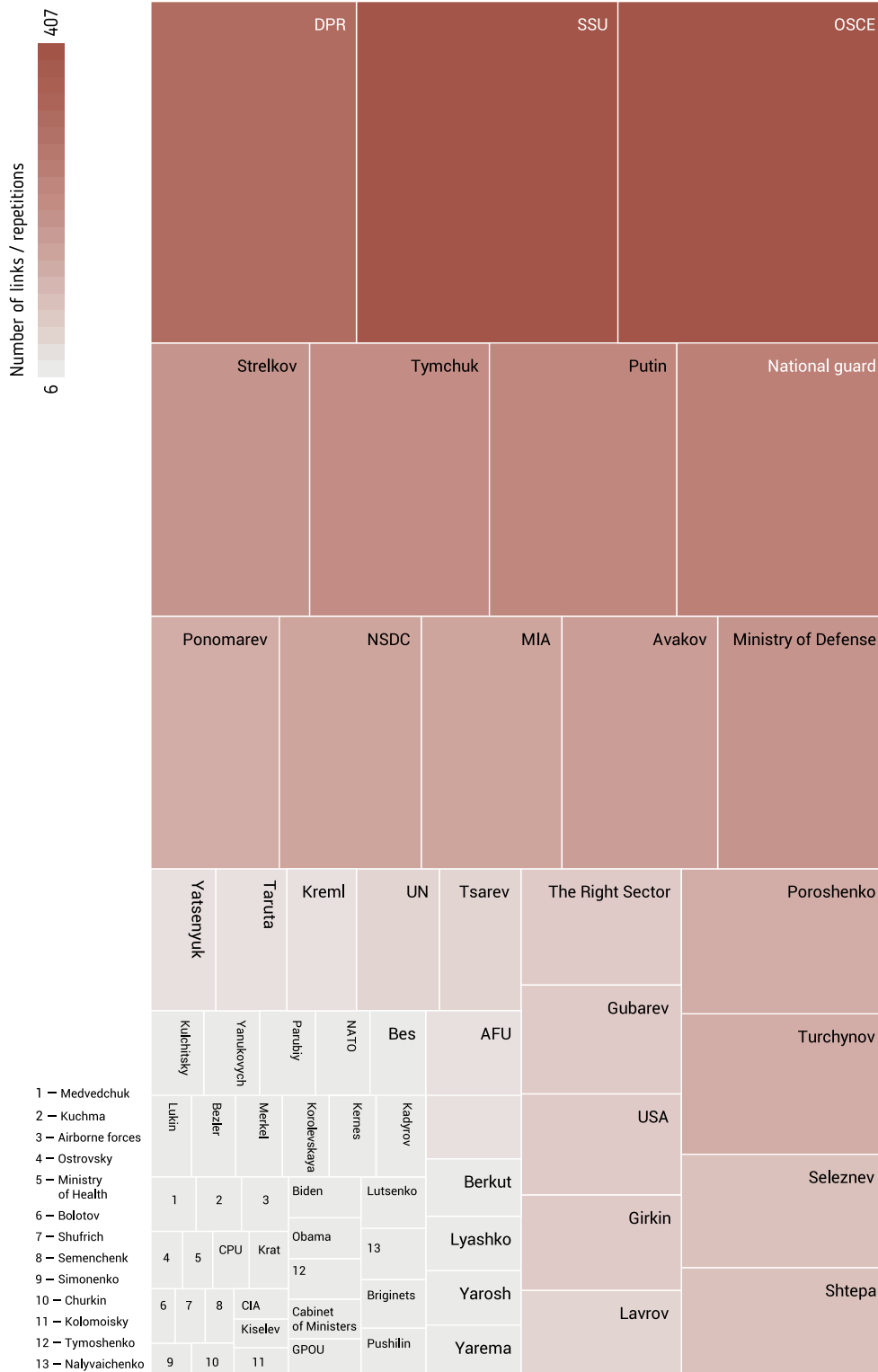


Fig. 6: Persons and structures frequently referred to by Donetsk regional online media

Slovyansk journalist Pavlo Horobchenko believes that local journalists first took a neutral, even inert position: *“The journalists worked by inertia. At the beginning, they did not perceive how dangerous it was. We just continued to work and to film: ‘What is going on? They say they are liberators. We managed to live under those, so we will live under these.’”*¹⁷⁸

However, many local journalists were openly supporting the members of the illegal armed formations. Some were wearing St. George’s ribbons as a sign of support, some wrote articles for propaganda newspapers distributed by pro-Russian formations in the city, and some openly asked if the IAG needed help.¹⁷⁹

On April 19, it was reported that journalists in Slovyansk were forced to suspend their activities. Oleg Zontov said that equipment was being taken away from the journalists, and they were forced to give up their flash drives. Many editors decided *“not to publish this week”*. According to Zontov, digital television and the internet stopped to work in the city after the TV tower was seized.

Zontov also clarified that Roman Huba was forced to leave Slovyansk after a group of armed men broke into the student dormitory where he lived on the night of April 17.

At the same time, the local TV station continued working until electricity disappeared.¹⁸⁰ Its work is evaluated in different ways. Some of the interviewed local residents accuse it of supporting members of the IAG and promoting separatism. Others note that the local TV channel was just filming without comments.

Analysis of the channel’s video content on YouTube in 2014 showed no obvious signs of separatist propaganda. The stories trace the support of the Party of Regions; there is a video with a concert for the “Defenders of the Homeland Day” on February 23, 2014 with the St. George ribbon on the screen. However, according to the respondents, it is possible that damning videos were just deleted.

After the recapture of the city, the SSU seized parts of the footage from the TV channel. Andrii Petrenko, a local resident, stated that one of their videos which was posted on YouTube served as evidence in the trial of the so-called referendum.¹⁸¹

The TV channel claims that they managed to keep neutrality as they moved from stories and reports to filming without commenting on the events. *“You see, there were no direct threats. No one was threatened. No one said, ‘We will break you, disperse you, or do something to you.’ This is because we did not comment. We did not say that these guys are bad and these are bad, did we? Maybe, it is*

178
Interview C-6, December 14, 2018.

179
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

180
Slavjansk: Russkie boeviki ustanovili informacionnuju blokadu, Novosti Donbassa [Slovyansk: Russian militants have established an information blockade], April 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2LhdK9A>.

181
Interview C-5, December 12, 2018.

not journalist-like, but we wanted to survive”, the TV channel later commented.¹⁸²

All interviewed local journalists noted that it was possible in the captured city to work only in a “no comments” mode, i.e., to describe what was happening without judgments.

“ Filming without comments. That is, these are the events, and that is it. Names, events—that is it. How to shoot, where, without mentioning any definitions, you could do that, but only if you wanted. It would have been better to objectively give information, like ‘Fighters are fighters’. However, it was not possible. But this does not mean that it was necessary to shout: “The ‘ukry’ are firing.”¹⁸³

182
Interview C-6, December 14, 2018.

183
Interview C-4, December 17, 2018.

184
Slova ta viiny: Ukraina v borotbi z rosiiskoiu propahandoiu [Words and wars: Ukraine in the fight against Russian propaganda], Internews, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2XlfxGo>.

In Slovyansk, journalists were threatened and illegally detained, but most local media stopped their activities, without waiting for threats. Journalists of national Ukrainian online media did not always perform in good faith. At the same time, Russian propaganda is more effective when there are no alternative sources of information.¹⁸⁴ Hence, to stop reporting at all or to report only poorly during the insurgency in the city and an ongoing “information war” also means to lay down the instruments, which the enemy actively misuses. High-quality journalism is as important for the restoration of peace and the development of Ukraine as honest work of civil servants, judges, and law enforcement officers. There should be no “other cities” as that there is no “other state” neither.



A building damaged by shelling (40 Vasylykivska Street).
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 18, 2014

85 DAYS UNDER FIRE

4

MARIIA BILIAKOVA, NATALIYA KAPLUN
Vostok-SOS

The hostilities in and around Slovyansk lasted from April 12 to July 5, 2014. As early as May 2, both sides of the conflict began to use artillery. Participants in the armed confrontation performed daily combat tasks, such as attacking military and strategic objects of the enemy to inflict maximum damage. Civilians in Slovyansk were in constant danger at that time. When addressing the Ukrainian government and the leaders of the self-proclaimed “DPR” in June 2014, volunteer Petro Dudnyk wrote: *“I get the impression that the war is just a game for you, and the life of ordinary people is a bargaining chip.”*¹⁸⁵

This section contains several stories of civilians in Slovyansk whose ordinary life turned into a feat during these 85 days. These stories were selected from two dozen interviews documented by researchers of the Vostok-SOS Charitable Foundation and the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives in the fall of 2018.

CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE HOSTILITIES IN SLOVYANSK

From April to July 2014, the events in Slovyansk were covered by the media worldwide. However, there was little reliable information about the humanitarian situation, civilian casualties, and the impact of the hostilities on the city’s civilian infrastructure. During these months, the city had undergone significant changes through the destruction of infrastructure and the establishment of a significant number of military warehouses, barracks, heavy weapons positions, and military checkpoints.

Militants of the IAG who emerged in the city for 85 days created more than 20 objects of military significance.¹⁸⁶ A significant part of them was located in densely populated areas of the city, more than half of them—in medical (Regional Psychiatric Hospital, City Hospital No. 1), educational (Secondary Schools Nos. 16, 4, 21, Boarding School,

185
Petro Dudnyk’s Facebook post,
June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30tgx35>.

186
Currently recorded cases.

Sloviansk College of the National Aviation University), cultural (Center for Culture and Leisure), religious (Dobra Zvistka Church) and administrative institutions.¹⁸⁷ Around the captured buildings, the IAG fighters built not only defense structures but also sniper firing positions. Thus, residents of the city were in the crosshairs daily.

There were several dozen military checkpoints in Sloviansk. Most of the checkpoints were set up by the militants on the central streets, near hospitals and schools. The checkpoints had the appearance of small fortified facilities. The militants at the checkpoints were always armed, with small arms, man-portable air defense systems (MPADS), and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). Due to the checkpoints, public transport routes in the city had to be changed. For all vehicles, including rescue services and ambulances, it became difficult to move along.

Between May and June 2014, the IAG fighters fired at positions of the AFU with the self-propelled artillery installation “Nona” (hereinafter – SPA “Nona”) or tanks from residential areas of Sloviansk. The Ukrainian military was deployed, among others, on mount Karachun, near a local fish farm and a compound feed factory. The attacks by the IAG often provoked return fire that was not always selective. It is impossible to calculate the total number of artillery ammunition used by both sides of the conflict. According to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, only from the artillery positions on mount Karachun about 16 thousand 122-mm mines were fired during the 85 days.¹⁸⁸ However, this was only one of several firing positions of the AFU, from which artillery fire was conducted during the battle of Sloviansk.

Before the military operation to regain control of Sloviansk started, the city was in a complicated humanitarian situation. People who could not leave their homes for various reasons lived in terrible conditions for months: in constant expectation of attacks, without electricity, and, in some places, without gas supply. Often, civilians had to survive even without drinking water, social benefits, or the ability to buy food and medicine.

Neither the state nor the self-proclaimed “republic” organized any humanitarian help, that is, no systematic actions aimed at reducing human suffering were taken. This is confirmed by Victoriia Ivlieva and Petro Dudnky, two volunteers who provided humanitarian assistance to the city’s civilian population.

For Victoria Ivlieva the situation in Sloviansk was comparable to the war in Chechnya:

“ There was simply no humanitarian operation. I do not know why. Ukraine is a gentle and affectionate country; the more I visit it, the more I am convinced of it.

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For more information on the locations of facilities of the militants in residential areas of Sloviansk: Misto, z yakoho pochalasya viyna: na holovnu rol' pryznacheno... [The City Where the War Began: the Lead Role is Assigned to...],

https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Slov2_10.pdf.

188

Tak peremozhemo. Plan dii z vidnovlennia Slov'ianska, Petr y Mazepa [So we will win. Action plan for the restoration of Sloviansk, Petr and Mazepa], July 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2LiYXvm>.

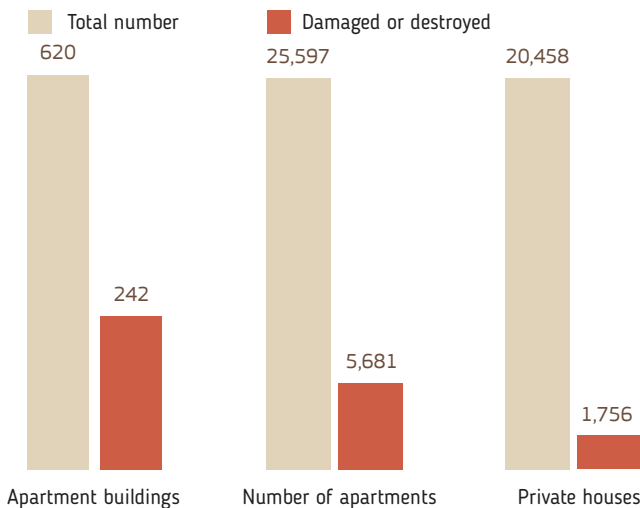
Everything that has happened here is incredibly far from Chechnya, where no one spared anyone, and everyone was getting out as best they could, independently or with the help of small humanitarian organizations. I cannot figure out why the same happened to the residents of Slovyansk.¹⁸⁹

Petro Dudnyk drew attention to the lack of a humanitarian corridor:

“ We had to smuggle medicine to help persons with diabetes who would have died without insulin right in front of our eyes... Where was the escape corridor? Why people had to leave the city under gunfire and explosions? Without our support, they could not have left the city at all. Why did we not agree on a ceasefire, at least temporarily, to help ordinary people to leave and to providing them with transport and further settlement?¹⁹⁰

According to official data, 124 civilians were killed during the hostilities in Slovyansk.¹⁹¹ However, estimates put the number of victims even at around 500.¹⁹² 78 civilians were injured, including 19 who ended up with disabilities.¹⁹³ With regard to the city's population (as of January 1, 2014, 116,694 people were living in Slovyansk¹⁹⁴) 0.11% of the population died (or 0.43% according to unofficial data), and 0.07% were injured.

According to Slovyansk City Council, 242 apartment buildings were damaged or destroyed due to shelling in 2014. Four of these buildings were officially not reparable. In total, 5,681 apartments were damaged or destroyed in these buildings, 29 of which officially not reparable. The attacks also damaged 1,756 private houses—127 of them beyond repair.



189 Tse misto - velyka psykhologichna travma [This city is a big psychological trauma], Radio Svoboda, July 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/32g1X06>.

190 Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30tgx35>.

191 Request to Slovyansk City Council as of January 22, 2019 No. 01.01-19/11.

192 Author's interview with Vadym Liakh, Slovyansk, December 13, 2018.

193 Request to Slovyansk City Council as of January 22, 2019 No. 01.01-19/11.

194 Population of Ukraine as of January 2016, State Statistics Service of Ukraine, p. 27, <https://bit.ly/2Yz4vUL>.

The housing stock in Slovyansk

According to the State Emergency Service's preliminary estimates in July 2014, the total amount of damage caused by the hostilities to the housing stock in Slovyansk was equal to 1.5 billion Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH).¹⁹⁵

As of January 2019, the total amount of funds allocated from the local and regional budgets for the restoration of multi-story residential buildings, including apartments, amounted to UAH 10.5 million.¹⁹⁶

The city council of Slovyansk announced in October 2014 that 29 enterprises were damaged during the fighting.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, almost 4% of the 736 registered enterprises in the city (as of 2014)¹⁹⁸ were affected by the fighting.

These figures convey the extent of the damage caused to the city due to the fighting in 2014. However, they hide the stories of the people behind them. The stories of those who tried to survive the armed confrontation. Can the number of damaged buildings be small if among them was your house, the one you built with your hands? Is it appropriate to talk about the insignificance of a percentage of the total population, if it includes the dead and injured, who were someone's children, parents, relatives, or friends?

Only an appeal to the human stories can show what civilians experienced during the hostilities in 2014. Their traumatic experiences are inevitable to understand how to heal the war's wounds and what needs to be done to prevent hostilities from returning to this city.

THE CONSTRUCTION WORKER

Anatolii is a retired school keeper. Once a cadet at Slovyansk aviation technical school, he served in the Transcaucasian military district. He returned to his hometown in the 1970s and settled in Cherevkivka, one of the districts of Slovyansk. He built a house with his own hands, worked in a foundry, and raised a son and grandchildren. He likes to communicate with people but is reluctant to recall the events of 2014, as he still believes that he failed to protect his house from artillery fire.¹⁹⁹

Anatolii felt a sense of alarm in April 2014, when the Russian-supported IAG and pro-Russian activists seized the Slovyansk Police Department and the city's SSU building. At that time, he already told his friends that all that would not pass merely. He knew that

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U Slov'iansku zruinovano zhytlo na 1,5mlrd hryven, Ukrainska Pravda [In Slovyansk, there is destroyed housing for UAH 1.5 billion], Ukrainska Pravda, June 16, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2HILbVg>.

196

Request to Slovyansk City Council as of January 22, 2019 No. 01.01-19/11.

197

U Slov'iansku ne vystachaie visim milioniv hryven na remont budynkiv do zymy [Slovyansk lacks UAH 8 million for the repair of houses by winter], Korrespondent.net, October 21, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2VKpdzl>.

198

Main indicators of enterprises' activities in cities of regional significance and districts in 2014, Department of Statistics in Donetsk region, <https://bit.ly/2VT2Fx0>; The impact of the war on the economy of eastern cities of Ukraine: the cases of Mariupol, Kramatorsk and Slovyansk, Donbas Studies, <https://bit.ly/2T0HsPT>.

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Interview C-12, November 1, 2018.



Fence damaged by debris in Cherevkivka.
Photo credit: Mariia Biliakova,
November 1, 2018

there would be bloodshed. *“It did not let me down, that feeling,”* he concludes. However, Anatolii’s life did not change much at the beginning—he was still on duty at school at night and tinkering in the garden during the day.

In early May, fighting broke out near Semenivka. Anatolii had to listen for distant explosions on the city’s outskirts and the noise of ammunition flying directly over his head regularly. Sometimes he thought that he was the only one who understood the danger of the shelling. When he advised passers-by with children to go home and hide in basements, they did not take him seriously.

At the end of May, Anatolii started working in the main building of the school. His previous workplace, the primary school, was captured by armed men who earlier were on duty at a checkpoint near the school. He had no feelings about this and just continued to go on his shift to another building. The primary school building that IAG fighters seized was only about three hundred meters away from his house. Now, he had to walk a bit further to his work.

One day, Anatolii had to pass through a fortification on his way to work, which appeared on his street. The number of people with weapons in the area had increased significantly. However, those people treated him normally: *“I can say it honestly: every time I was on duty, there were no incidents of someone offending me, hitting me, taking something away, or anything else.”*

In June, the explosions became more intense, and the Cherevkivka district came under fire. Anatolii’s son and grandchildren left the city, and he started living with his wife in two houses. From now on, she spent the night at their son’s house on the next street. They were afraid not only of shelling but also of looting.

On the morning of June 6, 2014, Anatolii was in the basement when about 50 shells exploded one after another next to his house, in the school's direction, on the street near the river. When one of the shells hit a neighbor's house, Anatolii carefully looked out into the street. The explosion was intense: the doors in his house and garage were open, and the blast tore off some. A column of dust rose above the houses across the road, and the empty street was covered with pieces of fences, tree branches, and broken slate. Anatolii tried to call the firemen, but no one picked up the phone. By some miracle, he contacted his son, who called his friends in Donetsk. There, someone managed to call the fire brigade from Slovyansk by long-distance communication.

The firemen arrived an hour later. They explained that they could not get there quickly as they had to avoid numerous checkpoints and fortifications. By that time, the neighbor's house had completely burnt down, and the roof of Anatolii's house was on fire. The building began to fill with water and his wife and strangers came running to help from a nearby street. Everyone tried to save the house and property. While Anatolii called the fire department, his neighbors took his car out of the garage because it could have caught fire easily.

After that, Anatolii's wife started having heart problems. However, at that time, there was no cardiologist in Slovyansk. Therefore, they rushed to Druzhkivka, where his wife was sent immediately to the Cardiology Department. They saved her.

On July 11, 2014, Anatolii and his family returned to Slovyansk. On the evening of his return, he was already on duty at the school. His acquaintances told him about the shooting of a looter (the event happened when he was in Druzhkivka) just in the schoolyard. The victim was a civilian who was caught in one of the destroyed buildings.

Upon his return, Anatolii began to rebuild his house, of which only the walls remained. He built the house in 1972 from adobe, and to protect it from moisture, he covered the walls with white bricks. After the attack, the roof of the house completely burned down. When the fire was extinguished, the brick cracked from the sharp temperature drop, the adobe walls got too much moisture from water and were covered with a black layer of mold. What had once been home was now a black ruin. Anatolii told himself that he should not give up. He should try to rebuild everything, not paying attention to his advanced age: *"Everything can be rebuilt, only [dead – ed.] people cannot be brought back."*

We spoke with Anatolii in autumn of 2018 in the courtyard of his house. The owner apologized that he could not invite us inside because the house was still not rebuilt entirely.

Due to a lack of money, time, and energy, it was difficult for Anatolii to restore the house. Money had to be borrowed from the bank and friends; he used the money to purchase materials for covering the roof and insert new windows. Time for work had to be cut out between shifts at school and gardening. Farming brought the family at least a small but steady profit.

With neighbors and caring friends' help, the exterior work was completed before the beginning of winter in 2014. But the work inside the house was not finished yet. Anatolii did not receive any help from the City Council to restore his house, although, in July 2014, he had submitted all necessary documents: an application, invoices, and acts which were certifying the condition of the house.

Anatolii is in his seventies. *"I am used to difficulties,"* he concludes. *"Yes, it is difficult to restore all this after work. I still have not restored everything. The most painful thing is that I am not sure if I can restore order in the house, or the yard, because everything is broken and scattered. But I will try anyway."*

THE FORMER MORTARMAN

Oleksandr is an Afghanistan veteran. Since 2014 he works at a gas station. In the 1980s, he was a commander of a mortar battery in Afghanistan. His memories of the events of 2014 consist of small stories that are more like sad jokes and anecdotes—about a pro-Russian “loser-militiaman” who overslept the nocturnal escape of his comrades from Slovyansk, about a fishing trip during which he recorded the use of Russian man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) etc.²⁰⁰

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Interview C-12, November 2, 2018.

The capture of the city in April 2014 left Oleksandr reeling: *"I was shocked. Where was our police? Where was our SSU? They have weapons, they have everything... Fifteen people arrived in Slovyansk, and everyone gave up. I talked to the police: one was on vacation, another one said he was not there. I don't know."*

After the capture of the city, Oleksandr felt the first changes in the city. The gas station owner left Slovyansk as the representatives of the “new government” in the city began to “squeeze” money and cars from entrepreneurs. Moreover, the soldiers of one of the formations settled in the neighborhood boarding school near the gas station. Oleksandr had little contact with them, but he saw them almost every day.

Oleksandr divided the fighters who were in Slovyansk into two categories: “locals” and “Russians”. The “Russians” behaved in a cultured way. The “locals”—on the contrary.

“ *It was still daytime, and the gas station was open. One of the guys arrived and put a gun through the window. Of course, it was one of the “local” guys, “Russians” did not behave like this.*

– What channel are we watching?

– I watch what I want to watch.

– Do you support us? Or not?

– You? And who are you?

You just need to be able to communicate with these people. There [in Afghanistan – ed.] I was able to communicate with them, the skills remained. Because closing the door is not an option. If you close the door, someone will break in... Closing doors is an act of aggression. But open doors mean that people can come in and get out. That was the only way to deal with them.

During the intensification of hostilities near Slovyansk, supplies of food and fuel stopped. However, the gas station where Oleksandr was employed continued to work.

“ *It was a miracle to bring here another 27 tons of gas. They [the militants – ed.] were already at the checkpoint—how did they allow the tanker to pass? No one could believe it. Somehow, the documents were not checked at all. They just let us through. And we come through without any problems. With this gasoline, almost half of Slovyansk managed to leave. There were four queues of cars at the entrance and exit. People were waiting because it was the last gas station that had gas.*

Hostilities in the private sector where Oleksandr lived began approximately at the end of May. The militants simply set up mobile mortars on the street and hit positions on mount Karachun. Due to this, Oleksandr took his family to Kharkiv. He returned to take care of the gas station and to guard his house.

Immediately after his return, his neighbors, who were also taking their families out of the city, came to him: *“What should we do now, when three mortars are running along our street. And they do not shoot once, but around 15–16 shots each?”*

Oleksandr sarcastically advised to wait out the attacks in the basements: *“There are two options, depending on where and from what they will shoot [in response – ed.]: either they will dig you up, or you will be buried in the basement.”*

Then he explained that to save your life, you must always remain vigilant. While the mine is flying, everyone has 2–2.5 seconds to get on the ground. When a mine approaches, its whistle changes, and you can only save yourself if you are careful enough. If the generator is running and the attacks begin—you must turn everything off immediately so that extra noise does not interfere.

A neighbor of Oleksandr did not hide during the attacks. He just pretended that nothing was happening. He was tempting fate. When mortars hit the street, and the return fire came from mount Karachun, he climbed a ladder to the roof to talk on the phone with his family. He was not a spotter, but he was able to “catch” the connection from above. One day the neighbor was noticed, and they started shooting at his yard. One of the mines exploded about 200 meters from the house. After that, the man finally realized the danger and quickly left the city.

When the fuel at the gas station ran out, Oleksandr still went to work. People from the nearby multi-story buildings always gathered there because its well still worked and it was possible to get water. Moreover, miraculously, there was electricity at the gas station, so people charged their phones there.

Around the first half of June, Oleksandr came under fire at the gas station. It happened at around 4 pm. Besides Oleksandr, a young man and a girl in the gas station were charging their phone and tablet. It was very quiet. There was no electricity, no fuel, no cars, and no music in the city during those months. In the silence, you could hear the work of a military technician near the boarding school, which had been turned into barracks. From the sounds, Oleksandr found out that three cars had left and stopped at the woodline, somewhere up to one kilometer away from the gas station. They started shooting.

Oleksandr says that, at first, they shot in the direction of the railway station. From the perspective of the woodline, they may have been firing at Karachun. Then, mines started falling near the gas station. But Oleksandr insists that this was no return fire from the mountain. Instead, the same team that fired at mount Karachun was firing back. Several explosions occurred very close, near the restaurant “Palermo”, in another woodline, and near the gas tank. Finally, a mine plummeted across the street from the gas station. A fire broke out. The girl who was charging the phone panicked. She was afraid that the construction would not hold and that the tank with the remaining fuel or the barrel with gas would explode. Oleksandr reassured her. He knew that these walls would withstand even a direct hit by a 120-mm mine; most important was not to run into the street under the rubble.

After the shooting, a car came directly to the gas station and fired from it. It was a KAMAZ truck with a 120-mm mortar. Oleksandr went out to the car, pretending not to understand anything.

“ You have to know: when a 120-mm mine explodes, the sound is like someone took a sledgehammer and is hitting a huge iron square with it. So the sound is very steely when a 120-mm explodes. Your ears hurt. It is almost a tank caliber. Well, it is a mortar, but not a rifled one.

Oleksandr had eye contact with the people in the car. But no one came out.

“ It did not surprise me, because we served there [in Afghanistan – ed.] and we know that after firing, no one gets out of the vehicle. The only thing is when they started to leave, they stopped. The canopy of the truck was lifted. I think there four people on the KAMAZ. The mortar itself I did not see because it was inside the truck. They were all sitting. Then they drove on to see where they hit.

In the evening, a Russian journalist appeared at the gas station with a camera operator, asking for comments about the attack. Oleksandr did not have the mood to give comments. When the film crew started to smoke, he reacted sharply: “Goodbye, people—no smoking in here. There is gas and everything else. Get out of here!”

As a former mortarman, Oleksandr understood that this was only a “test shot” at the gas station. He knew that the next attack would be more accurate and that the gas station would explode. Indeed, this would have happened when the Ukrainian military was nearby:

A destroyed gas station in Slovyansk near the E40 Kharkiv-Rostov highway. July 2014. Source: Artem Hetman's blog, <https://bit.ly/3bsNUZM>



“ Those who fired just watched. The shooter takes the map. All shots made from a mortar, from any weapon (except, of course, machine guns), are marked: At this point, one shot was fired. It hit this specific place.

Oleksandr called the owner of the gas station after the attack and told him about the incident. The next day he went to the building of the boarding school. Who was there? “Low-lives”. They were all armed with machine guns and dressed in camouflage. However, he was used to people in uniform carrying weapons. According to Oleksandr, they were not residents because they acted “decent”.

“ I told them, “We have something to discuss. Guys, what does it give you? (I meant the gas station.) If you want, take your car; take the rest [of the fuel – ed.]. Just take it, and that is it. Take it; I will give it all away for free. Five hundred liters of each type of fuel which I can no longer pull through the column.” We did not talk for long, precisely 10 seconds. I was just told, “You know, we have to!” And I said: “I understand, go ahead.” I turned around and left. They did not touch me again, though.

Oleksandr knows from his experience in Afghanistan that there can be no fighting without the loss of military and civilian lives; it is a part of the war, its reality, and the norm. According to Oleksandr, all actions of the Ukrainian army during the battle for Slovyansk were justified and dictated by military necessity, even when civilians were killed: “Where they shoot, civilians die in one way or another. In any case, it is unavoidable.” He also does not consider the death of Ukrainian soldiers to be something special. Participation in combat endangers all who dare to take up arms, and death in battle is normal for a soldier. Oleksandr is only outraged that Slovyansk citizens have not yet admitted that during the fighting, the city was shot at not only by the Ukrainian army. He noted: “These ‘comrades’ destroyed more than half of what was destroyed in Slovyansk. They do not know that. They are sure that the shelling only came from Karachun [a position of the AFU – ed.]”

THE STUDENT

In 2014, Liliia²⁰¹ was a student of the Faculty of Philology of the Donbas State Pedagogical University. She recalls her experiences very emotionally and is surprised at how difficult it is to arrange the events that badly affected her chronological order.²⁰²

After the capture of Slovyansk by pro-Russian forces, Liliia was completely unclear about what was happening. Because of the

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The interviewee's name has been changed.

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Interview C--13, December 14, 2018.

checkpoints, it became difficult to get to classes, but lectures at university continued. Then, she stopped attending lectures as her parents were anxious about what might happen to the girl in a crowded city with armed people, and they persuaded her to stay at home for a while until the situation improved.

Liliia lived in one of the private houses in the center of the city. Through the internet and conversations with friends, she found out what was happening to her friends—one of the guys from the faculty was almost taken to the basement of the former SSU building, and the owner of a local website was beaten on the street by people who represented the new de facto government in the city.

Liliia's life in those days consisted of working in the garden, socializing with friends, and playing the piano. In the garden, she and her mother saw leaflets dropped from a helicopter over the city. Then, something white fell, and the neighbors started shouting that the Ukrainian army was trying to poison the city. These leaflets urged citizens to take care of their lives in the conditions of an armed confrontation. Liliia picked up one of these leaflets on the street near the house and kept it.

The helicopters in the sky over Slovyansk made people in camouflage and her neighbors very nervous. However, Liliia and her mother perceived them differently:

“ *When Ukrainian helicopters flew over us, my mother and I were on the street, and we were so happy. We are a part of Ukraine, hoping that the war and all of that would end soon. There was some hope. Here they are flying, they are close, and so everything is okay. And we waved [to them – ed].*

Once Liliia and her mother noticed a helicopter flying over Slovyansk being shot at from the city. Two missiles cut the sky—the first one missed, the second hit its target, and the helicopter downed outside the city. The girl and her mother hoped that someone would manage to jump out of the burning chopper and escape. But such a miracle did not happen. The entire crew died. They were sitting in the courtyard, clinging to each other, and crying. At the same time, their neighbors were shouting “hooray!”.

At the end of May, it became clear that the uncertain situation in the city would last for a long time. The exam period was approaching, and Liliia had to prepare for tests and exams. She decided to go to the university, but the next day (May 26), the university's area was shelled.²⁰³ During the attack, Liliia was at home. She was informed by friends who spent the night in a bomb shelter.

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Slovyansk. Donbas State Pedagogical
University. After the shelling on
May 26, 2014, YouTube:
Viktor Vepriksy, May 27, 2014,
<https://bit.ly/2J4lb2D>.



Damaged market “Slovyanskyi Bulvar” resulting from shelling on June 8, 2014. Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 17, 2014

In general, the IAG fighters used the place near the university buildings and the student dormitories many times to fire at the AFU positions. One of the students even took a video from the dorm window of how the SPA “Nona” fired from there.²⁰⁴ According to students, on May 26, the SPA “Nona” gunners missed their target and hit the dormitories and the university; because of that, the glass in the buildings flew out. After that attack, lectures stopped, and the students were allowed to go home.

Liliia was again at home, but now her parents’ home was no longer safe, too. Even neighbors with pro-Russian sympathies noticed that something strange was happening on their street at the end of May. In front of a neighborhood food store, armed men began to appear and examine the area. After a while, the artillery installation “Nona” also appeared on the spot. For a moment, this incident united all neighborhood residents, whether with pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian views. They decided to approach the militants and clarify that heavy weapons as “Nona” should not be on that street. Liliia recalls that her father even wanted to carry a knife and a kinetic pistol, but Liliia and her mother did not allow him to leave the house:

“ My dad and another neighbor, and some other men were trying to approach them—very aggressively, they just wanted to kick them out. But we knew this could end badly. We thought it was a bad idea because it could hurt our families and us. All the more, because we are a family with pro-Ukrainian views! And we did not know whether they would agree.

In the end, only those men who supported the pro-Russian movement in the city went to talk to the IAG fighters. Liliia does not know what they were talking about but afterward, there was no

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“Nona” is firing near a dormitory in Slovyansk, Part 1, YouTube: InfoResist, May 27, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2Hzf5aa>.

more military equipment on their street. No shots were fired from here, and, therefore, no response fire neither. All buildings survived. Nevertheless, some debris from time to time flew in from the neighborhood streets. Liliia later found several of them in her garden.

On Liliia's street, there was always electricity, even when there was no electricity in all the surrounding areas. However, like everywhere else, there was no mobile phone connection. For briefly informing the own family that you are alive, you had to go to the nearest intersection. Since about that time, the water supply stopped. To get some water, you had to go every day to people who had a well. Fortunately, a house with a well was not far away from Liliia's home. Other residents were not so lucky. Liliia's brother, who lives in one of the multi-story buildings, had to come from the center to collect water. However, he said that his neighbors just took water from fountains in bottles and carried it to their apartments.

In the queue for water, one could meet many people, also from those streets without electricity. An eleven-year-old boy, the son of a house owner with a well, took everyone's phones to charge them for free. No one forced him to do that—he just wanted to help those worse off than him. Life in war conditions forced children to grow up and become more responsible. *“It was strange: everyone tried to get away somehow, but this family did not even think about it,”* Liliia recalls. *“When we left the city, we left the little boy the keys to our house. He helped people”.*

Liliia's family left the city on Trinity Day, i.e., on June 8. On that day, the girl woke up from loud explosions and, for the first time in all those months, she burst into tears. It seemed to her that the war would never end. Liliia's mother planned to prepare supplies for the winter, but her father insisted on leaving. They hastily collected things, put their cat and the dog in the car, and left.

At that time, many left Slovyansk without knowing where they were going. Also, Liliia's family who was convinced to return soon. And, indeed: When Slovyansk was recaptured, the family returned to their unscathed house, and Liliia successfully passed her exams.

“ *The most challenging thing during the occupation was the lack of understanding of what was happening. We did not know if this hell would ever end. Will we go home? When I left the city, I watched all the videos about Slovyansk. Every day. And I almost always cried because everything in the videos was so familiar to me. So my feelings were a mix of expectation and despair. There were already thoughts that we might not return home. And I was given a chance to understand how much I love my hometown, although I wanted to go to live in another city.*

THE FIGHTER

Oleksii²⁰⁵ is in his fifties. In the 1980s, he fought in Afghanistan. After his military service, he worked as a welder. Like many soldiers, he is used to speaking in short sentences. At the end of 2013, he decided to find a job in his hometown and, therefore, to meet his retirement together with his family.²⁰⁶

Already at the end of winter, Oleksii felt that something wrong would happen to his city, when the Mayor of Slovyansk, Nelia Shtepa, began to call for the creation of “Self-Defense Units”: The city was allegedly being attacked by “Banderites” and the “Right Sector”. Due to the public behavior of members of these “Self-Defense Units”, the local grannies concluded that the city was already under attack and that these drunkards were members of the Right Sector.

Oleksii’s life did not change much after April 12. The only thing was that he forbade his teenage daughter from going to school. Oleksii and his wife were worried about her safety because there was a checkpoint with armed people next to her school.

Checkpoints were also constructed in Slavkurort, where Oleksii lived, at the crossing, near the lake. He believes that this area was a kind of neutral territory at that time: Although there were no battles, it was separated in the two sides of the armed confrontation.

Somewhere in May, there was no electricity or water; every day, mines were flying overhead and exploding in the direction of Semenivka. Under these conditions, Oleksii persuaded his wife and his daughter to leave the city and to go to their relatives. However, they did not want to leave Oleksii alone.

On the night of June 16–17 (around 11:30 pm), Oleksii woke up due to loud explosions somewhere nearby. It seemed to him that they were getting closer and closer to his house. He quickly moved his relatives to a windowless room and covered them with a mattress, where they waited for the end of the attack. Splinters splattered across the roof, damaging the slate. Later, Oleksii said that he registered more than 20 explosions at that time.

When the explosions began to recede, Oleksii went out into the courtyard. There he met his neighbors, with whom he walked down the street. On the road, they saw the dead bodies of Olha and Volodymyr, a married couple. Another neighbor, Victor, had his leg blown off. They put a tourniquet on him and called an ambulance. When the explosions got louder again, everyone went back to their homes. At home, Oleksii shared what he saw with his family. Why were Olha, Volodymyr, and Viktor on the street at night? Why did

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The interviewee’s name has been changed.

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Interview C-14, December 14, 2018.

Semenivka, Ordenonostsiv Street.
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi,
July 18, 2014



they not stay at home? Oleksii explained that when there was no electricity, people communicated with relatives in the yard, listened to the radio, and talked. And when they heard the explosions, they probably panicked and ran home. It hurts Oleksii in particular because, on the eve of the accident, he explained to his neighbors how to behave under fire. He stressed that, in any case, you should not run anywhere but stay where you are, lie down and try to stay calm. This was the only way to escape.

After the attack, no one in Oleksii's house slept. They just waited for the next morning. Around five o'clock, an ambulance arrived and took Victor. Later, Oleksii had to learn that he died in the hospital. Viktor was of advanced age, and they could not stabilize his blood pressure. During the attack, a 72-year-old woman was also killed when she panicked and started to hurry to her son.

It was around lunchtime when they arrived from the morgue to collect the bodies. The process was accompanied by the press, namely the Russian TV channel "LifeNews". Oleksii recalls that he often spotted the blue van of this channel in the city. Sometimes, he noticed the van precisely at the places where a disaster or civilians' death was imminent.

The morgue did not work properly in those days, so the killed neighbors' burial had to be carried out quickly. Oleksii remembers that everyone in the neighborhood tried to help the relatives of the victims. He himself helped by digging graves. He felt incredibly sorry for Olha and Volodymyr's son, who lost his parents in one evening. At that time, their son was almost thirty years old. After his parents' death, he became a "militiaman". In July 2014, he moved to Donetsk together with his armed unit. The death of his parents was probably a painful loss and prompted him to continue the armed struggle against the Ukrainian military, whom he blamed for the death of his parents.

After the attack, Oleksii found an unexploded 82-mm mine. He is convinced that this is clear evidence that the militants shelled their street:

“ They were shooting from the city. Apparently, from the brick factory area because there was a hit in the house, and the mine from the 82-mm mortar did not explode. The hole of the impact remained. The range of the 82-mm artillery is 2,700. Our guys were much further away. It is clear who fired the shot.

Oleksii tried to explain to his neighbors why he was sure that the IAG fired at their neighborhood. He believes that a Ukrainian reconnaissance squad may have been on its way to their area that night and that the IAG’s militants opened fire on them prematurely.

After the attack, Oleksii sent his daughter and his wife to their relatives while remaining at home to guard their house. He stayed in his home almost all the time until the recapture of Slovyansk. Oleksii finds it challenging to describe this period in which he had to endure without water and electricity. Every day felt like the last for him. He walked daily to his neighbors who had a well and carried water for himself and the lonely pensioners who lived in his street. He shared everything he had with them: Oleksii had enough supplies, but they had neither money nor food left.

In Oleksii’s family, everyone has a military background. His adult son is serving in the AFU, and his daughter, a teenager in 2014, plans to study in Kyiv and wants to become a military psychologist. After the liberation of Slovyansk, Oleksii volunteered for the Donbas battalion. Since then, he is frequently on the front line. “*Life has changed*”, says Oleksii about his experience. “*I have been fighting in different units since 2014... We need to win. I do not want to go home. I have to because of my age, but I cannot.*”

THE PASTOR

Petro Dudnyk is a public figure and a pastor of the Protestant “Dobra Zvitska” church.²⁰⁷

“*I do not know if you believe in God or providence, but I received a word from God at the beginning of the year [2014 – ed.]*”, the pastor begins his story. After this providence, he suggested that the church set up a stock of long-term storage products to feed people in difficult times. When the fighting practically cut off the city from the outside world, these supplies proved very useful for distributing free hot meals. However, the church could not fulfill its

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Interview C-15, November 2, 2018.

plans because on May 2, people in camouflage seized the church's building. "You see, we have not yet had the experience that we have today," explains Petro, "That is, you are still thinking in a democratic, liberal [manner – ed]... and you simply do not understand what is going on?!"

Since the location of the Dobra Zvistka Church at the entrance and exit of Slovyansk was of strategic importance, the IAG fighters set up their position on the roof of the building. In the beginning, this position of the IAG was only used by marksmen at night. However, that changed quickly when one day fifteen armed men entered the church. These were Russian Special Forces, and their commander's call sign was "Cap".²⁰⁸ Under their control, the building of the church turned into a military facility. From this time on, the church stopped admitting worshippers. Only one parishioner who lived nearby was allowed to look after the building. According to his memory, besides the special forces, some 40 Don Cossacks settled in the building. They, in turn, were joined by "20-30 local bandits who were the least manageable".

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Serhii Mykolayovych Velykoridnyi, Myrotvorets, <http://bit.ly/2Sb19Fx>.

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On YouTube alone, there are several fragments of videos with the SPU "Nona" shooting from the church yard, but the longest (13 minutes) is a video entitled "This is how the Russians fight". Artyleriiia boiovykiv vela vohon iz podvir'ia tserkvy [The militants' artillery fired from the courtyard of the church], news. bigmir.net, July 5, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2Hrs10i>.

On June 8, 2014, two self-propelled "Nona" guns fired at the Ukrainian army's positions from the courtyard of the seized church. The incident is well documented in a video recorded by a soldier of the formation. The video shows armed men in camouflage, two self-propelled guns with the Russian inscriptions "to Lvov" and "to Kiev" on the sides, and an Orthodox priest praying in front of the church. On the video, you can also see and hear how shots are fired, commands addressed to spotters, and the last words of a member of the "Nona" crew before leaving the church grounds: "Let us get out of here, or we will get return fire now!"²⁰⁹

Although the militants expected a "response", there was no return fire against the church. Houses in the surrounding streets came under fire, but the church remained almost undamaged. When the city came back under Ukrainian control, Petro received an explanation for this:

“ And after the liberation of Slovyansk, different soldiers came to me. One of the officers told me: 'Many times I had all the information about how many militants were here. And many times, we were ready to destroy them [along with the church building – ed.]. But Kyiv did not permit us to do so.' The Ukrainian government or the army did not give the go-ahead for the destruction of religious buildings. Thus, it was not destroyed.

Back in late April, Petro Dudnyk helped two families to leave Slovyansk. These were foreigners, whom the new authorities in the

city automatically perceived as spies. Petro shared their story on Facebook, after which he received a significant number of requests to help them leave Slovyansk.

Petro Dudnyk had connections with various charitable foundations and NGOs, both Ukrainian and international. He then founded a volunteer movement that helped to evacuate citizens and deliver food and medicine to those who decided to stay in the city despite the danger.

Within a few days, Petro already had a small team. First, he was joined by fellow believers, later by more and more people who did not belong to his church. Very quickly, the movement united a large number of people who provided donations to the inhabitants of Slovyansk or who became volunteers themselves, crossing the fire line daily and taking care of people who were to be taken out of the city: *“The evacuation team consisted of my friends, real heroes of the church. Then, various people joined, also people who were not members of the parish at all. Real sacrificial volunteers. Donations were sent and received by various people from many countries of the world.”*

During trips to Slovyansk, volunteers delivered food, drinking water, and medicines. Bedridden patients and persons with disabilities were taken to Kharkiv and handed over to local volunteers who took care of them. People who had a place to go and needed help only in leaving the city were taken to Iziium. There, they could take a bus or train to move further. Those who had nowhere to go or no money were taken to Sviatohirsk. They were first accommodated in the Suputnyk camp. Here, groups of IDPs were created and sent further across the country, to Odesa, to Dnipropetrovsk, and to Zaporizhzhia.

Between May and June 2014, Petro Dudnyk’s Facebook page contained many brief posts about people who received help at that time: small stories about friends and acquaintances. Each of them struggled with the circumstances of life in the city in their own way. These posts are pieces in the puzzle that contribute to the overall picture of the humanitarian disaster that then engulfed Slovyansk.

On May 31, Petro described a meeting with an elderly couple on the highway outside Slovyansk. A man and a woman, frightened by the shelling of the city, were walking. They had no money and did not know how to contact the volunteers.²¹⁰

The pastor also told the story of a friend who became a volunteer:

“ *When machine guns fired, it was scary, but we got used to it over time. When the heavy machine guns fired, it caused fear. However, when the mines burst and shells*

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Petro Dudnyk’s Facebook post,
May 31, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2GawwY2>.

*flew over our heads, it was a real nightmare. My five-year-old son once said this prayer: "God save me tonight, so I would not be killed." Praying was the last straw.*²¹¹

In a post dated June 16, Petro Dudnyk wrote about the beginning of famine in the city, about elderly who did not receive pensions, and mothers without money for their children.²¹² The following day, during the evacuation, Petro had to cram seventeen people into an eight-seat bus.²¹³

On June 24, the pastor shared the story of a Slovyansk resident, in whose courtyard a shell exploded: *"Danik visited her with a food kit. The woman was just crying."*²¹⁴

A few days later, on June 30, Petro Dudnyk wrote about the death of two people who should have been taken out of the city by volunteers in the morning: *"I asked for lists with their names so that we from Kharkiv could buy train tickets for them. I received a list. But two names were marked as 'killed'. And six others were marked 'injured, currently hospitalized.' And this was just after one night and morning before 11am."*²¹⁵

The most comprehensive assessment of the scale of the humanitarian disaster in Slovyansk was made after the end of the fighting in the city. From July 5 to 10, volunteers visited almost all houses in Slovyansk and distributed about 20 thousand food packages. They found three citizens who starved to death: *"For example, neighbors left, but the disabled people remained. No one could take care of them, only we discovered them."*

After Slovyansk returned under government control, the movement initiated by Petro Dudnyk continued its work. As the restoration of everyday life, the restoration of social payments, and food and medicine delivery happened for many too slow, even more people joined his team. Volunteers fixed broken houses, delivered building materials to the victims, and restored a church, an orphanage, and a rehabilitation center.

Petro Dudnyk points out that, according to the most conservative estimates, in 2014, volunteers evacuated more than 4,000 civilians from the city and distributed tens of thousands of food packages. Moreover, dozens of buildings damaged by explosions were restored. Of course, the volunteers were not able to help every resident of Slovyansk. However, without these people's heroic actions, the count of victims of the armed conflict and the city's humanitarian disaster would have been much higher.

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Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 11, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2SldBD3>.

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Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Gb3RpO>.

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Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 17, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2xKmP1X>.

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Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ScIhW>.

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Petro Dudnyk's Facebook post, June 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2YZe65C>.

Now, Petro Dudnyk and his fellows are helping residents who live near the contact line. There are places near Slovyansk where people have been living in harsh conditions for years already—without electricity, without water supply, constantly under fire, and without any hope for an end to the hostilities. The same life that Slovyansk experienced during those harrowing 85 days in 2014.

AFTERWORD

The stories above convey the experiences of the main characters and testify to violations of the rules of war, namely international humanitarian law (IHL). The cases described above contain signs of war crimes committed by combatants on both sides of the armed conflict.

In legal terms, these are deliberate attacks against civilians who did not participate in hostilities (together with indiscriminate shelling of residential areas). These include, among others, the shelling of unprotected cities, villages, housing, or other non-military facilities, the seizure of religious buildings and their military use, the location of artillery firing positions in densely populated areas, and the obstruction of the evacuation of civilians during hostilities.

IHL does not prohibit the conduct of military operations in densely populated areas in principle. However, IHL restricts the use of weapons and the targets of attack. It furthermore provides recommendations for the placement of military installations in these areas. Also, IHL requires all parties to an armed conflict to spare the civilian population, provide acceptable living conditions for civilians in the combat zone, and to leave the combat zone safely.

Most importantly, violations of IHL are war crimes and result in criminal liability for combatants and commanders. The extent of their guilt is determined by an independent and impartial body, the International Criminal Court (ICC). Ukraine temporarily recognized the Rome Statute of the ICC, but this document has not been ratified yet. To correctly classify each specific violation of IHL and to identify perpetrators, the court requires a large amount of information regarding the circumstances of committed crimes. Therefore, the work of documenters from governmental and non-governmental organizations that collect, analyze, and preserve information about IHL violations during an armed conflict is of crucial importance. This work is necessary to prevent any manifestations of arbitrary use of force on the part of law enforcement units against civilians and to establish a favorable environment, which, in our opinion, is the primary condition for building sustainable peace in eastern Ukraine.



Flags of Spas Nerukotvornyi (Divine Savior), the Communist Party, and the "DPR" over Slovyansk.
Source: 3rm.info

“THE SLAVS ARE PAVING THE WAY TO RAMA”

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN SLOVYANSK

SERHII PROTSENKO

Human Rights Public Research Center

NATALIIA HRYTSENKO

Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives

Russia Great, Small, White, Triune God's country!
Who doesn't want you to be whole?
This, above all, is Satan!²¹⁶

*Archpriest Vitalii Veselyi,
Prior of the Holy Resurrection Church of the UOC-MP,
Slovyansk*

Before the capture of Slovyansk, there were Muslim and Jewish communities in the city, religious organizations of Buddhists and Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Evangelical Christian churches, etc. The city authorities held events with the participation of representatives of various faiths and involved them in the events of the local community.²¹⁷

There were also six churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) in Slovyansk. Representatives of the UOC-MP had a somewhat privileged position among other religious organizations, including access to municipal resources and the city authorities' loyalty. The local authorities' granting of preferences was a significant prerequisite for establishing and spreading the “Russian world” ideology among the city's residents. In particular, in 2011, the city authorities gave the Villa Maria, an architectural monument of local significance, and its surrounding territory to the UOC-MP for free use for 50 years.²¹⁸

In 2012, the Center of Slavic Culture “Vvedenie” appeared at Villa Maria under Archpriest Vitalii (Veselyi).²¹⁹ According to Dmytro Tymchuk, Head of the “Informatsiyni Sprotyv” (Information

216

Poems from Slovyansk, Archpriest Hennadii Belovolov, livejournal.com, August 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2P7FvEh>.

217

Mer Slavjanska budet podderzhivat' social'nye proekty pastorov [Mayor of Slovyansk will support social projects of pastors], *Religiya v Ukraine*, March 12, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2MxUhCl>.

218

Villa Marii – pristanishhe terroristov ili centr Moskovskogo pravoslavija [Villa Maria is a heaven for terrorists or the center of Moscow Orthodoxy], 6262com.ua, May 11, 2016, <http://bit.ly/335Ys0X>.

219

Church of Resurrection, Gorlivka and Slovyansk diocese, official website, <http://bit.ly/2Zsh6xa>.

Resistance) Group, Father Vitalii has been conducting “informational and psychological work” with the local population since 2004.²²⁰ In his sermons, he regularly claimed that the Ukrainian state never existed and never would exist. He also asserted that the inhabitants of Ukraine would not be of Slavic origin.

With the active support of the UOC-MP, “Vvedenie” became a venue for disseminating pro-Russian views among the residents of the city. Young people also visited the center, where they attended circles of Russian hand-to-hand combat and Orthodox paramilitary formations (Cossacks). Under the tutelage of Father Vitalii, the “Big Cossack Circle” of the village Torska of the “Great Don Army” took place in Slovyansk. There, the recruits passed the rite of initiation into the Cossacks along with the oath “to serves the Don, the Fatherland and the Lord.”²²¹

220

Dmytro Tymchuk, Facebook Post, April 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NsHfFk>.

221

Slovyansk (Donetsk region). A Large Cossack circle was held in the city for the Orthodox holiday, Ukraina pravoslavna, Official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, October 17, 2007, <http://bit.ly/2PdCNxc>.

222

Interview C-1, December 6, 2018.

223

Poklonnyj krest v Majakah [Memorial cross in Mayaki], Kazak Donbassa, November 15, 2011, <http://bit.ly/33XZMzQ>.

224

Chisto “novorossijskoe” ubijstvo. Kak i pochemu adepty “DNR” rasstreljali 4 protestantov [Purely “Novorossia” murder. How and why the adepts of the “DPR” shot 4 Protestants], Ukrainska pravda. Zhittya, June 13, 2016, <http://bit.ly/33XhdQL>.

225

Narodnyj mjer Slavjanska: “My ne dumali, chto dojdiet do vojny, tak kak nadejalis’ na pomoshh’ Rossii” [People’s Mayor of Slovyansk: “We did not think that it would come to war, as we hoped for help from Russia”], Regnum, October 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NpCRaM>.

“ *The Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was a state church. Father Vitalii, the church’s abbot, created a center of Russian Orthodox culture at Villa Maria. The so-called Don Cossacks were based there: They were engaged in martial arts, and children were trained there, too. And all this in a pro-Russian way for at least three years before the onset of this “Russian spring”. That is, the base was formed there.*”²²²

In the newspaper “Cossack of the Donbas” from November 15, 2011, archpriest Vitalii is mentioned as Slovyansk Cossacks’ confessor.²²³

According to representatives of local religious communities, the UOC-MP also took a particular position on inter-religious dialogue and mutual understanding at the beginning of the armed conflict.

“I did not know until the very end how much dirt and aggression they poured on Evangelical Christians in their churches,” says the pastor of the large Protestant Dobra Zvistka Church Petro Dudnyk. “De facto, they treated the Protestants as Satanists.”²²⁴

In an interview with the REGNUM²²⁵ news agency, the “People’s Mayor” of Slovyansk Viacheslav Ponomariov recalls the participation of the UOC-MP in the birth of the pro-Russian protest movement in Slovyansk:

“ *V. Ponomariov: Then I went to the Sviatohirsk Lavra, where I had a long conversation with the bishop. I explained to him that we were apolitical people, that we only wanted a peaceful sky over our heads, that we would defend our cultural, family values and our land to prevent this scum from coming here. Of course, we would try to change the*

oligarchs' power, who sell our children's future together with our soil.

REGNUM: How did the bishop react to this? Did he bless you?

V. Ponomariov: Yes, he did.

Andrii Mishchenko, a public personality in Slovyansk, reported about the arrival of monks who did not look like clergymen:

“ *In February 2014, my wife and I walked through the city market, and I noticed the monks. Everyone in the city is used to the Sviatohirsk monks. If you look at their hands, you can see that they are engaged in manual labor. And here were two people in boots, aged 30-35 years, they had “young” beards, and most importantly, their hands looked as if they had just had a manicure.*²²⁶

Nikolay Mytrokhin, a scholar who focuses on the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), believes that the radicalization of the ROC began almost two decades ago:

“ *Over the past two decades, thousands, if not tens of thousands of teenagers have been trained in various military-patriotic clubs within the ROC. They were not only trained in shootig with Kalashnikov rifles and knife fighting—they were mentally poled for revanchism, Russian nationalism, and anti-humanism.*²²⁷

According to the residents' testimonies, on April 6, 2014, military equipment was brought to the Villa Maria premises in coffins.²²⁸

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE “EPIC”

*“From the very beginning of our ‘Slovyansk Epic’, both in Slovyansk and Donetsk, we have always felt the support of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, from the monks. From the Sviatohirsk Lavra in the first place. Despite possible reprisals, they openly went out and blessed the militia”, said Igor Girkin (Strelkov).*²²⁹

It was the morning of April 12 when an armed group led by the Russian citizen Girkin (Strelkov) left the Villa Maria to seize administrative buildings of Slovyansk.²³⁰

Girkin had a long history of contacts with the Moscow Patriarchate. In January 2014, as part of a delegation of the ROC to Kyiv, he accompanied the procession with the “Gifts of the Magi”, which was

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Andrii Mishchenko on the capture of Slovyansk, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, March 15, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2TWDauQ>.

227

Nashestvie farsian [Invasion of the farsians], Grani.ru, May 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Pb3qmu>.

228

Father Vitalii Veselyi, UOC MP's priest denies involvement in separatist actions in Slovyansk, YouTube: Gordyeyev Oleksii, <http://bit.ly/2HmwTUa>.

229

“Russkaja vesna”: interv'ju s Igorem Strelkovym o vere i ubezhdenijah, [“Russian spring”: an interview with Igor Strelkov about faith and beliefs], Staroobryadcheskaya mysl, December 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31YH9tu>.

230

Boeviki Moskovskogo patriarhata – uchastniki zahvata Slavjanska otrjadom “Krym” FSB RF. O nachale vojny na Donbasse v 2014-m [Mililitants of Moscow Patriarchate – participants of the capture of Slovyansk by the FSB detachment “Crimea” of RF. About the beginning of the war in the Donbas in 2014], 6262com.ua, July 18, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2Zgo6gP>.

transferred to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra of the UOC-MP.²³¹ He also worked as head of security for the Russian entrepreneur Konstantin Malofeev.²³² Malofeev is a member of the Patriarchal Commission on family issues of the ROC and a well-known Orthodox patron.

On April 15, Mayor Nelia Shtepa accused priests of the UOC-MP of inciting an armed conflict:

“ Five days ago [April 10, two days before the city’s capture by illegal armed formations, ed.], these armed rebels gathered behind Artemivsk in two KAMAZ trucks. After that, in agreement with our Orthodox father, Father Vitalii, they were deployed in his orthodox center. I received a phone call from residents. I was told that about 150 fully armed people had left this orthodox center and were joined by another 300 people invited by Father Vitalii, former Afghans, and military personnel who had joined the ranks of the “rebels”.²³³

231
Girkin and Malafieiev in Kyiv, January 24, 2014 – Girkin (Strelkov) in Kyiv, YouTube: Volodymyr Taranenko, February 19, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2ziWQPU>.

232
Nashestvie farsian [Invasion of the farsians], Grani.ru, May 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Pb3qmu>.

233
Boeviki, zahvativshie gorotdel milicii v Slavjanske, ukryvalis' v pravoslavnom centre – mjer, Ostrov [Militants who captured the City Police Department in Slovyansk, took refuge in the Orthodox Center, Mayor], April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31Wty63>.

234
Bishops of the UOC reacted irritably to the statements of the Mayor of Slovyansk about participation of local clergy in armed actions, Religiya v Ukraine, April 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2K0xX5e>.

235
Interview C-16, November 2, 2018.

After Shtepa’s accusations, the Horlivka Diocese of the UOC-MP answered with counter-accusations against the mayor. Simultaneously, the diocese expressed diametrically opposite views on the situation in the city without refuting the allegations.²³⁴

There is an unconfirmed version that the 300 people who joined Girkin’s group were representatives of paramilitary groups and Cossacks who guarded the Sviato-Uspenskyi Monastery of the UOC-MP in Sviatohirsk near Slovyansk (Sviatohirsk Lavra). This assumption is shared by Petro, a member of the local Protestant religious community:

“ For years, the Orthodox Church, the Russian and Moscow Patriarchate churches, engaged in brainwashing. Therefore, it is evident that the 300 military men Girkin said he had at his disposal when storming the city were the very Cossacks who protected the Sviatohirsk monastery.²³⁵

The participation of the clergy of the Sviatohirsk Lavra in the capture of Slovyansk is also confirmed by the commandant of the Cossack Union “Oblast Viiska Donskogo” [Don Army Region] in Donetsk, nicknamed “Yashchur”. At the end of April 2014, he noted:

“ When we arrived at the base, we were immediately met by monks from the Sviatohirsk Lavra with weapons in their hands. We were shocked to see this. Then, when the

conversation started, we asked why they were armed: "This is our Russian land, and we are protecting it".²³⁶

"Yashchur" added that, during attacks, the monks refused to follow the militants' orders to leave the bases. They referred to the "Father's order to stand to the end". The Cossacks even had to call the "Father" from Sviatohirsk to give the order to the monks to move away.

During Igor Girkin's stay in Slovyansk, he was visited by the monks of the Sviatohirsk Lavra. They told him about the prophecies left for posterity by the monastery elders: that a mighty revival of Triune Russia would begin, which meant a united Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.²³⁷

After Slovyansk came back under the control of the Ukrainian authorities, the abbot of the Sviatohirsk Lavra Metropolitan Arsenii²³⁸ called the ex-mayor of Slovyansk Nelia Shtepa and Igor Girkin "people with a sick imagination" through their allegations that the Lavra served as a shelter for militants.

After fleeing from eastern Ukraine, Igor Girkin (Strelkov) said that all his security consisted of hieromonks of the Sviatohirsk Lavra.²³⁹ He also added that one of his units, the armed formation "Slovyansk brigade", was led by a novice of this monastery, who held a venerable position among the monks. According to Girkin (Strelkov), the Orthodox people of "Novorosiia" and "Russian Donbas", which took up the banner of the militants, were convinced that they were fulfilling their duty to the Orthodox faith and were standing for "Faith and Fatherland".

SLOVYANSK BRIGADE

"ROMASHKA"

One of the commanders of the IAG was Serhii Zhurykov, call sign "Romashka", sexton of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra of the UOC-MP. Zhurykov was the head of the unit that attacked SSU employees on April 13.²⁴⁰ During that first battle in the so-called anti-terrorist operation in the Donbas, captain Hennadii Bilichenko of the SSU's alpha division was killed. "*Romashka' also was in ambush. He sees wealthy people are approaching in very cool cars with Kyiv car plates. He tore them up,*" recalls the so-called "People's Governor" Pavlo Hubarev in his book "The torch of Novorossiia".²⁴¹

236

Hard in training, easy in battle, Cossack Union "Region of the Don army", March 24, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2ZrCiDq>.

237

Igor Strelkov on the split of Orthodoxy, YouTube: Roy TV, September 10, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ZdW1XY>.

238

Namestnik Svjatogorskoj lavry mitropolit Arsenij; Patriarh Varfolomej zaigralsja v pravoslavnogo Papu [The vicar of the Sviatohirsk Lavra, Metropolitan Arseniy; Patriarch Bartholomew played out the Orthodox Pope], RBC-Ukraine, November 21, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2TWFJgs>.

239

Girkin: moja lichnaja ohrana sastojala iz monahov Svjatogorskoj lavry [Girkin: my personal security consisted of monks of the Sviatohirsk Lavra], Infocisist, October 12, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2P96PC9>.

240

Boeviki, zahvativshie gorotdel milicii v Slavjanske, ukryvalis' v pravoslavnom centre - mjer [Militants who captured the City Police Department in Slovyansk, took refuge in the Orthodox Center, Mayor], Ostrov, April 15, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31Wty63>.

241

Pavel Gubarev, "Torch of Novorossiia", Patriot Donbassa, <http://bit.ly/2KQj0j5>.

Serhii Zhurykov, call sign "Romashka",
Source: 6262.com.ua



In a recording of intercepted negotiations by the SSU from April 14, Girkin (Strelkov) reports to "Konstantin Valeryevich" (Malofeev) about the attack on the Ukrainian military and law enforcement officers, and the latter congratulates him on a "*well-marked holiday*" (Orthodox Palm Sunday).²⁴²

242
GRU Slovyansk, April 14, 2014,
YouTube: SSU, April 14, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2ZpRe56>.

243
V Slavjanske pogib ponomar' Kievo-Pecherskoj lavry, komandovavshij otrjadom povstanciev [In Slavyansk, the sacristan of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, who commanded a detachment of rebels, was killed], Relihiia v Ukraini, May 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31Q0dIK>.

244
Segodnja v Slavjanske proshhalsi' s bojcom Narodnoj samooborony Sergeem Zhurikovym, kotoryj pogib ot puli snajpera [Today in Slovyansk, People's Self-Defense fighter Serhii Zhurykov, who was killed by a sniper's bullet, was farewelled], Slavgorod.com.ua, May 4, 2014, <https://bit.ly/389UZ0w>.

245
Kak Kievo-Pecherskaja lavra vospityvala boevikov dlja Girkina [How Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra raised fighters for Girkin], Espresso, May 2, 2018, <http://bit.ly/30wUTvs>.

246
Exercise of the "Loyal Cossacks of the Rus-Guard", Kyiv region, YouTube, 25.11.2012: Dmitry Zhukov, <http://bit.ly/31UB1Cs>.

247
Cossack camp Azov unity 2013, YouTube: Dmitry Zhukov, <http://bit.ly/2ZcJIAW>.

"Romashka" was killed during a sniper duel on May 2.²⁴³ The burial ceremony of Zhurykov took place on May 4 with the participation of the "People's Mayor" Ponomariov in the city's central square.²⁴⁴

"VANDAL"

Other parishioners of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra also joined Girkin's (Strelkov) detachment.²⁴⁵ In particular, Andrii Saveliev ("Vandal"), a man from Kyiv who was raised in the pro-Russian children's and youth paramilitary group "Loyal Cossacks" organized by the UOC-MP, led by ataman Oleksii Selivanov, Secretary of the Coordinating Council of Atamans of Orthodox Organizations of Cossacks under the UOC-MP. Members of the organization learned to use explosives, stabbing and firearms, and how to provide first aid for various types of injuries.²⁴⁶ The "Loyal Cossacks" took part in paramilitary training camps jointly with Russian organizations of Cossacks that took place in the summer of 2013 on the Ukrainian Azov coast with the participation of the UOC-MP.²⁴⁷ They were also engaged in securing various events held under the patronage of this religious organization, such as "processions", "prayer stations", etc. As a sign of gratitude from the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Andrii received an iPad from the Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Zurabov.

Before finishing the 9th grade of school, Andrii immediately went to fight in Crimea and shortly afterward in the Donbas. Awarded by Girkin with the medal "For the Defense of Slovyansk", he now lives in Russia with his mother and older sister.

“KEDR”

Dmytro Zhukov (“Kedr”), a previously convicted resident of Kyiv, also joined the Slovyansk events on the side of the pro-Russian armed groups. In November 2011, Dmytro Zhukov was one of the “Day of Russian Unity”²⁴⁸ organizers in Kyiv. He also actively took part in events of the UOC-MP in Kyiv. He was one of the leaders of the NGO “Orthodox Choice”, which supported the activities of an anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian website.²⁴⁹ After the recapture of Slovyansk, he moved to Crimea.

THE CLERGY

During the city’s capture, the clergy of the UOC-MP openly sided with the armed pro-Russian groups: they provided them spiritual support and carried the view that a religious factor would have caused the conflict.

On April 13, Archpriest Mykola Fomenko, rector of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Slovyansk, appeared on the barricades built near the captured Slovyansk City Department of the MIA. He summoned the “unity” of pro-Russian forces and said that the church has never stood aside from the events. There is evidence that Fomenko also visited the “Andriivskyyi” checkpoint.²⁵⁰

248

Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, only together we are Holy Russia!, flackelf, livejournal.com, November 6, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MA1EJj>.

249

Statement of the all-Ukrainian NGO “Orthodox choice” about the events of May 9, 2011 in Lviv, Ukraine Schengen, <http://bit.ly/2MxxNkM>.

250

Opium dlja naroda, ili cerkov' v Slavjanske s prikusom DNR [Opium for the people, or a church in Slovyansk with a DPR bite], Barcode, July 31, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TXjeYE>.



Regimental priest of the “militia” Father Viktor and members of the “Motorola” squad, Slovyansk, 2014. Source: mgarsky-monastery.org

Archpriest Volodymyr Ocheretianyi visited the “Cherevkivka” checkpoint, where he gave communion to the militants and condemned the authorities in Kyiv for using military units and tanks.²⁵¹ Ocheretianyi stressed that the “*local militias*” *defended their rights*”, and consecrated the battle banner, which was previously consecrated with the relics of St. George the Victorious. He referred to the battle banner as a “battle flag”, which was “explicitly used never to perish the fighting spirit.”²⁵²

251

Cvjashhenniki UPC MP podnimajut boevoj duh vooruzhennyh povstavec Slavjanska [Priests of the UOC-MP raise the morale of the armed rebels of Slovyansk], *Relihiia v Ukraini*, April 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZeaKSX>.

252
Ibid.

Priests of the UOC-MP were also involved in the organization of public demonstrations to counter the Ukrainian army. In particular, Father Vitalii Veselyi organized a demonstration in which elderly women, standing with Orthodox icons on the bridge, blocked the Ukrainian army’s entrance to the city.²⁵³

253

Slov’iansk. Rik pislia DNR [Slovyansk. One year after the DPR], *Ukrainska Pravda*, April 15, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MAONa4>.

254

Prayer at the checkpoint in Slovyansk, YouTube: Slavgorod.com.ua, <http://bit.ly/2U0KIS3>.

255
Ibid.

Afanasii, hieromonk of the UOC-MP, performed a prayer service at the checkpoint near the gas station.²⁵⁴ The monk made no secret that he had come to the checkpoint to provide spiritual support and blessing “*for this good cause.*” Furthermore, he noted that “*the people came out to defend their Orthodox faith.*”²⁵⁵

256

Priest from Slovyansk: the army that raised its hand against its people is a criminal army, YouTube: irbis altaiski, June 2, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZcKokm>.

257

Dom svjashhennika iz Slavjanska rasstreljali na Troicu [The priest’s house from Slovyansk was shot on Trinity Day], *RIA Novosti*, July 31, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zr4QwZ>.

On May 29, an unnamed Orthodox priest addressed the faithful of the Orthodox Church of Slovyansk, saying he had come to the city to fight and defend “Orthodox Russia”.²⁵⁶ The priest said that the militants were provoked to take up arms by “Jewish Masons”, descendants of the devil, and the Ukrainian army would be criminal.

Father Roman, a priest of the Church of the Holy Spirit of the UOC-MP, who left for Russia after the outbreak of the hostilities,²⁵⁷ participated in anti-Ukrainian propaganda in the Russian media. According to him, he was helping the fighters of the IAG, despite the risk of facing repressions. He also claimed that the city was being

Slovyansk, 2014, protests against the entry of the Ukrainian army into the city. Source: nslovo.com



shelled by the Ukrainian military, which would have a “special” attitude towards Orthodox holidays. Furthermore, he claimed that locals would be participating in the ranks of the fighters:

“ Attacks on church holidays only increased. They started bombing on Friday or on big holidays in the middle of the week. Why? I do not know. Maybe because if you have sin in your heart, hatred, then the devil guides you. After the beginning of the bombing of the city, the majority of residents joined the “militia”. People saw that godless bombing and understood that it was necessary to protect their city and their relatives.²⁵⁸

The consecration of the battle banners of the first volunteer battalion took place in the Church of the Holy Spirit of the UOC-MP with the participation of Girkin, the leader of the militants.²⁵⁹ The banners’ consecration ceremony was conducted by Father Oleh Khyzhniakov, who was the chaplain of that battalion. The militants promoted the “DPR” in the church. They also ate and spent the night there.²⁶⁰

Girkin’s assistant Ihor Druz (real name – Dus²⁶¹) noted the high level of support for the militants among local Orthodox priests: “We were fed by local priests, who served in their parishes and came to support us. The majority of orthodox priests throughout Ukraine supported us. The episcopate is another matter. Unfortunately, there are many traitors among Ukrainian bishops.”²⁶²

258
Interview C-15, November 2, 2018.

259
Novorossiia: the birth of the Orthodox army, YouTube: Oleksandr Pisarev, July 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZxaduR>.

260
Tam neljudi jeti nochevali, eli i pili, a prihozhan nastavljali na put’ DNR, – zhiteli Slavjanska obvinjajut svjashhennikov UPC (MP) [There these inhumans spent the night, ate and drank, and instructed the parishioners on the path of the DPR, residents of Slovyansk accuse the priests of the UOC (MP)], Video, Censor.net, July 21, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZiwlPX>.

261
Meshkanets Dubna vyiavyvsia radnykom vozhdia “DNR” [A resident of Dubna turned out to be an adviser to the leader of the “DPR”], Erve.ua, July 14, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2Nr0645>.

262
Pomoshhnik Strelkova: “Bol’shinstvo pravoslavnyh svjashhennikov za nas, a sredi episkopata mnogo predatelej” [Strelkov’s Assistant: “The majority of Orthodox priests support us, and there are many traitors among the episcopate”], Vlasti.net, October 8, 2014, <http://bit.ly/30sZ4rP>.



Consecration of the flag of the first volunteer battalion.
Source: voicesevas.ru

Ihor Dus (Druz).
Source: rusvesna.su



Igor Dus has a personal history with the UOC-MP. A native of Dubno, Rivne region, in 2007–2011, he was an adviser to the representative of the UOC-MP in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Metropolitan Avgustyn, and in 2011 he founded the public “orthodox-patriotic” organization called Narodnyi Sobor. The webpage of this organization²⁶³ contains anti-Ukrainian materials. According to Dus himself, he met Girkin in the Orthodox Church.²⁶⁴

“ *The West vehemently hates the “Russian world” and Serbia... I think it hates them most because they are orthodox. Many Western politicians spoke about their dislike of orthodoxy. However, their actions speak louder. The West is engaged in a real de-Christianization of the world, destroying orthodoxy in Serbia, in Ukraine, and spreading terrible evils around the world.*²⁶⁵

The clergy of the UOC-MP also took part in public burials of dead militants in the city center. These ritual ceremonies served as a propaganda tool and were inciting hostility.

THE USE OF CHURCHES

According to the testimonies of parishioners of the UOC-MP, active propaganda for the proclamation of the “DPR” and the need to counter “fascism” begun in the city’s churches in April.²⁶⁶

The premises of churches and their surrounding territories were used as military facilities. In three of the six churches of the UOC-MP in Slovyansk, the militants set up fortifications and checkpoints. Several days in a row in July, they set up artillery installations in the square in front of the church in the Cherevkivka micro-district.

263

Official website of the movement “Narodnyi Sobor”, <http://bit.ly/2Hm1HEw>.

264

Igor’ Druz’: “Nashi rebjata hoteli unichtozhit’ Jarosha, no ja otgovoril...” [Ihor Druz: “Our guys wanted to destroy Yarosh, but I dissuaded...”], Ukraina.ru, August 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2K0zkpk>.

265

Igor’ Druz’: “Na nashih znamenah – lik Hrista” [Ihor Druz: “the face of Christ is on our banners”], official website of the “Narodnyi sbor” movement, August 4, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NoXt2C>.

266

Slov’iansk. Rik pislia DNR [Slovyansk. One year after the DPR], Ukrainska Pravda, April 15, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MAONa4>.

Furthermore, the militants established observation posts on the bell towers of four churches: in Cherevkivka—to control the route Donetsk-Slovyansk; in Slavkurort—to control the entrance to the city from the route Kharkiv-Rostov; in the Pivnichnyi micro-district—to protect the entrance to the city from the feed mill, and on the bell tower of the church near the railway station where they had a good view of mount Karachun near Slovyansk.²⁶⁷

A representative of the ROC abroad, who was near Slovyansk during the fighting, noted that the militants deliberately hid mortars behind orthodox churches and fired from there at the Ukrainian military positions.²⁶⁸ Therefore, they forced the anti-terrorist operation forces to open return fire, which resulted in shells hitting churches. On June 16, Archpriest Mykola Fomenko accused the Ukrainian army of targeting churches of the UOC-MP.²⁶⁹ Such attacks were extensively used as an element of anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

On June 6, 2014, the press service of the National Guard of Ukraine issued a message saying that mortar attacks were carried out against checkpoints of the ATO forces from the territory of an orthodox church.²⁷⁰ These attacks resulted in deaths and injuries to Ukrainian soldiers. In their response, Horlivka and Slovyansk eparchies of the UOC-MP rejected these accusations.²⁷¹

Local activists note that the churches of the UOC-MP of Slovyansk were also used for storing weapons.²⁷² When the city came back under the Ukrainian Government's control, the Donbas battalion seized five MANPADS, seven (or eight) grenade launchers, 20 Kalashnikovs, and two boxes of ammunition for machine guns from the basement of the Alexander Nevsky Church.²⁷³

Representatives of the UOC-MP seized property of other religious organizations and provided spiritual support to the militants when they fired at the Ukrainian military. In particular, attacks on the Ukrainian military in the presence of orthodox priests took place from the Dobra Zvistka Protestant Church's territory.²⁷⁴

Yevhen Tkachov also confirms the participation of the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate in illegal actions on the side of the militants from the Slovo Zhyttia Church.

“*In Slovyansk, we first encountered religious persecution from people who considered themselves orthodox and part of an “Orthodox Army”. We met precisely those orthodox ministers who carried weapons, abandoned their parish, and came here to fight for “Mother Russia” so that “fascism” and the “Banderivtsi” would not pass through.*

267
Opium dlja naroda, ili cerkov' v Slavjanske s prikusom DNR [Opium for the people, or a church in Slovyansk with a DPR bite], Shtrih-Code, July 31, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2S6caMX>.

268
Svjashhennik RPZC: “Boeviki v Slavjanske prjachut za pravoslavnyimi hramami minometry i ottuda vedut obstrel pozicij ukrainskoj armii” [Priest of the Russian Orthodox Church: “Militants in Slovyansk hide mortars behind Orthodox churches and fire at Ukrainian army positions from there”], Relihiia v Ukraini, June 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Z8GtVw>.

269
Archpriest Mykola Fomenko: It is a miracle that the churches in Slovyansk are still intact! Gorlivka and Slovyansk dioceses. Official website, <http://bit.ly/2KP1xh4>.

270
V Slavjanske s territorii hrama obstreljali blokposty Nacvardii [In Slovyansk from the territory of the church, the National Guard checkpoints were fired at], Korrespondent.net, June 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TYSQgU>.

271
S territorii hrama ne obstrelivali blokpost - Slavjanskaja eparhija [No one ever fired at checkpoints from the church's territory - Slovyansk diocese], bigmirnet, <http://bit.ly/3442R00>.

272
Slov'iansk. Rik pislia DNR [Slovyansk. One year after the DPR], Ukrainska Pravda, April 15, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MA0N4a>.

273
Reportazh iz Slavjanska: My, zhivye i mertvyje... [Report from Slovyansk: We, the living and the dead...], Argument, September 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Nu0puP>.

274
Slovyansk. On the territory of the church, militants are firing from a tank, YouTube: Zhora Boy, September 12, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Z9YH9b>.

275
Religioznyj terror na okkupirovannoj chasti Donbassa: kak boeviki ohotjatsja na pastorov [Religious terror in the occupied part of the Donbas: how militants hunt pastors], Argument, November 28, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2Nu0pLl>.

When Slovyansk came back under the Ukrainian authorities' control, the UOC-MP continued to support the militants. In particular, the Sviato-Uspenska Lavra in Sviatohirsk became a hiding place from law enforcement agencies for some members of Girkin's detachment.²⁷⁶

After the city's recapture, members of the executive committee, deputies of the City Council, and public figures created a commission and visited the Villa Maria rented by UOC-MP to check the building's condition.²⁷⁷ Inside the building, they found newspapers, photos, and other media containing signs of anti-Ukrainian propaganda, including articles given the title "Let's fight back against the advancing fascism", the newspaper "Spetsnaz of Russia", and the book "And the new Russia will rise".

276

"Otrabatyvaem vse versii, krome smerti" ["Working out all versions, except for death"], Gazeta.ru, January 25, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MxNWxq>.

277

V gundjaevskompritone v Slavjanske obnaruzhena antiukrainskaja propaganda (foto) [Anti-Ukrainian propaganda was found in the Hundyaevskiy nest in Slovyansk (photo)], Glavnoe, March 7, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2L2u8Zc>.

278

The appeal of Oleksii Dobychin. Slovyansk. June 28, 2014, YouTube: Voin Rusy, November 29, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TZknza>.

279

Novorossiya raised the banner of faith, YouTube: Vasilij Terkin, June 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Nu0v5F>.

280

"Russkaja vesna": interv'ju s Igorem Strelkovym o vere i ubezhdenijah ["Russian spring": an interview with Igor Strelkov about faith and beliefs], Staroobryadcheskaya mysl, December 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/31YH9tu>.

PERSECUTION

On June 28, 2014, Oleksii Dobychin, a Russian citizen, member IAG of the "DPR" and the editor of the site "Moscow–Third Rome", called in a video message on everyone to "join the ranks with the defenders of Slovyansk".²⁷⁸ Moreover, he said that there is a religious war in eastern Ukraine, where "the Vatican, dissenters, heretics, and traitors of Christ have come against us using the money of the 'zhydobanderivtsi' [a derogatory term composed of anti-Semitic and anti-Ukrainian components – ed.]" Together with Dobychin, an unnamed representative of the Orthodox Church appeared in this video message, who said that "the Antichrist is coming to our land" and that there is a need to protect the "own faith".

The militants established the Orthodoxy of the Moscow Patriarchate as the dominant religion of the region. They began to persecute representatives of other faiths, primarily evangelical Christians, who historically had a relatively strong representation in the local community.

Symbolic of this was that the militants raised three flags on the roof of Slovyansk City Council: the flag of the "DPR", the communist battle flag of the Second World War, and a banner of the Image of Edessa, a holy Christian relic known in the Orthodox Churches as the Mandyion and which was also raised on other administrative buildings, towers, and roadblocks.²⁷⁹ Thus, radical orthodox and communist symbols were combined with symbols of the new "Russian world" on the City Council's flagpole.

“ All the priests I met supported our struggle. And they did it not from a national but a religious point of view: they understood what and who came to power in Kyiv. These forces can be called satanic.²⁸⁰



Flag with the Mandylion on the roof of the Slovyansk City Council building.
Source: terskiykazak.livejournal.com



Flags installed by militants over Slovyansk City Council.
Source: terskiykazak.livejournal.com

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Pravoslavnyj sovetnik lidera boevikov na Donbasse Strelkova-Girkina opravdal rasstrely zhiteljev Slavjanska [Orthodox adviser to Strelkov-Girkin, the leader of militants in the Donbas justified the shooting of residents of Slovyansk], Credo press, August 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2L400N1>.

282
Igor' Druz': "Pravoslavnyj chelovek nikogda ne budet voevat' protiv Novorossii" [Ihor Druz: "an Orthodox person will never fight against Novorossiia"] Relihiia v Ukraini, October 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33WpVyU>.

283
Pastor-volonter Petr Dudnyk: "Uznav, chto jevakuciju iz Slavjanska ja organizuju besplatno, zhenshhina razrydalas' ["Volunteer-pastor Petro Dudnyk: "When a woman learned that I organize evacuation from Slovyansk for free, she burst into tears"], Facts, May 27, 2015, <http://bit.ly/328Ts6T>.

284
Za veru i SSSR: Russkaja pravoslavnaja armija na Vostoke Ukrainy [For faith and the USSR: the Russian Orthodox army in eastern Ukraine], Korrespondent.net, May 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Hphbrs>.

285
Chisto "novorossijskoe" ubijstvo. Kak i pochemu adepty "DNR" rasstreljali 4 protestantov [Purely "Novorossiia" murder. How and why the adepts of the "DPR" shot 4 Protestants], Ukrainska pravda. Zhittya, June 13, 2016, <http://bit.ly/33XhdQL>.

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Reportazh iz Slavjanska: My, zhivye i mertvye... [Report from Slovyansk: We, the living and the dead...]. Argument, September 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Nu0puP>.

Igor Dus, an adviser to Girkin, stated that after the victory over the Kyiv authorities, the militants planned to build a social state that would protect "Christian values".²⁸¹ Dus, as an information and policy adviser, also made statements aimed at inciting religious hostility to the Ukrainian army among the city residents:

“ On the Ukrainian side, there are no orthodox at all because no orthodox person would go to war against “Novorosiia”. Everyone knows that the unity of Holy Russia is the will of God. The punitive battalions are mainly Uniates, dissenters, neo-pagans, and sectarians.”²⁸²

The self-proclaimed local authorities treated representatives of religious communities other than the UOC-MP with suspicion and tried to control their actions.

In particular, representatives of Protestant churches were “invited” by armed men to meetings with the self-proclaimed leader, the “People’s Mayor” of Slovyansk, Viacheslav Ponomariov. During these meetings, the militants were interested in particular in the purpose of the churches’ activities, namely in food provisions for and evacuations of the local population.²⁸³

Some of the armed groups in Slovyansk, notably the “Russian Orthodox Army”, identified themselves with the radical orthodoxy.²⁸⁴ They hindered evangelical Christians’ activities and occupied their worship houses to establish their headquarters, hospitals, and firing points.

DOBRA ZVISTKA

In early May, the militants attacked the “Dobra Zvistka” Protestant church. Two cars drove up to the church building, snipers cordoned off the perimeter, and masked shooters broke through the fence. The church’s leadership announced the evacuation, but the parish did not have time to escape. The parishioners had to put their faces down on the floor. At the same time, armed men searched the church’s premises for four hours and tried to find members of the “Right Sector” or documents that would indicate any connection of the church with this organization.

The militants did not find any representatives of the Right Sector nor any evidence of their cooperation with the church. However, they confiscated computers and tore out the surveillance cameras of the church.²⁸⁵

“The logic is simple: we are the enemy of the radical ‘Russian Orthodox Army’. An American church? Americans must be destroyed!”, said the church’s pastor Petro Dudnyk.²⁸⁶

Two days later, snipers arrived at the church, saying they would be on duty there at night because it was convenient to control the city's entrance.

On May 16, pro-Russian armed groups kidnapped Bishop Oleksii Demydovych, the head of the evangelical organization "The Ukrainian Church of God". He was held for seven hours in the basement of the captured SSU building.²⁸⁷

According to a witness to the events, armed men came to the church the day before and started looking for Oleksii Demydovych. At that time, he was in Iziium [a city in Kharkiv Oblast – ed.]. Also, the militants were interested in his brother, Pastor Serhii Demydovych, who was in Kyiv at that time and, therefore, avoided his arrest. People with weapons said that as soon as Oleksii Demydovych arrived in the city, they would like to meet with him. When Demydovych returned to Slovyansk, militants were already waiting for him near the church. Petro, a witness to the incident, first did not understand what was happening. Later, he realized that the militants were arresting Demydovych.

“ We did not realize that he was being arrested because it was a quiet conversation. But they said: “We have an order from Strelkov to take you to the commandant's office or the SSU building.” When they started getting into the car, I said, “We will go in our car.” They said, “No.” And they put [Demydovych – ed.] in their car with the gunmen. We realized that this was not an invitation. It was an arrest.”²⁸⁸

After his release, Demydovych said that he was taken to the building of the city's SSU branch; they blindfolded him with tape, tied his hands, and put him in the basement. During the interrogation, the militants were interested in the church's structure; they said that he was a member of a religious sect and that the only “correct” church

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Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church is an international terrorist organization, [al_enchante](http://al_enchante.livejournal.com), [livejournal.com](http://bit.ly/2L7HtPO), <http://bit.ly/2L7HtPO>.

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Interview C--16, November 2, 2018.



Militants place weapons and ammunition on the territory of the Dobra Zvistka Church. Source: Petro Dudnyk's Facebook page, <http://bit.ly/31ZViH6>

was the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Demydovych managed to get free due to personal connections and, eventually, the intervention of the “People’s Mayor” Viacheslav Ponomariov. After the release, Demydovych and his family left the city.

A few days later, a group of armed individuals declared the Dobra Zvistka Church a military object. They seized the building and its adjacent territory.

Armed formations of the “DPR” used both the territory and the captured church’s property as a barrack and an ammunition depot. Also, they fired from the territory of the church at the Ukrainian army from the self-propelled gun “Nona”.

After the church’s capture, pastor Petro Dudnyk left the city for security reasons and under threat of arrest.

On June 2, Hennadii Lysenko²⁸⁹ was stopped at a checkpoint while he was trying to bring food and medicine to the city and taking people out of the city on the way back. There were signs on Hennadii’s car: the inscription “evacuation of families with children” and a red cross. From the checkpoint, he was taken by the militants to the SSU building, where he was blindfolded with tape, beaten, and put under psychological pressure. Once they simulated to shoot him: they brought a machine gun, put it to his back with threats, and pulled the trigger. During the torture, Hennadii was accused of supplying food to the Ukrainian army and was asked why he was not orthodox. The militants were also interested in the structure, the parishioners, and the leadership of the church. They also complained about the dismissal of pastor Oleksii Demydovych. On the evening of June 3, Lysenko was released, but his car was taken away.

On July 3, armed groups of the “DPR” detained Oleksandr Reshetnyk, a volunteer of the Dobra Zvistka Church, as he was returning to

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Mykola Karpytskyi. Activities of the Pentecostals of Slovyansk in wartime 2014–2015, Open Academic Journal Index, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MB49ve>.

The building of the Dobra Zvistka Church. Source: tyler78.livejournal.com



the city after he had been evacuating residents. At the Ukrainian checkpoint, he could not enter the city because he had passed this checkpoint many times that day. Oleksandr was looking for other ways to get home. On his way, he met a man with a broken scooter and decided to give him a ride. Later, they were both captured at a checkpoint of pro-Russian militants. During the detention, the militants said that they were on the lookout for Reshetnyk. They also accused him of picking up a person on neutral territory, which was forbidden.²⁹⁰ Oleksandr was searched and told that the fish sign (the ichthys) on his car was “*a sign of charismatics who are worse than Baptists.*”

A witness to the detention was Yevhen, a minister of the Dobra Zvistka Church, who was detained at the checkpoint at the same time. Yevhen was accused of helping the Ukrainian army. After being searched, he was released only a few days later.

Oleksandr Reshetnyk was first tied to a fence at the checkpoint and then taken to the captured City Police Department where the militants issued him a “protocol” of detention. Then, Oleksandr was put in a cell in the basement of the building. Oleksandr was not physically abused. The following day, Oleksandr was interrogated and accused of being religious charismatic and “*selling out to the Americans*”. After explaining what he and his church were doing, the militants replied that he was certainly doing a good deed, but he was not orthodox, which was very bad for him.

On July 5, the day of the city’s recapture by the Ukrainian army, Oleksandr was released from unlawful captivity.²⁹¹

“PREOBRAZHENNIA HOSPODNIIE”

On June 8, at the Preobrazhennia Hospodnie (Transfiguration of the Lord) Protestant Church at Tsentralna Street 45 (formerly Karl Marx Street), the clergy held a festive service in honor of the Holy Trinity Day. After the service, the parishioners left the church. Outside the building, they met armed men with machine guns. The militants drove up to the church in a Renault Logan Universal car, taken a few days before from Hennadii Lysenko, a Pentecostal of the Dobra Zvistka Church.²⁹²

Until this day, the militants repeatedly entered the church building, examined it, and asked where the religious community was getting from its money.²⁹³ The militants came to pastor Oleksandr Pavenkov’s house eight times to look for the owner.²⁹⁴ During one of these “visits”, the armed men asked about the owners of four cars which were all parked next to the church building: a Land Rover 3 (Discovery), a Toyota Avensis, a Ford Transit, and a Chevrolet

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Religious persecution in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea 2014, Mission Eurasia, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NsUGpc>.

291
Mykola Karpytskyi. Activity of the Pentecostals of Slavyansk in wartime 2014–2015, Open Academic Journal Index, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MB49ve>.

292
Voshozhdenie. Kto ubil chetyreh hristian v osazhdennom Slavyanske [Ascent. Who killed four Christians in besieged Slavyansk], Focus, August 29, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KRrvKP>.

293
Chuzhaja religija kak opravdanie ubijstva [Someone else’s religion as a justification for murder], 6262com.ua, May 29, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2NrS3Eb>.

294
Na telah zamuchennyh svjashhennikov byli strashnye sledy pytok i izdevatel'stv [On the bodies of the tortured priests were found terrible traces of torture and abuse], Faktty, July 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NrSuyj>.

Evanda.²⁹⁵ The owners of these cars were the deacons of the church Viktor Bradarskyi and Volodymyr Velychko and the two sons of the senior pastor Oleksandr Pavenkov, Ruvym, and Albert. Machine guns were pointed at them, and they were ordered to get into their cars. The militants warned that they would shoot in case of resistance. A guard with a machine gun sat in the back of each car. A column of five cars drove away from the church in an unknown direction.

The following day, relatives and friends began searching for the detainees in the city's administrative buildings, where the militants' headquarters and places of unlawful captivity were located. In one building, no detainees were found. On the premises of the SSU, where the headquarter of Girkin (Strelkov) was located, they were reassured that everything would be fine with them and that they were digging trenches somewhere. The City Police Department assured that the Protestants were on the prisoners' lists and promised to hand them over medicines and food from their friends and relatives.

After the militants arrested the Protestants, Ihor Draban, a local volunteer and a parishioner of the church, called his friend Viacheslav Ponomariov, the self-proclaimed "People's Mayor" of Slovyansk, with a request to get them free. The latter, however, refused to help.²⁹⁶

A few days later, Viktor Bradarskyi's wife Nataliia was humiliated at the headquarter of Girkin (Strelkov). The militants told her that the Protestants had sold themselves to the Americans and that they were spies. Moreover, they would not know where her husband was.

Inside the city's fire station, Nataliia recognized those people who had arrested her husband. They told her that her husband was interrogated with Volodymyr Velychko and that both were already released and left in their cars. They also said that they had questions for the sons of pastor Pavenkov. They would be accused of providing weapons to the Ukrainian army. They could not give any information about Bradarskyi's and Velychko's whereabouts. The militants gave the advice to get in contact with the City Police Department. However, the law enforcement officials later also said they did not know where the two men are. They only confirmed that their names were missing in the lists of detainees.

The relatives then turned to the orthodox priest Mykola Fomenko who personally knew the detainees and was treated with respect by the militants. But Mykola Fomenko refused to help. Instead, he accused the Protestants that their faith was bad and repeated the accusation that the arrested men delivered weapons for the Ukrainian army.

²⁹⁵ Religious persecution in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea 2014, Mission Eurasia, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NsUGpc>.

²⁹⁶ Chisto "novorossijskoe ubijstvo". Kak i pochemu adepty "DNR" rasstreljali 4 protestantov [Purely "Novorossiiia" murder. How and why the adepts of the "DPR" shot 4 Protestants], Ukrainska pravda. Zhittya, June 13, 2016, <http://bit.ly/33XhdQL>.

“ During that conversation, he said that the Protestants are accused of bringing either phosphorus, biological, or chemical weapons for the Ukrainian army. He started telling that a bomb of this kind detonated in some village—one of those bombs brought by the Protestants. He added that the smoke from the explosion of that bomb would cause brain damages.²⁹⁷

When the city returned to government control, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies began searching for the missing. They found a burned car and the shirt of Viktor Bradarskyi. Later, a grave was found containing the half-burned bodies of four men.

After that, law enforcement officers tried to recreate the chronology of events.

On June 8, the prisoners were placed in a metal shed of the captured City Fire Department. Money in foreign currency was found in the car of one of the kidnapped men.²⁹⁸ The militants used this against them and declared the deacons to be “American spies”. They were tortured on the fire station’s premises, and the next morning, they were taken away in the car of Viktor Bradarskiy’s, a Chevrolet Evanda. Later, they were shot in the Mashmet district.²⁹⁹

Serhii Myronenko, Deputy Prosecutor of the Slovyansk Interdistrict Prosecutor’s Office, confirmed the use of torture.³⁰⁰ Myronenko was imprisoned by the militants at the fire station at that time, too. There he heard the screams of the kidnapped Pentecostals. According to Myronenko, they were tortured during the interrogation. Despite being tortured and threatened with execution, the Protestants behaved courageously: they were singing and praying to God.³⁰¹ The forensic examination found that all four believers were shot the next day following their detention, June 9. During the execution, Viktor Bradarskyi tried to escape, and they shot him in the back. Then, the killers blew up his car and tried to hide all the facts of the murder.

According to Fridon Vekua, the then Deputy Mayor of Slovyansk for Humanitarian Affairs, the death of the four believers was discussed four believers’ death was discussed at a closed meeting of the city leaders of the “DPR” on the morning of June 9.³⁰²

The remains of the bodies were found the same day and taken to the morgue. It was not immediately possible to identify the bodies. The bodies were kept in the morgue until June 10, when the electricity was turned off. After that, they were buried with others in a mass grave near the Children’s Hospital.

There are also two alternative versions of the events. According to the first, the militants secretly removed and buried the remains of

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Chuzhaja religija kak opravdanie ubijstva [Someone else’s religion as a justification for murder], 6262com.ua, May 29, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2NrS3Eb>.

298

Ustanovleny lichnosti boevikov “Russkoj pravoslavnoj armii”, rasstreljavshih gruppu hristian v Slavjanske v 2014 godu [The identity of the militants of the “Russian Orthodox Army” who shot a group of Christians in Slovyansk in 2014 has been established], Relihiia v Ukraini, February 1, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ZmAPdR>.

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More information about mass graves of civilians you can find in the report: Misto, z yakoho pochalasya viyna: na holovnu rol’ pryznacheno... [The City Where the War Began: the Lead Role is Assigned to...], https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Slov2_10.pdf.

300

Religioznye presledovanija na okkupirovannom Donbasse: delo Lenina zhivet [Religious persecution in the occupied Donbas: Lenin’s case lives on], Marker.ua, October 24, 2018, <http://bit.ly/31XgFZn>.

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Deacon Andrii Barilo on how 4 Protestants were shot in Slovyansk (June 2014), Gordyeyev Oleksii, March 25, 2016, <http://bit.ly/33WY1Y2>.

302

Slov’iansk. Rik pislia DNR, Ukrainska pravda [Slovyansk. One year after the DPR], April 15, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MAONa4>.

303
 V Slavjanske odkryli memorial sluzhitelej cerkvi, kotoryh ubili boeviki [A memorial to church servants who were killed by militants is opened in Slovyansk], UKRINFORM, June 18, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ZofGzQ>.

304
 Mykola Karpytskyi. Activities of the Pentecostals of Slovyansk in wartime 2014–2015, Open Academic Journal Index, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MB49ve>.

305
 Orthodox fascism in action, Anton Gerashchenko, Facebook.com, July 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KS0g2T>.

306
 Policija ustanovila lichnosti treh muzhchin, kotorye ubili chetyreh sluzhitelej cerkvi v Slavjanske, STRANA.ua [The police have identified three men who killed four church officials in Slovyansk], February 1, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ZhV0hO>.

307
 Religious persecution in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea 2014, Mission Eurasia, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2NsUGpc>.

the bodies in one grave immediately after the shooting.³⁰³ According to the other version, after the murder, the militants presumably called the local police to pick up the bodies and falsified the case as if the Protestants were killed by Ukrainian military shelling. The police took the bodies to the morgue and photographed the victims, but they hid the crime from everyone, including their relatives.³⁰⁴

Anton Herashchenko an adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, also reported that the Protestants were arrested based on denunciation and accusations of helping the Ukrainian army.³⁰⁵

Later, the investigation found out that three persons shot the kidnapped men: Oleh Obraztsov, a resident of Makiyivka, born in 1965, and two other residents of Slovyansk, Andrii Chernyshov, born in 1963, and Yevhen Pushkov, born in 1979.³⁰⁶ After the murder, they collected a large sum from the victims' relatives, allegedly for the captives' release. After the liberation of Slovyansk, all three went to Donetsk. They are suspected of committing crimes under five articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine and face life imprisonment.

The bodies buried in a mass grave were found when the city came back under government control. After the exhumation, the dead were buried according to Protestant traditions.

On the night of June 10–11, the militants arrested Tetiana Nosacheva, her friend Tamara and the church operator Ruslan Rudenko in the Transfiguration of the Lord Protestant Church.³⁰⁷ Four armed men broke into the building of the church at two o'clock in the morning. Members of the religious community and residents



Чернишов Андрій Олександрович,
 1963 р.н., житель м. Слов'янськ



Образцов Олег Володимирович,
 1965 р.н., житель м. Макіївка



Пушков Євгеній Миколайович,
 1979 р.н., житель м. Слов'янськ

The perpetrators of the murder of Pentecostals in Slovyansk. Source: dn.npu.gov.ua

of the city who left their homes to escape the shelling were spending the night there. The gunmen explained their appearance by the need to check documents. They had flashlights used to shine on the people during the interrogation. The militants also searched the believers' personal belongings. On Tetiana's mobile phone, they found a photo from Independence Square in Kyiv sent by a friend. This was the reason for the arrest of Tetiana, her friend Tamara and Ruslan Rudenko. They seized the video camera of the church and all media storage devices. The Protestants were put in cars; one of the militants started accusing the detainees of sectarianism. He threatened that the church building would soon be confiscated and stressed that there was no place for Protestantism in Slovyansk.

The detainees were brought to one of the militant bases in Slovyansk and put in the basement, where they were held for the next day. On June 12, they were moved to the basement of the city's SSU department. On June 13, Tetiana was interrogated by a military officer who asked why she sold her native faith and changed it to the American one. On that day, June 13, she and her friend were released. Ruslan Rudenko stayed under arrest for some time.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF SLOVYANSK

The Jewish community of the city was also affected by the arbitrariness of the militants. On April 17, militants captured the TV tower on Mount Karachun.

Afterward, on April 20, the Ukrainian TV channel "Inter" began to broadcast "KPE TV", the channel of the militants, which posted a video message to the audience on the internet:

“*Here, from Slovyansk, we deliver a powerful informational blow to the biblical matrix... Zionist zombie broadcasting... the Zionist zombie box... Here is the deal, guys. Here, in Slovyansk, a new story begins. Slavs are paving the way to Rama. The victory will be ours.*³⁰⁸

308
Separatists launched anti-Semitic television in Slovyansk, Association of Jewish organizations and communities of Ukraine, April 2014, <http://bit.ly/33P0JKF>.

After this statement, the new TV channel aired the lecture "Following the Direction of Truth and Unity" by Kostiantyn Petrov, a retired general, leader of a Russian anti-Semitic neo-paganist sect, and a political party created on its basis.

After the statement and the lecture, the Jews of Slovyansk immediately left the city.

"The Jewish community also left immediately. Because, as soon as the militants captured Karachun, those who went on air said to make a powerful blow to the Jewish community," an employee of

Slovyansk City Council, who was engaged in the development of relations with public and religious organizations, stated.

THE UKRAINIAN AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH

The St. Andrew's Church of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is located at Tsentralna Street 29 (Karla Marx Street), near the local SSU department. In May 2014, the "DPR" militants broke into the church. Father Savva (Fryziuk), the abbot of the St. Andrew's, remembers:

“ One day they came to the church because we were 50–70 meters from the SSU... For about a month, we were not touched because they were dealing with their business, hunted more active and dangerous citizens, but then they came to us. They said, “We will not tolerate you here”.³⁰⁹

Father Savva managed to avoid his arrest due to his acquaintance with the son of the “People's Mayor” Viacheslav Ponomariov, whose car he had consecrated before the capture of the city. Savva left the city.

ROBBERY

The representatives of the “new government” also robbed the property of religious organizations. “*They threatened with prison terms and execution. They took our property and our cars and kept us in the Police Department for two days. Then, when our Lord pardoned us, we thought that we could flee, but in fact, it turned out that the militants left*”³¹⁰, says Yevhen Tkachov, a parishioner of the Slovo Zhyttia Church.

In addition to the seizure of the building of the Dobra Zvistka Church, four cars were also seized. One of them was taken away by the “DPR” militants at a checkpoint during the evacuation of Slovyansk residents from the embattled city, which the church organized. The passengers were kicked out of the minibus, and the driver was taken to the basement of the city's SSU. He was accused of “helping the Ukrainian military”. After three days of physical and psychological abuse, he was released in exchange for his car.³¹¹

Armed groups of the “DPR” also robbed the children's orphanage “Vitryla Nadii” located at Serafymovycha Street 62A. The orphanage was managed by the Dobra Zvistka Protestant Church, too. The guard of the house was taken to the basement. Later, he was rescued due to the efforts of the Protestant community. The children of the orphanage managed to get out of the building just in time.³¹²

309
Duhovnaja oborona [Spiritual defense],
Den, January 9, 2016,
<http://bit.ly/2KT2wHc>.

310
Religioznyj terror na okkupirovannoj
chasti Donbassa: kak boeviki
ohotjatsja na pastorov [Religious
terror in the occupied part of the
Donbas: how militants hunt pastors],
Argument, November 28, 2018,
<http://bit.ly/2Nu0pLl>.

311
Pastor-volonter Petr Dudnyk: “Uznav,
chto jevakuaciju iz Slavjanska ja
organizuju besplatno, zhenshhina
razrydalas”, Fakty [Volunteer-pastor
Petro Dudnyk: “When a woman
learned that I organize evacuation
from Slovyansk for free, she burst
into tears”], May 27, 2015,
<http://bit.ly/328Ts6T>.

312
The orphanage affected by the attacks
in Slovyansk continues to help children
finding a family, gcshelp.org,
May 30, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2KQtn6r>.

The property of other Protestant churches also suffered from the arbitrariness of pro-Russian armed groups. In particular, they seized the Bible School of the Nove Zhyttia Church, located at Zirkova (Telmana) Street.

Jehovah's Witnesses also became victims of the "DPR" militants. The militants reported that on June 8, they allegedly detained a group of saboteurs who supplied weapons to the Ukrainian military and transmitted information about the location of the positions of the IAG of the "DPR". During the search, fifty thousand dollars were found among the detainees.³¹³ According to the militants, the detainees acted under the guise of a religious organization called "Jehovah's Witnesses". The detainees were taken to the headquarter in Slovyansk. The next day, the press center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia denied the involvement of the organization's members in helping any party, referring to their religious views.³¹⁴

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In Ukraine, the church is separated from the state, and no religion can be recognized by the state as mandatory. The right to observe and practice any religion is guaranteed by Ukrainian legislation and international law.³¹⁵ This includes access to places of worship and religious personnel.³¹⁶ The persecution of believers in Slovyansk violated their right to respect religious beliefs and practices during armed conflicts, as stipulated in the Geneva Convention IV.³¹⁷ Respect for religious beliefs and practices is recognized as a fundamental guarantee for civilians and military personnel in the Additional Protocols I and II.³¹⁸ At the same time, international law recognizes the legality of certain restrictions on the right to freedom of religion, in particular, restrictions on its exercise are allowed if such restrictions are carried out according to the law and if it is necessary to protect public order, public health, and morals, or to protect the rights and freedoms of others.³¹⁹ Restrictions on the rights of specific categories of believers in Slovyansk were illegal, as their activities did not carry any of the listed threats.

All the mentioned international law and Ukrainian legislation norms related to ensuring religious freedom are reflected in the self-proclaimed republics' so-called legislation only in a few formal sentences. In reality, these regulations were not implemented in any way, as people were detained, imprisoned, and even killed for religious beliefs or belonging to a non-ROC church. Moreover, in May 2014, representatives of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" adopted their own "Constitution", which created

313

Separatism of the brain. The terrorists considered the "Jehovah's Witnesses" by Ukrainian saboteurs, Crime.in.ua, June 9, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33POLCh>.

314

Separatizm golovnogogo mozga. Terroristy sochli "Svidetelej legovy" ukrainskimi diversantami [Separatism of the brain. The terrorists considered "Jehovah's Witnesses" to be Ukrainian saboteurs], Crime.in.ua, June 9, 2014, <http://bit.ly/33POLCh>.

315

Svideteli legovy reshitel'no otvergajut svoju prichastnost' k "postavkam oruzhija" v Slavjansk [Jehovah's witnesses strongly deny their involvement in "arms deliveries" to Slovyansk], Credo.ru, June 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZxmDCZ>.

316

Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine; Law of Ukraine "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations"; Article 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

317

ECtHR decision in Cyprus vs Turkey, application No. 25781/94, pp. 241-247, <http://bit.ly/33YuTeD>.

318

Article 27 of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (IV Geneva Convention).

319

Article 75 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I); Article 4 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions August 12, 1949, concerning the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), dated June 8, 1977.

the foundation for religious intolerance in the policy of the representatives of the IAG.³²⁰ Below is a provision from one of the “document’s” articles:

“ 2. In the “Donetsk People’s Republic”, the leading and dominating faith is the Orthodox faith (Christian Orthodox Faith of the Eastern Confession), which is professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

3. The historical experience and role of Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognized and respected, among other things, as the pillars of the Russian world.³²¹

320
Part 2 of Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine; Part 3 of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights; Part 2 of Article 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

321
Constitution of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” 2014, constitutions of States (Countries) of the World, June 3, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ZpVNMW>; Svoboda vid sovisti. Separatysty rozv’iazaly relihiinyi teror [Freedom from conscience. The separatists have unleashed religious terror], Tyzhden.ua, June 26, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MxYgik>.

322
Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine July 15, 2015, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Zho8Rm>.

323
Moskov’skij patriarhat poshirjue cinnosti “russkogo mira” [Moscow Patriarchate propagates the values of the “Russian world”], Gazeta.ua, September 15, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2ZgzJdm>.

324
Relihiinyi teror na okupovanii chastyni Donbasu: yak boiovyky poliiuut na pastoriv [Religious terror on the occupied part of the Donbas: how militants hunt pastors], Radio Svoboda, November 26, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2Zm6u30>.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine with a call for the reunification of Ancient Russia’s historical territory with the preservation of the values of the Russian language and religion is based on the idea of the “Russian world”.

This provision of the “Constitution” was later withdrawn, but the idea was still found in practice. In July 2014, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed the militants’ claim that the main religion in the Donetsk region is the Orthodox Christianity of Moscow Patriarchate and sectarian activity is prohibited. “*This approach explains to a large extent the increasing number of attacks on Protestant, Mormon, and Roman Catholic churches in the areas controlled by the armed groups. Religious leaders have been harassed, threatened, and abducted*”, the UNHCR report notes.³²²

The creation of the “Russian Orthodox Army” battalion, which operated during the Slovyansk insurgency, testifies to the purposeful imposition of the “dominant faith” and its transformation into a hybrid weapon throughout eastern Ukraine. Some of the militants came to the self-proclaimed republics to take part in the “crusade” to implement the dogmas of the ROC. Since then, there has been an increase in religious intolerance towards other faiths on the territories in eastern Ukraine, which the Ukrainian government currently does not control, except for the Moscow Patriarchate’s Orthodox churches.³²³ This thesis is supported by Maksym Vasin, Executive Director of the NGO “Institute of Religious Freedom”. In his opinion, the militia used religious persecution, first and foremost, to strengthen their influence in the region:

“ They use religious terror to consolidate illegitimate power. To root out any dissent and thus try to make the population of the occupied territories so ideologically homogeneous that there are no attempts to disobey.³²⁴

AFTERWORD

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has radically changed people's lives on the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions which are currently not under Ukrainian state control. After the capture of a part of the Donbas, freedom of religion became nothing more than fiction, and the ROC and its Metropolitan Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate received a monopoly on religion. The self-proclaimed republics' religious policy aimed to establish a unified ROC by ousting and persecuting other faiths on the non-controlled territories. Selective treatment of religious communities and the persecution of religious figures and believers have led to the offset of their fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly freedom of religion and religious pluralism.

Even though Russia and the ROC deny their role in religious oppression, many facts prove their link with the militants. In general, on the non-government controlled territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions, there were recorded cases of persecution of representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic churches, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Protestant and Evangelical churches, as well as Muslims.³²⁵ The alleged reasons for illegal actions against religious communities included competition with the ROC, pro-Ukrainian positions or connections with the West, or their opposition to the "Russian world" ideas. As a result, most churches and religious communities in Slovyansk were forced to stop their activities or went underground during the insurgency. With the recapture of Slovyansk, the religious and ecclesiastical life of the city was restored, but the crimes committed during the insurgency left their mark on the believers' lives.

325

Religious persecution in the Donbas: Church servants and temples are in danger, Institute for Religious Freedom, October 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2P7hL3h>. Arrests, executions, and seizure of churches: the occupation authorities in the Donbas persecute the faithful, Human Rights Information Center, October 25, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2TWzetU>.



Fortifications of the IAG created with the use of forced labor. Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 18, 2014

NO RIGHT TO CHOOSE

FORCED LABOR AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ILLEGAL PRISONS

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In 2018, Ukraine was ranked 49th (out of 167 countries) in the world's slavery index with 286,000 modern slaves, according to a study by the Australian organization Walk Free Foundation.³²⁶ The organization compiles the so-called Global Slavery Index, which estimates the number of people who live in modern slavery in 167 countries around the world.

For comparison, in 2013, the number of modern slaves in Ukraine ranged between 110 and 120 thousand.³²⁷ Therefore, before the outbreak of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, the number of people in slavery was almost three times less than in 2018. In 2014, when the armed conflict began, Ukraine was ranked 40th out of 167 countries globally, with about 112,600 people in slavery.³²⁸

In two years, the situation in Ukraine had deteriorated significantly. In 2016, Ukraine was ranked 33rd with about 210,400 slaves, i.e., the number of slaves had increased by almost 100,000 people since 2014.³²⁹

326

The Global Slavery Index 2018 report, Walk Free Foundation.
<http://bit.ly/2m8hmQ7>.

327

The Global Slavery Index 2013 report, Walk Free Foundation, p. 120,
<http://bit.ly/2kp07rC>.

328

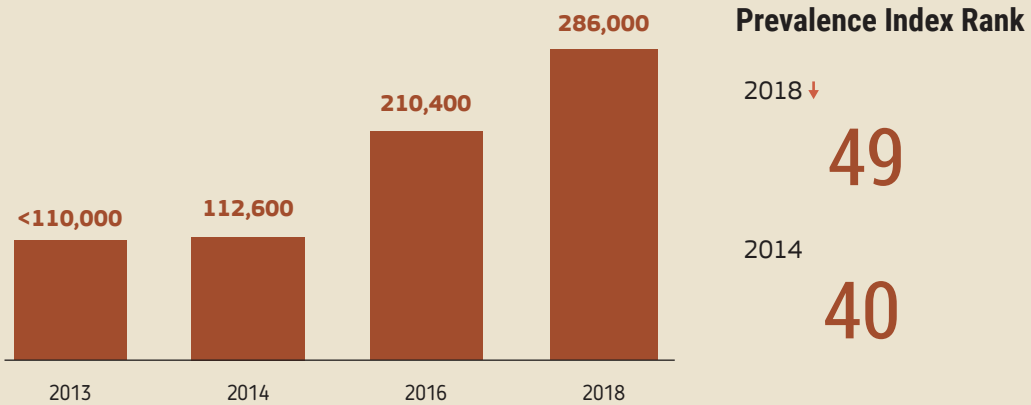
The Global Slavery Index 2014 report, Walk Free Foundation, p. 20,
<http://bit.ly/2kA6IRG>.

329

The Global Slavery Index 2016 report, Walk Free Foundation, p. 30,
<http://bit.ly/2m7qLaA>.

Country Data on Ukraine

Global Slavery Index 2018



Ukraine

\$8,272

GDP (Purchasing power parity)

44,657,704

Population

286,000

Estimated number living in modern slavery

6.41/1000

Estimated proportion living in modern slavery

49/167

Prevalence Index Rank (2018)

54.38/100

Vulnerability to modern slavery

Data on Ukraine, Global Slavery Index 2018, <http://bit.ly/2m2FONK>

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine is one factor that contributed to the increased number of slavery cases. This is also confirmed by the Walk Free Foundation, which notes that as a result of the conflict, men, in particular, have become vulnerable to slavery: they were forced to perform military service and perform physical labor to support the activities of the IAG.³³⁰

³³⁰ Ibid, p. 67.

Data from the international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch confirm that under the militants of the self-proclaimed “DPR” detainees of illegal prisons and residents of the non-government-controlled territories became victims of forced labor. In 2014, Human Rights Watch reported about such cases:

“ In Donetsk, in mid-August, Human Rights Watch interviewed several victims of forced labor and relatives of victims, as well as a militant. All of them said that people detained for alleged public drinking of alcoholic beverages, curfew violations, illegal drug use, and other minor violations could end up in “punitive brigades”³³¹ for up to 30 days. In some cases, Human Rights Watch also saw men in civilian clothes working in “punitive brigades” at checkpoints near Donetsk.³³²

OHCHR has also been reporting forced labor of illegally detained persons since 2014. And already in one of its first reports, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) pointed to testimonies indicating a mass phenomenon:

“ In discussions with the HRMMU following their release, many detainees who were held by armed groups report beatings, ill-treatment, sleep deprivation and very poor conditions while in detention, and forced labour, including digging trenches on the front lines. (...) The son of a man abducted in Donetsk on 7 July reported that his father had been transferred by the armed groups to Snizhne where about 100 detainees, males aged from 14 to 60 years old, were being held. He said that during the day the detainees were forced to dig trenches near the Ukrainian-Russian Federation border, which has been on the front lines of heavy fighting between the armed groups and the Ukraine forces.³³³

The question of the relationship between forced labor and slavery and its impact on the index of slavery in Ukraine legitimately arises. “Slavery” is understood as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.”³³⁴ Accordingly, slavery is the forced subordination of one person to another, with the subordinated person remaining in the property and complete dependence on the other. Today, the term “slavery” can refer to similar concepts, particularly human trafficking and forcing people to perform specific work.

According to the Forced Labor Convention of the International Labor Organization, “forced or compulsory labor shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”³³⁵ That means that even if there are no signs of

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Note: The punitive brigade refers to a group of people who were detained for certain “administrative misconduct” and were forced to work.

332

Ukraine: Rebels Subject Civilians to Forced Labor, Human Rights Watch, September 4, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lE6hGg>.

333

Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, July 15, 2014, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 10, <https://bit.ly/3u3b7M2>

334

Article 1 of the Slavery Convention as of September 25, 1926, as amended by the UN Protocol as of December 7, 1953, <https://bit.ly/3pmN4Uv>

335

Article 2 of the Forced Labor Convention No. 29, International Labor Organization, June 28, 1930, <https://bit.ly/3u2zysP>.

physical or economic dependence, but there is evidence of coercion under involuntary conditions, or under the threat of punishment, a person's work is recognized as forced. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has established through its practice that "servitude" during forced labor is a severe form of the denial of liberty.³³⁶ Such a provision includes not only the victim's obligation to provide certain services to others but also the obligation to work for the benefit of another person and the impossibility of changing his or her situation.

336
ECtHR decision In Siliadin V. France,
application No. 73316/01, p. 123,
October 26, 2005.

337
Article 4 of the Council of Europe
Convention on Action against
Trafficking in Human Beings of
May 16, 2005, <http://bit.ly/2k6oziP>.

Forced labor and human trafficking are related concepts but not identical. Human trafficking includes hiring, transporting, transferring, concealing, or obtaining persons through threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or helplessness, or by providing or receiving payment or benefits to obtain the consent of a person who has power over another person for exploitation.³³⁷ Exploitation also includes forced labor, slavery, or slavery-like practices. The difference between forced labor and human trafficking lies in the transfer of an illegally detained person. In the case of human trafficking, it is mandatory to transfer the victim from one person or group of persons to another person or group for exploitation. In contrast, forced labor is the exploitation of the victim without transfer to other persons.

Slovyansk was one of the first cities in the armed conflict, where lawlessness affected the growth of forced labor and human trafficking. Militants of the "DPR" controlled the city from April 12 to July 5, 2014. During this time, arbitrary detentions and, as a result, forced labor of illegally employed persons became widespread, which is a violation of international human rights law and IHL. Prisoners were tortured and held in conditions that violated human dignity; they worked under dangerous and humiliating conditions, washed blood in dungeons and basements, cleaned the territory of illegal prisons, and fortified the fighting positions of the IAG directly on the front line.

This section results from monitoring studies of the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives and the Public Committee for the Protection of Constitutional Rights and Freedoms of Citizens, members of the Coalition Justice for Peace in Donbas. It is based on the testimonies of nine victims and witnesses of human rights violations in Slovyansk, which refer to forced labor and human trafficking cases. We also used domestic and international legal

acts (judicial practices), reports of international organization, and data from open sources—i.e. media and analytical publications. The names of some respondents have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Forced labor and human trafficking are often misinterpreted. Many people associate these crimes only with slavery and concentration camps of dictatorial regimes. This misconception has far-reaching consequences: Cases of forced labor and human trafficking are often not reported because victims do not understand that such actions are criminal. However, slavery, human trafficking, and forced labor should be distinguished because the degree of liability and the consequences of these crimes differ.

FORCED LABOR IN ILLEGAL PRISONS

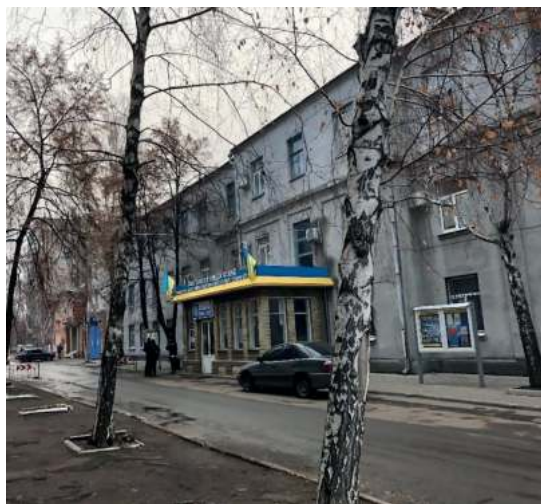
To this day, a network of illegal places of detention, in which civilians and military personnel are held captive, operates on the self-proclaimed “DPR” territory. It is a systemic and large-scale phenomenon, indicating an organized policy of illegal detention. People are mostly detained for being opposed to the new self-proclaimed government, for administrative offenses, or to obtain a ransom. Beyond doubt, the impunity that prevails in these places promotes forced labor of illegally imprisoned persons.

Slovyansk became the first place where local administrative buildings were seized by the “DPR” militants led by the Russian colonel Igor Girkin (Strelkov).³³⁸ Soon after the beginning of these events, mass detentions of civilians and Ukrainian military personnel started in the city. Some of the victims were released, some were killed, and the fate of others is still unknown. People were usually detained to break the resistance of potential “enemies of the republics” (people with pro-Ukrainian views, local deputies and activists, journalists, representatives of foreign and local non-governmental organizations), to punish violators of the rules of the established regime, as well as to resolve personal conflicts or to demand a ransom. As a result of documentation efforts, the existence of two illegal places of detention where prisoners were exposed to forced labor could be disclosed:

- the building of the Slovyansk City Police Department;
- the building of the Slovyansk City Department of the Ukrainian Security Service (SSU).

338

Richnytsia vyzvolennia: yak terorysty vtikalы zi Slov'ianska i Kramatorska [Anniversary of the liberation: how the terrorists escaped from Slovyansk and Kramatorsk], 5 Kanal, July 5, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2m7r2KE>.



The building of Slovyansk City Police Department, February 14, 2018 (30 Universytetska Street, Slovyansk). Photo credit: Hrytsenko Nataliia



Basement and courtyard of Slovyansk SSU Department, December 13, 2018 (32 Tsentralna Street, Slovyansk). Photo credit: Hrytsenko Nataliia

The “People’s Militia” led by Igor Girkin, a citizen of the Russian Federation, controlled the city, including the detention places. According to the respondents, in the SSU building premises, there were people with insignia of the “Russian Orthodox Army”. In the City Police Department building, respondents reported locals’ presence among the staff of the detention place.

Both places had specific conditions for holding prisoners since they were law enforcement offices. However, in the captured building of the SSU, most of the illegally detained persons were kept in basements and rooms that were not equipped for this purpose and did not meet any detention standards.

Prisoners were tortured and ill-treated both physically and psychologically. They recall various physical violence types, notably beating with fists and different objects, using weapons, punching certain body parts, etc. Moreover, people suffered from deprivation of sleep, food, and water. Some detainees were kept permanently blindfolded and were forced to lie down and to sleep. A lack of water, food, and toilet facilities was typical for both illegal detention places. The arbitrary nature of detention, the lack of a judicial or an external review, harsh and inhumane detention conditions, and the constant use of torture during interrogations created an environment in which forced labor of prisoners could be used with impunity.

The analysis of the evidence provided by victims and witnesses reveals many cases where civilians were used as workforces for activities that the militants themselves were unwilling to perform. This includes, among others, the cleaning of rooms where torture took place, the cleaning of dirty toilets, collecting garbage with bare hands, but also digging trenches on the frontline. By harassment and torture, the aggrieved prisoners were put under pressure, especially psychologically, to break their resistance.

VICTIMS OF FORCED LABOR AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Victims held in places of detention in Slovyansk confirmed cases where prisoners had to work under humiliating and life-threatening conditions, which IHL and international human rights law prohibit. The norms of international law are also reflected in the Constitution of Ukraine, which prohibits forced labor, too. Ukraine is a state party to several international labor treaties and, therefore, must respect, protect and ensure the right to work, particularly by prohibiting forced labor or creating appropriate conditions for such work.³³⁹ Compliance with IHL is mandatory for all parties to the conflict—for members of the Ukrainian military and the IAG. Moreover, the work of prisoners of war is prohibited if such work:

- is harmful to health or dangerous;
- is not undertaken based on the own will of prisoners of war;
- is humiliating for the servicemen;
- relates to the removal of mines or similar hazardous devices.³⁴⁰

In most documented cases, the militants forced illegally detained civilians to work. IHL prohibits the work of detained civilians if such work is forced, insulting or humiliating.³⁴¹ In Slovyansk, detainees were often forced to clean the territory and various premises and later to dig trenches under fire.

There are also documented cases of human trafficking prohibited both in times of peace and during an armed conflict under Article 149 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.³⁴² According to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, human trafficking constitutes a violation of human rights and an offense to the dignity and the integrity of the human being, which may result in slavery.³⁴³ In Ukraine, combating human trafficking is regulated by the Law of Ukraine “On Combating Human Trafficking”, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in Human Beings as of May 16, 2005, and other normative legal acts adopted for their implementation.³⁴⁴

339

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948; Articles 6-7 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966; Article 4 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950; Forced Labor Convention No. 29 of 1930; Articles 49-57 of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war (III Geneva Convention); Article 95 of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (IV Geneva Convention); Article 5 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions from August 12, 1949, concerning the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), dated June 8, 1977.

340

Articles 49-57 of the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war (III Geneva Convention) of 1949.

341

Article 95 of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (IV Geneva Convention) of 1949.

342

Article 149 “Human Trafficking” of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

343

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in Human Beings as of May 16, 2005, <https://bit.ly/20MHb6A>.

344

The procedure for establishing the status of a victim of human trafficking was approved by the CMU Resolution No. 417 of May 23, 2012, <http://bit.ly/2kbGfK6>; Procedure for payment of one-time financial aid to persons who have suffered from human trafficking, approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers as of July 25, 2012, No. 660, <http://bit.ly/2ILS1Lp>.

Members of the Coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas” have documented many testimonies of people who were held captive and forced to work to support the militants’ activities and were transferred to other IAG. None of the testimonies of the victims discussed later complied with the requirements and prohibitions of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in times of war.

THE STORY OF A “POLITICAL PRISONER”

The captivity for Sviatoslav Kravchuk, a resident of Kostiantynivka and a political figure, lasted 67 days. During this time, he was repeatedly tortured, held in inhumane conditions, and forced to work under the threat of death. In April 2014, armed men beat Sviatoslav and arbitrarily detained him in the middle of a street in his hometown. With his hands tied and his eyes covered by tape, he got to the building of the Slovyansk SSU Department and later to the Slovyansk City Police Department.

The man belonged to a particular category of prisoners, and until the last days of his detention, he was almost not involved in any work. The victim was under “special supervision” and was considered a “political prisoner” detained for his political beliefs. Sviatoslav was not allowed to leave the cell and go out into the fresh air; he did not have any “privileges”, and the guards watched him closely.

For the first time, Kravchuk was forced to work while being held in the SSU building, where the guards ordered him to clean the lawn in the courtyard. Through his “political” status, he was not involved in any work until the last days of his imprisonment in the City Police Department. At that time, Slovyansk was in the active phase of the confrontation between IAG and the Ukrainian military. One evening, the head of the guards came to Sviatoslav and several other prisoners and told them that they would have to perform a responsible task—tomorrow, they would dig trenches. The victims (primarily civilians) did not express a desire to work, so the militants threatened them. The victims had two options: *“either working or being shot.”*³⁴⁵

They went outside after that conversation, where they had to dig trenches, sometimes even under fire. Sviatoslav realized he could die at any moment:

“ They scolded us that they would shoot us if we did not dig up by the evening. However, we did not finish anything. No one shot us, but the fear was very intense [...] when mines

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Interview C--17, December 13, 2018.

*fell, it was terrible, and there was no place to hide. No dugout; there was nothing. We were all hiding somewhere behind the summerhouse.*³⁴⁶

About 15 illegal prisoners had to go out to dig trenches. Guards of the detention place handed prisoners over to the “Russian Orthodox Army”, which organized and controlled the work process. The militants made sure that the prisoners did not escape. One of the victims, who was held captive in the Slovyansk Police Department together with Kravchuk, confirmed his words: “*Sviatoslav Kravchuk? Yes, he worked. He said that they dug trenches for them [the militants – ed].*”³⁴⁷

The prisoners, performing forced labor, tried to look for some positive aspects of what was happening. Sviatoslav says that while digging trenches, he got into the sun for the first time during his long captivity. One man even lost consciousness after finally being outside.

346
Ibid.

347
Interview C--18, December 25, 2018.

Sviatoslav was released on the night of July 5, 2015, after the Ukrainian army regained control over Slovyansk. The war experience and forced labor under the threat of death left a psychological and emotional imprint on Kravchuk. Even though his case is only one of the few that took place during the armed conflict, it is a clear example of the use of illegally imprisoned persons for labor in violation of all possible human rights regulations and standards.

WORKING SCHEDULE FOR A JAILED ACTIVIST

Another story of a forced labor victim also took place in an illegal prison during the capture of Slovyansk. Vitalii, a public activist, came to the city to investigate the insurgency together with his friends. The militants noticed them at one checkpoint, and after a while, Vitalii was severely beaten and detained. He was placed in a car and brought to the SSU building in Slovyansk. There he was detained, interrogated, and tortured.

Vitalii had to clean the territory and premises of the detention place. Several times, he cleaned the office of Girkin’s (Strelkov) deputy with the call sign “Nis”. Every morning, the guards took the man out to clean the yard and collect garbage with his bare hands, and this, according to the victim, was “*the cleanest job*”. There were days when he was forced to clean dirty latrines, and the militants gave him only a broom and a bucket of water. There is clear evidence of the arbitrary use of human labor and purposeful bullying through the work’s humiliating nature.

Vitalii recalls that he was not searched during the work, and when returning to the cell in the basement, he could have taken with him a plank to sit on or some pillow. Since the detainees were kept in a cold basement and not taken out for walks, forced labor was the only opportunity to smell the fresh air and see the sunlight.

Vitalii is sure that he performed forced labor. To refuse to work would be at least “stupid” because it would immediately cause an adverse reaction and likely deterioration of the guard’s attitude. Moreover, the guards behaved aggressively and put psychological pressure on the prisoners during the work. *“You only look down because it is better not to look at the soldiers. If you meet their eyes, you will be hit by the butt of a rifle, and no one knows what is in their heads”*, Vitalii recalls.³⁴⁸

In May, the man and other illegal prisoners were transferred to the Slovyansk City Police Department. There, he was no longer forced to clean, but now he had to distribute food twice a day. Vitalii was held in the Police Department for almost a month. He was released as part of a prisoner exchange.

348
Interview C--1, June 20, 2016.

349
Article 1 of the Council of Europe’s
Convention on Action against
Trafficking in Human Beings,
May 16, 2005.

350
Further information about the
inhumane conditions of detentions
of civilians is available in the report:
Misto, z yakoho pochalasya viyna: na
holovnu rol’ pryznacheno...[The City
Where the War Began: the Lead Role
is Assigned to...], https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Slov2_10.pdf.

“I DUG TRENCHES AND MADE DUGOUTS”

The militants did not hesitate to “lend” illegal prisoners as labor forces. Digging trenches, cleaning places of incarceration, toilets, and building barricades—this and other demanding work types required labor resources, which the militants lacked. In the case discussed below, the “DPR” groups disregarded both fundamental human rights and the established principles of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.³⁴⁹

On May 2, 2014, Ihor traveled by train from Kyiv to Krasnyi Lyman to visit his father and mother. The journey was long: to get to his parents, he had to change trains in Slovyansk. There, he learned that trains and commuter trains that went to Krasny Lyman were suspended. He went to his father’s friend to spend the night and wait for the resumption of traffic. The decision to stay in the city was fatal for him.

Ihor was passing the former SSU building on his way to the friend’s house. Suddenly, a man from the “militia” called for him and asked who he was and where he was going. Ihor was searched, and they ordered him to remove his backpack and empty it.³⁵⁰

“ *The militants decided that I was a spy and came to look for information. They started checking me on social networks,*

*went to my “Vkontakte” profile, and saw a publication about Euromaidan. They decided that I was following the Right Sector and that I was a representative of their main enemy.*³⁵¹

They immediately seized him and tied up his arms, legs, and half of his face with tape so that he could not see where they were taking him. Later, he realized that he was in the basement of the captured SSU building: *“I was taken to the basement and put on the cement floor. Eyes, hands, and feet were tied. I remember that it was freezing, and I was shaking.”*³⁵² He remained in this state for the next two weeks, completely dark and motionless.

On the night of May 21-22, 2014, he was transported to the Slovyansk City Police Department building. In the basement of the building, Ihor and the other prisoners were forced to work. They had to clean rooms after interrogations, toilets, and other parts of the building. According to the man, the militants gathered a group of four or five prisoners to dig trenches and handed them over to other illegal groups, in particular, to the “Russian Orthodox Army” on the front line:

“*Representatives of this illegal armed group came to the Police Department building and took prisoners to dig trenches. Usually, I was taken out for forced labor to two sites. One of them was a summerhouse cooperative, where I was forced to dig a firing position for mortars and build barricades or fences. The second object was in the field. In the field, I dug trenches and made dugouts.*”³⁵³

Ihor was repeatedly forced to dig trenches during attacks between the militants and the Ukrainian military. According to him, during an hour of his work, 10–20 mines flew past him. He and other prisoners lay down on the ground during the attacks and covered their heads with their hands. When the shelling subsided, they got up and continued to dig again. After completing the work, they were transferred back to the IAG “People’s Militia”, which was based in the building of the Slovyansk City Police Department.

Ihor remained in captivity until July 5, 2014. He recalls that during the liberation of the city by the Ukrainian military on the night of July 4–5, 2014, one of the prisoners, a former militant under the call sign “Oligarch”, released all prisoners and reported that all the militants left the building of the Slovyansk City Police Department.

For the IAG, it was advantageous to dispose of prisoners and use their labor to avoid doing dangerous or humiliating work. If a

351
Interview C--20, January 21, 2019.

352
Ibid.

353
Ibid.

prisoner died while digging trenches, no one was responsible. In a sense, the prisoners became a resource used to maintain defense or, at worst, to serve the needs of the “militia”.

“THE DAILY GRIND” OF ILLEGAL PRISONERS

The stories of victims are about hard work and how human dignity can be diminished. The crimes of forced labor and human trafficking in Slovyansk illustrate the consequences of legal arbitrariness that led to people’s expulsion as free labor. To ignore even a small piece of evidence would be wrong.

The previously mentioned cases were by no means the only ones that were often life-threatening. Several respondents confirmed the use of civilian labor to dig trenches, which was practiced in the Slovyansk City Police Department’s building in the last two weeks before the city’s recapture.³⁵⁴ The very fact of digging trenches is a significant danger to human life. Some prisoners were terrified of this work, so they tried to avoid it in various ways. One of the victims saw a man who had to dig trenches simulating knee pain to stay in the cell.³⁵⁵ Moreover, some respondents claim that such work often resulted in deaths because they had to carry it out during bombardment. The prisoners, for example, were taken to dig trenches in the neighborhood of Semenivka where artillery battles were continually going on: *“The City Department was the worst; from there, people were taken to dig trenches in Semenivka, and Ukrainians periodically fired at Semenivka with mortars, tanks, and many ‘workers’ died...”*³⁵⁶

There is much evidence that the militants were looking for free labor in Slovyansk for specific work types. Locals were mostly detained for violating the curfew or other “misconduct”. *“The guys were taken to dig trenches periodically. For digging trenches in Slovyansk, among the locals, some of the ‘less terrible criminals’ were used. They had to work, and then they were freed. They did not take me out, they did not trust me,”*³⁵⁷ says a former illegal prisoner. Locals were often arrested for drinking alcoholic beverages in public or for alcoholized driving. As punishment, vehicles were confiscated, and drivers were forced to dig trenches for up to 10 days as a “correction method”.³⁵⁸

The documented cases of forced labor during illegal detention indicate that there was no element of voluntary work. In armed conflict situations, victims are subjected to servitude because armed groups can threaten and commit them to forced labor. For establishing the fact of forced labor, it is necessary to prove

354

Interview C--17, December 13, 2018;
Interview C--19, June 20, 2016;
Interview C-18, December 25, 2018.

355

Interview C--21, February 25, 2019.

356

Interview C--22, August 14, 2015.

357

Interview C--19, June 20, 2016.

358

Interview C--23, August 22, 2015.

that the victim did not consent to work and was threatened with a penalty for refusal.

Andrii Koval, who was captured for his pro-Ukrainian views, told how he was “voluntarily-forcibly” taken out to clean up and sweep the territory near the barricades. Other interviewees claim that the recruitment took place under threats or explicit knowledge that refusal would make their prison term harder to survive and worsen the warders’ attitude.³⁵⁹

359
Interview C--17, December 13, 2018;
Interview C--18, December 25, 2018;
Interview C--21, February 25, 2019.

360
Interview C--21, February 25, 2019.

Inhumane conditions of detention also affected the “desire” to continue working because most prisoners did not leave their cells or sat in a cold basement without fresh air and communication with the outside world. One of the respondents said that he washed his hands for the first time in a long time during work. Moreover, he became a witness to how several illegal prisoners secretly negotiated with the guards their working conditions in exchange for cigarettes and food.³⁶⁰ Sometimes, the work provided an opportunity to go outside and tell a loved one that they were



Fortifications of the IAG built with the use of forced labor. Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 18, 2014

in prison: “People taken to dig trenches received phones. From one man, the guards forgot to take back such a phone. He brought it to us, and everyone started calling their relatives. I called my mother and told her that I was alive.”³⁶¹ Often, the work was the only way for the prisoners to see the sun, to get enough food, or to find other necessary things outside:

“ We had to work on the territory. On the one hand, this was a compulsion, of course, because we were told to clean up garbage. However, on the other hand, even at that moment, I understood that this should have a positive impact on me, at least psychologically, because I could go outside to have some fresh air.”³⁶²

The victims’ psychological state often deteriorated significantly due to hopelessness and without communication to the outside world. Some prisoners were forced to swear allegiance to the “DPR”. At that time, people were “re-arrested” and forced to work for the militants’ personal needs. Such cases witnessed Viacheslav Yaremko, an entrepreneur illegally arrested in the building of the SSU in Slovyansk:

“ You have no law, no lawyer, no judge [...] you live in an unknown state, in ignorance. You sit there for a day, two, three, you start to go crazy because it is a lot of stress. Thus, people start “to change their shoes” on the move, so they do not have to sit there or work, they start to cooperate with them [...] However, they will not give weapons right away because there were some dubious people of unknown origin detained. They will first send him to do some work, and then they will talk to him again. Then they will be recruiting this person, and only afterward they take in someone.”³⁶³

Cooking and distributing food was another type of forced labor in which people in the Slovyansk City Police Department were engaged. Two respondents claimed that they were forced to give food to other detainees.³⁶⁴ While talking to women who worked in the kitchen, one of them learned that they were also not paid for their work: “It meant that they were also forced to work there. That they do not cooperate voluntarily.”³⁶⁵

One of the worst jobs that prisoners were involved in was cleaning up after shooting and torture. Some persons who were illegally

361
Interview C--24, July 12, 2015.

362
Interview C-25, September 19, 2018.

363
Interview C-26, June 25, 2018.

364
Interview C-19, June 20, 2016;
Interview C-21, February 25, 2019.

365
Interview C-21, February 25, 2019.

detained in the Slovyansk City Police Department were forced to clean the premises from blood after torture, particularly Pavlo, a theater director who was captured after trying to convince the locals of the illegality of the insurgency. He stayed in captivity until the Ukrainian government regained control of Slovyansk. The man described how he washed blood in the room where torture took place: *“There were traces of blood on the walls... I mean, there was a washbasin, well, a sink, but at the bottom, everything was paved with concrete and tiles. And there was this sharp corner which was covered in blood.”*³⁶⁶ He also recalled a case when the militants shot another man in his leg and forced him to wash the wound and the floor.

The shootings took place in the building of the SSU on the orders of Girkin (Strelkov).³⁶⁷ The militant’s leader publicly told how, according to the “Stalinist laws”, he shot people in Slovyansk: *“We had a military court, the legislation of 1941, which Stalin introduced. Based on this legislation, we carried out trials, sentenced and executed people... In total, four people were shot during my stay in Slovyansk.”*³⁶⁸ One of the victims told others how he once got to work in this “workplace”. On that day, four people were shot, and the man was forced to remove the corpses and the blood.³⁶⁹ Such forced work can amount to torture because removing dead bodies is a grueling physical job and severe emotional stress for a person who is entirely dependent on the murderers.

INVESTIGATION OF CASES OF FORCED LABOR AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

FORCED LABOR

The State of Ukraine is responsible for any violations of individuals’ rights and freedoms under its jurisdiction, including conducting an effective investigation.³⁷⁰ Therefore, violations of international obligations manifest through public authorities’ inability or unwillingness to investigate and prosecute those accused of forced labor.

Unfortunately, the current legislation and the practice of its application in Ukraine make it impossible to conduct an effective investigation in cases of forced labor during the armed conflict in the Donbas. Although international legal acts ratified by Ukraine prohibit forced labor,³⁷¹ criminal liability is only provided for human trafficking.

366
Ibid.

367
Strielkov: Rozstrily v Slov’iansku provodyly za “stalinskymy zakonamy”, Ukrainska Pravda [Strelkov: Shootings in Slovyansk were carried out according to “Stalinist laws”], January 18, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2m2G3NG>.

368
Hirkin rozpoviv pro rozstrily u Slov’iansku i Putina [Girkin told about the shootings in Slovyansk and Putin], Radio Svoboda, January 20, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2Lc5hT>.

369
Interview C--27, August 22, 2015.

370
Article 1 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950.

371
Article 4 of the 1950 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Article 1 of the Forced Labor Convention No. 29, 1930.

In the context of armed conflicts, forced labor is classified under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine as an element of ill-treatment of prisoners of war and separately as the use of civilians in forced labor. This qualification covers severe violations of IHL while having significant limitations on the investigation and prosecution of criminals, since it applies only in cases of a declared war or any other armed conflict between states as well as in all cases of occupation of an entire territory or parts of the territory by another state, even without armed resistance.³⁷² However, the provisions of the particular part of the Criminal Code of Ukraine do not contain a rule that would cover forced labor in non-international armed conflicts. Therefore, it is difficult to speak about the qualification of forced labor under Article 438 when the nature of the armed conflict in Ukraine is uncertain. The situation is further complicated by the inability of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies to gain access to the temporarily non-controlled territories, where most of the crimes were committed.

³⁷² Article 438 "Violation of the laws and customs of war" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

³⁷³ Regulated by Articles 146 and 146-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

³⁷⁴ Interview C--17, December 13, 2018; Interview C--18, December 25, 2018.

³⁷⁵ Interview C--17, December 13, 2018.

The victims' testimonies illustrate the tendency for law enforcement agencies not to open criminal proceedings and ineffectively investigate forced labor cases on the temporarily non-controlled territories. Investigations are primarily conducted in the context of unlawful deprivation of liberty or kidnapping³⁷³ without additional qualifications. According to two victims of illegal detention in Slovyansk, as of the end of 2018, law enforcement agencies did not open any criminal proceedings under the Criminal Code of Ukraine regarding their involvement in forced labor.³⁷⁴ Proceedings under other articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine were opened. However, both men believe that the investigation of their cases is ineffective: *"The investigation was opened, it is still ongoing, the case is not closed. However, my impression is that there is no investigation. Several other people and I were interviewed, and that was on my initiative."*³⁷⁵

The mentioned cases of forced labor in Slovyansk only further illustrate the systemic problem of inefficiency of investigations into forced labor, in particular, through the improper wording of the article of the Criminal Code of Ukraine on forced labor. There is a need to establish further penalties for forced labor in national legislation in the context of a non-international armed conflict.

The process of investigation of cases of forced labor in the armed conflict zone is incomprehensible for victims because, at the stage of taking statements, law enforcement agencies do not separate this crime. Therefore, victims often do not understand that forced labor is a criminal act under Ukrainian law. Some victims respond to documenters' questions with several sentences and do not give significant importance to forced labor.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

To combat human trafficking, law enforcement agencies should take measures to detect the crime of trafficking in persons, in particular, identifying persons who have suffered from it, as well as identifying individuals or legal entities who are traffickers and bringing the responsible persons to justice.

The Criminal Code of Ukraine contains a separate article on human trafficking.³⁷⁶ However, the authors are not aware of any cases where criminal proceedings were initiated under Article 149 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine in the context of trafficking in persons in illegal places of detention. Usually, in such cases, proceedings are opened under the article on illegal deprivation of liberty or kidnapping.³⁷⁷

When the militants detained Ihor, his aunt immediately turned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the SSU with an official statement about her nephew's kidnapping. In the Solomyanskyi district of the Police Department of Kyiv, this application was registered on May 3, 2014. Later, after his release, Ihor informed the law enforcement authorities that he was transferred for exploitation from one unit to another during his unlawful captivity. However, law enforcement agencies have not opened criminal proceedings under the human trafficking article of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.³⁷⁸ Proceedings were only opened for unleashing and waging an aggressive war against Ukraine by representatives of the Russian government and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation by a group of persons, which resulted in people's death and other serious consequences.³⁷⁹

AFTERWORD

The people whose stories are described above were among the first victims of forced labor and human trafficking on the territories which are not controlled by the Ukrainian government. Based on the analysis of their testimonies and data from open sources, it can be assumed that there were many more victims of forced labor and human trafficking during the capture of Slovyansk. Forced labor in Slovyansk laid the foundation for prisoners' labor in other non-government-controlled parts of the Donbas. In particular, the UN Mission on Human Rights in Ukraine continues to receive evidence about forced labor in illegal places of detention on the territories that the Ukrainian government currently not controls.³⁸⁰

Despite the international characterization of forced labor as a violation of human rights, Ukrainian criminal legislation does

376
Article 149 "Human Trafficking" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

377
Article 146 "Unlawful Deprivation of Liberty or Kidnapping" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

378
Article 149 "Human Trafficking" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

379
Article 437 "Planning, Preparation, Initiation, and Conduction of Aggressive War" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

380
Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, November 16, 2018 - February 15, 2019, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 44, <http://bit.ly/2lCgrah>.

not provide liability for forced labor. The reasons for this include uncertainties with regards to the nature of the armed conflict in the Donbas and the legal qualification of the acts committed, the unwillingness or inability of law enforcement agencies to investigate cases of forced labor, as well as the low awareness of victims of the crime of forced labor.

In the end, the lack of effective investigations leads to the fact that the participants of the IAG, who forced people to work in humiliating and dangerous conditions, avoid responsibility for their actions, and the victims lose the opportunity to restore justice. Due to the lack of access to the territories temporarily not controlled by the Ukrainian government, perpetrators can only be brought to justice by issuing a court decision in absentia. However, there is a possibility to execute such a sentence—it would be expedient to use international warrants and investigations.

Besides, regardless of the investigation of forced labor and human trafficking, victims need additional protection. Ukrainian legislation provides for a mechanism for the socialization of victims of human trafficking.³⁸¹ However, this mechanism is not explicitly intended for victims of human trafficking who have been held in illegal places of detention on non-government-controlled territories. Simultaneously, the procedure for obtaining the status of a victim of human trafficking in Ukraine, as in other countries, is quite complicated.

Therefore, it is necessary not only to change legal provisions by implementing IHL norms but also to carry out information activities both among those who suffer from forced labor and human trafficking in illegal places of detention and among law enforcement officials, to increase their awareness of these crimes.

381

Article 16 of the Law of Ukraine "On Combating Human Trafficking" as of December 9, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2IJRYzK>.



Exit from the SSU basement, a place of unlawful captivity. Photo credit: Mykhailo Reva, July 18, 2014






THE LIMITS OF ABSURDITY AND HUMANITY: ILLEGAL PRISONS

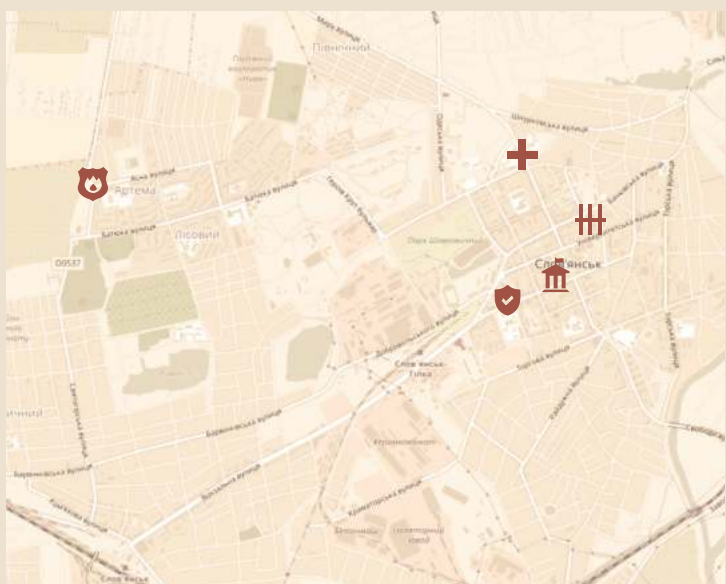
KATERYNA KOTLIAROVA, NATALIYA HRYTSENKO
Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives

Illegal captivity of civilians and military personnel in detention places has become one of the most widespread human rights violations during the armed conflict in the Donbas. Illegal prisons in the self-proclaimed “republics” are considered unofficial, even those adequately equipped to hold individuals. There are no guarantees of legal protection on those territories since control is exercised by the IAG, guided only by their understanding of the law. The legal lawlessness of the militants of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” led to many victims of violence and illegal detainees during the capture of Slovyansk.

This section uses 18 interviews collected by documenters of the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives. They contain testimonies of 15 people who were illegally deprived of their liberty and held by the militants of the self-proclaimed republics during the capture of Slovyansk. The names of some respondents have been changed to preserve anonymity. The testimonies demonstrate the arbitrary nature of the detention and the ill-treatment of prisoners, such as murder, systemic torture, inadequate sanitation, lack of food and medical care, and lack of access to legal remedies or the ability to contact relatives. Detention in illegal prisons in Slovyansk deprived people of any guarantees of protection because they were utterly dependent on the militants. From the testimonies of the victims, illegal places of detention could be identified at the following places:

1. In the premises of the Slovyansk City Department of the State Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) in Donetsk region; address: Karla Marksa Street (now Tsentralna) 32, Slovyansk.

-  Premises of Slovyansk City Department of the State Security Service of Ukraine in Donetsk region
-  Premises of Slovyansk City Council
-  Premises of Slovyansk City Hospital (former City Hospital in the name of Lenin)
-  Premises of Fire Station №38
-  Temporary detention facility of the Slovyansk City Police Department



Illegal places of detention during the capture of Slovyansk in 2014 (based on testimonies of victims and witnesses)

2. In the premises of the Slovyansk City Department of the Directorate General of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in Donetsk region (City Police Department) with a temporary detention facility (TDF); address: Lenina Street (now Universytetska) 30, Slovyansk.

3. In the premises of Slovyansk City Council; address: Zhovtnevoi Revolutsii Square (now Soborna) 2, Slovyansk.

4. In the premises of the Slovyansk City Hospital (former City Hospital in the name of Lenin); address: Shevchenka Street 40, Slovyansk.

5. In the premises of Fire Station No. 38; address: Yasna Street 44, Slovyansk.³⁸²

The places of detention were controlled by representatives of the “People’s Militia” under Igor Girkin, a citizen of the Russian Federation. Militants with the insignia “Russian Orthodox Army” were also present on the captured SSU Department’s premises in Slovyansk. Locals were usually only involved as staff.

GROUNDS FOR DETENTION

When Slovyansk lived under the militants’ rule, residents were detained for apparent and fictitious regime violations. The city residents always had to carry their passports and show them at the request of armed persons. There was a curfew in place in the city, after which it was better not to go out on the streets.

³⁸² For more information about the prison that operated in the fire department, see the section “The Slavs are paving the way to Rama”.

On April 23, 2014, Serhii Drach was driving a car after 11 pm. He was stopped by armed men who demanded to open the trunk. The driver was indignant: *“Take off your balaclava. You are positioning yourself as a defender, and defenders should not hide their faces. Who are you? I am showing you my documents, here is my passport. And you tell me to open the trunk.”*³⁸³ In response, these unknown persons pointed a loaded weapon at Serhii and detained him.

Civilians were also “arrested” for drinking alcohol in public or inappropriate behavior, the criteria for which were set by the militants. Therefore, residents tried to lay low: while driving through the city, they avoided checkpoints, and some people tried not to leave their homes for days.

Since the beginning of the hostilities, many researchers, journalists, activists, and representatives of the international community went to eastern Ukraine to cover events and study the local population’s problems. They also became targets of aggression from the militants. In April 2014, Lviv journalist Yuriy Leliavskiy got locked-up in Slovyansk. While he was reporting, armed men approached him, took his passport and his phone, put him in a car, and abducted him to the basement of SSU.³⁸⁴ A similar situation occurred with the brothers Yevhen and Hennadii Hapych in Horlivka, Donetsk region. Yevhen, a photojournalist, went with Hennadii to the East to collect material about the Donbas war. The brothers were captured near the building of the local police station when Yevhen took photos. After being interrogated, both were taken to the basement of the SSU building in Slovyansk.³⁸⁵

383
Interview C--22, August 14, 2015, the name is changed.

384
Interview C--28, October 11, 2016.

385
Interview C--29, July 13, 2015.

386
Interview C--30, August 27, 2015.

Sometimes, the IAG got help from locals who passed information about the whereabouts of pro-Ukrainian activists or citizens who did not support the “new government”. At the end of March, Russian journalists filmed a local woman and her destroyed house. The woman blamed the Ukrainian troops for the attacks and thanked the militants for their “help”. Her neighbor, the pensioner Viktor Ivanovych, denied any guilt of the Ukrainian military. Later, he was detained by the militants: *“A machine gunner came up to me and told me to go with him. He had a Russian accent. They took me to compile a report as if they caught a live Bandera with a beard. Then they put me against the wall, tied me with tape, taped my eyes, and dragged me to the basement.”*³⁸⁶

At about the same time, neighbors on one of the streets discussed the recent “referendum” and the possibility of a dialogue with the new government in Kyiv. Some supported the pro-Russian IAG, and some were against them. When a man with a bandaged arm exclaimed *“Glory To Ukraine!”*, the woman from the house next door,

387
Interview C--31, December 14, 2018,
the name is changed.

Alia, was filming and started a fight with him. Neighbor Hryhorii³⁸⁷ tried to separate the two. The conflict subsided, and the residents dispersed. The next day, militants broke into Hryhorii's house. They hit him on the legs, threw him to the ground, and showed him a scratched photo: the photo showed a person with a bandaged hand and half of Hryhorii's face. It was a photo taken by his neighbor Alia. *"All right, get ready. Take warm clothes with you. You will sit in the basement"*, the armed men commanded. There were five of them: all in camouflage and no locals. Four of them had machine guns aimed at the poor man. Their chief by the nickname "Hus" had a gun.

Oleksandr Gusev
Call signs: "Hus", "Dyki", "Batia"³⁸⁸
Citizenship: Russian Federation
Contractor of the Armed Forces of the
Russian Federation (m/u 90600)
Born: December 12, 1968
Killed on August 23, 2014 during
the fighting in Lysyche village,
Amvrosiivskiy district, Donetsk region.
Lived in Simferopol.³⁸⁹

Source: Myrotvorets center,
<http://bit.ly/2U97UZM>



388
Pavshie bojcy opolchenija (Elenovka,
Logvinovo, Novoazovsk) [Fallen
militia fighters (Elenovka, Logvinovo,
Novoazovsk)], Yadocent, May 11, 2016,
<http://bit.ly/2Pe2FsE>.

389
General list of Russian military and
voluntary mercenaries killed in the
Donbas, established from open sources
as of June 1, 2018, project "Cargo-200
from Ukraine to Russia", August 1,
2018, <http://bit.ly/2KUvMNU>.

390
Interview C--32, November 11, 2018,
the name is changed.

Anyone could be accused of collaborating with the "Right Sector", helping the Ukrainian military, or activities of sabotage.

An entrepreneur from Kramatorsk, Viacheslav Yaremko, regularly went to Slovyansk to run some errands.³⁹⁰ He had a car with Donetsk license plates, so his car's verification at the checkpoints happened relatively quickly. Once, he was crossing the "BZS" checkpoint next to a gas station. Before the war, there was a control point of the state automobile inspection. The militants decided to check the car carefully. There was a blue and yellow football scarf in his trunk with the words "UEFA EURO 2012" and a flashlight. For this, the IAG fighters accused Yaremko of espionage and sabotage activities for the Right Sector. Six armed individuals began to threaten him with firearms. Viacheslav was blindfolded, his hands were tied, and militants were kicking him. After that, the man was put in his car's back seat and taken to the basement of the SSU building. Oleksandr Kovaliov, nicknamed "Rys", was in charge of that checkpoint.



Oleksandr Kovaliov
Call sign: "Rys"
Born: November 19, 1959
Citizenship: Ukraine
Before the war, he lived in Slovyansk, Donetsk region.³⁹¹

Source: footage from Andrii Borodulin's YouTube channel about the "BZS" checkpoint at the entrance to Slovyansk, April 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/323mrZt>

After the capture of the city, also persecution for religious beliefs began. A parishioner of the Protestant Church, Heorhii Honcharenko, took residents of the city to the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government. Because he expressed a pro-Ukrainian position, he and another volunteer were detained at a checkpoint when they evacuated Slovyansk residents.

“ I was immediately told to get out from behind the steering wheel and stand aside. They told me that they have a BOL on me. We were put to stand facing the wall. Three other young boys were sitting there since last night, tied up and handcuffed. A sentry was placed next to us, watching us.³⁹²

Oleksandr Yankovenko is a resident of Slovyansk.³⁹³ Since the beginning of the war, he led a team that searched for dead Ukrainian soldiers. At the end of May, he was captured by five armed men near his home: At gunpoint, Oleksandr was put in a car and taken to the basement. “All in camouflage. Three of them were Caucasian, who did not speak Russian at all, had beards. Another one was local. Insignia: on the one hand “Novorosiiia”, on the other—the St. George's ribbon, sewn in a triangle”, the victim describes the kidnapers. Civilians were also kidnapped in other cities of the Donetsk region and taken to illegal prisons in Slovyansk.

Another category of detainees were supporters of the “DPR” but who refused to take part in the activities of the IAG for various reasons:

“ Together with us, there was a kid taken captive who saw Strelkov's appeal on YouTube about the need to save the Donbas. He came to Slovyansk to join the “militia”. However,

391
Kovaliov Oleksandr Yuriiiovych,
Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/2ZkQPRF>.

392
Interview C--33, August 22, 2015, the name is changed.

393
Interview C--32, November 11, 2018, the name is changed.

*a week later, he got desperate and went to the bus station to buy a return ticket. There, he was captured by a patrol of the militia.*³⁹⁴

Some militants themselves were also detained, for example, for drunkenness, violations of their internal rules, and specific crimes.

During the detention, mobile phones, photo and video equipment, money, cars etc. were taken from the victims. Sometimes the property was later returned, sometimes not. The robbery reached the point of absurdity when shoes and clothes were taken away before the victims being sent to cold basements. The journalist Hapych sat in the basements of the SSU for more than two days without shoes: *“They took my shoes off in the car and took them away. It was obvious that the guards liked them.”*³⁹⁵ Viacheslav Yaremko also recalled that an expensive jacket was stolen from him during the detention. When they sent him to the basement, they gave him an old sweatshirt.³⁹⁶

394
Interview C--22, August 14, 2015.

395
Interview C--34, July 13, 2015.

396
Interview C--32, November 11, 2018.

397
Kto postroil zdanie SBU v Slavjanske
[Who built the SSU building in
Slovjansk], Delovoy Slovjansk,
February 12, 2015,
<http://bit.ly/2Zi9L48>.

THE BUILDING OF THE SECURITY SERVICE OF UKRAINE

The building of the SSU in Slovjansk was built from red bricks in the mid-19th century on a particular order of Count Ribotpierre. The walls of the building were made with intervals, which provided good sound insulation. Since the building was built on karst soil, the basement under the building is a natural refrigerator—it is a large dry room in which the temperature is always maintained at 14-16°C.

During Soviet times, the house served as a repository of library funds and, later, the city’s archive. At a later date, the NKVD and KGB offices were located in the building. After Ukraine gained independence, it became the city directorate of the SSU.³⁹⁷

The building of the Security Service of Ukraine after the recapture of Slovjansk, July 5, 2014. Source: footage from a video on Vice News YouTube channel, <http://bit.ly/2Zi9T2X>



During the capture of Slovyansk by IAG, the building was used to hold illegally detained persons. *“Near the SSU, the road was blocked on both sides. We parked the car and went on foot to the SSU through the gate. Military people were sitting there: not ours, armed people,”* Hryhorii said.³⁹⁸

Militants guarded the entrance to the courtyard. They took notes and searched every newly arrived hostage. *“At the entrance, they recorded our data. There I gave my real name because I realized that something was off. I gave my data. When they were recording, they named the articles under which I was charged: insulting officials, violating the curfew, not recognizing their authority,”* says Serhii Drach.³⁹⁹

Respondents reported that, before entering the territory of the SSU or in the courtyard, their faces were wrapped with tape (sometimes covered with paper), caps were pulled over their eyes, and bags were put on their heads. *“They took me out of the car and put me among the sandbags. They said ‘the Hutsuls arrived’ because of my registration in western Ukraine. They put a bag on my head. I started choking, to which one replied: ‘Wait, it’s too early,’”* recalls journalist Hapych.⁴⁰⁰

They also tied hands with tape. The victims had to hold out in this condition for several days. Their wrists and fingers swelled, and their heads began to ache. They were often disoriented, not knowing who was next to them. Therefore, their descriptions of the place of detention may differ slightly.

As a rule, illegal prisoners were kept on the ground floor in the basement of the SSU. To get to the cellars, one had to go through the main gate to the courtyard. From the rear of the building, there were doors, and behind them were stairs leading to the basements and to the “Head of the Military Police of the DPR” Viktor Anosov (call sign “Nos”) on the second floor. He was in charge of this illegal prison.



Anosov Viktor Yuriiiovych
Call Sign: “Nos”
Born: October 31, 1965
Former employee of the Security Service of Ukraine
Citizenship: Ukraine, RF.⁴⁰¹

Source: Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/2L8kmVw>

398
Interview C--31, December 14, 2018.

399
Interview C--22, August 14, 2015.

400
Interview C--34, July 13, 2015.

401
Viktor Anosov, Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/30AQc3F>.



Layout of the SSU Department in Slovyansk, where IAG held victims captive in 2014 (according to a sketch by Volodymyr Lynko and other interviewees' testimonies).

There were three rooms in the basement where the hostages were held: a small one, a medium-sized one, and a large room.

The small room had no windows, only wooden doors, stone walls, and tile floors. Its size was 2x2 meters. It was damp and cold (about 15°C). The ceiling light flickered all the time. The room was used for short-term maintenance. Inside were two stumps on which the detainees were sitting. The victims said that there were eight of them at one night. Miserable, they had to huddle and lie on the cold tiles.

The medium-sized room was slightly larger than the previous one. The conditions were the same. The floor had rags, a box, and a piece of cardboard on which the victims were sitting.

The small room in the basement of the Security Service of Ukraine in Slovyansk used to hold illegal prisoners in 2014. Source: footage from a video on the YouTube channel of Vice News, <http://bit.ly/2Z19T2X>



THE LARGE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT

The large room with an area of about 20 square meters was located on the ground floor. Its three windows overlooked the courtyard where the guards were stationed. One of the windows was covered with plywood. The window was rarely opened, and there was almost no fresh air in the cell. Like the other cells, it was cold and damp. However, there were advantages: *“Because there were more people in this room, it was warmer. When it got freezing, we did pushups, squats, and somehow tried to improve our leisure time”*, said Leliavskiy.⁴⁰²

Until the end of April, there were no more than ten people in the room, and in May—up to twenty illegal prisoners at the same time. New prisoners were brought continuously in and out. Among them were locals, pro-Ukrainian activists, militants, and supporters of the “DPR”, soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, journalists, Ukrainian civil servants, Protestants, curfew violators, accidental victims of the IAG, etc. The authors have no information on whether women were held in this room. There is evidence that they were kept in other rooms. Among them, in particular, was Irma Krat, an activist of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv.

New arrivals were brought into the room with blindfolded eyes, tied hands and feet, and placed on a bench. They could have spent several days in this state. They were not allowed to do anything, not even lie down, remove the blindfold, or speak.

Those who had been in the basement for a long time or had passed the ordeal of torture were called “privileged”. Pavlo Yurov will always remember May 2, 2014. At that time, several hostages were released, and six people were left in the basement. In the evening, the militants ordered the prisoners to sit along the wall and promised to shoot them. *“To me, it felt like it took about 4 hours (waiting for the execution). It was already dawning. No one came in or said anything. Slowly we began to crawl. Nothing was happening. No one was guarding us. It was unclear what was going on”*, Pavlo says. After that night, he and the others became “privileged”. They were already allowed to lie down, move around, and communicate quietly. Thus, a particular hierarchy was formed among the hostages.⁴⁰³

Volodymyr Lynko told how the victims arranged their sleeping places: *“We were given two wooden doors. We organized a mattress for ourselves: the guards gave us some old smelly clothes”*. Those who were less fortunate lay on empty bags, while others sat on a bench for several days.⁴⁰⁴ No one was allowed to fall asleep. So the prisoners took shifts and woke the sleepers when the guards came in.

402
Interview C--28, October 11, 2016.

403
Interview C--37, February 25, 2019.

404
Interview C--36, September 19, 2018,
the name is changed.

The prisoners received food twice a day. In general, respondents noted that the food was decent. As a rule, they were given porridge, canned vegetables, and bread, less often—meat. Tea and water were also brought, and food came in plastic dishes. Cigarettes were also provided. Relatives of some prisoners passed food parcels. Because the captives were tied up, they had to adapt to eating: *“I had to eat it all with my hands tied. They put food on a bench, I sat on the floor, and ate”*, Pavlo Yurov said. Those who were accused of helping the Ukrainian military and sabotage activities could be starved for several days.

At first, the victims went to the toilet, which was located out of doors. However, as the number of prisoners increased since the beginning of May, the guards rarely let them out. *“Sometimes we asked to go to the toilet, just to go outside”*, recalls Andrii Koval.⁴⁰⁵ The hostages now had to relieve themselves in a five-liter bottle that stood in the corner of their room. Accordingly, there was a smell in the room. Sometimes the prisoners were beaten so severely that they could not even go to the toilet properly: *“One guy was beaten up badly, and he wet himself for a very long time. It really stank. They let him go somewhere to wash, threw away half of his clothes, and gave him other trousers”*, recalls Vitalii Kovalchuk.⁴⁰⁶

In the basements of the SSU, hostages were held until the second half of May 2014.⁴⁰⁷ In May, the prisoners were transferred to prison cells. It was not possible to establish the reasons for this decision. Perhaps, it could have been due to the intensification of hostilities around the city. However, there is evidence of short-term detentions (from few hours to two days) of civilians in the SSU in early June.

THE SSU COURTYARD

The yard occupied about 10 acres and had outbuildings, a garage, a toilet, and barricades. In the courtyard, the militants set up a table with a chair. Sometimes detainees were interrogated there.

Near the main building, there was a separate room, a basement with an extension, in which food was stored. Hostages were held there and interrogated. Volodymyr Lynko visited this place: *“I spent several hours here, in another room, in the basement, with closed eyes and tied hands.”*⁴⁰⁸

The garage also served as a place of interrogation and torture. In the courtyard of the SSU, Pavlo Yurov had his eyes blindfolded with tape, hands shackled, nose broken; he was dragged to the garage. He was accused of espionage because of a text about the

405

Interview C--24, July 12, 2015, the name is changed.

406

Interview C--38, June 20, 2016.

407

To learn more about about the inhumane detention conditions for civilians, please see: Misto, z yakoho pochalasya viyna: na holovnu rol' pryznacheno...[The City Where the War Began: the Lead Role is Assigned to...], https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Slov2_10.pdf.

408

Interview C--36, September 19, 2018.

Revolution of Dignity found on his laptop, as well as for having a foreign passport.

“ *The pattern was question-accusation-statement: you are hit, asked, and threatened to be killed. They were putting a gun to your head, pouring gasoline on your head, putting a knife to your ear and threaten to cut it off, set you on fire, shooting you. And they told me to tell the whole truth.*⁴⁰⁹

He was also threatened with rape and ordered to take off his pants. When the man refused, he was offered a “last cigarette” and mocked: “*Do you want to go to the ‘Heavenly Hundred’ [‘Heavenly Hundred’ refers to the participants killed during Euromaidan – ed.]? Death is near.*”⁴¹⁰

409
Interview C--37, February 25, 2019.

410
Ibid.

The yard was crowded, with about 50 people daily. Members of combat units and the leadership of the insurgents came there.

Vitalii Kovalchuk often saw fighters in the courtyard of the SSU:

“ *When I first saw those “militia” people, everyone was dressed as best they could. Someone had an old shotgun, a sawn-off shotgun, and rags of all sorts: hunters and extreme sports fans gathered there. At the beginning of May, I was taken outside. I looked at them: most people wore a “cyfra” uniform with these little green pixels. I once talked to the guards, and they let it slip that they did not receive a salary. Like, the other day, they should have been paid, but they did not. Of course, I pretended not to hear, but it was all clear.*

On the street, something was always cleaned and washed by locals who worked for the militants. Underage girls and boys came there to help, too.

THE GUARDS OF THE HOSTAGES

The illegally detained people were under surveillance around the clock. The chief guard was Roma, nicknamed “Beria”. He was responsible for the prisoners. Before the war, he served in the police, so he was familiar with his task. Respondents described him as follows: a man about 30 years old (as of 2014), 170 cm tall, muscular body, brown hair. He was from Volnovakha, Donetsk region, and he wore a “Dubok” military uniform.

The guards watched the prisoners, took them to the toilet and brought them food. Sometimes, they also protected the unlawfully detained persons from members of other combat units. There were cases when pro-Russian militants ran into the basement, shouting,

“My brother was murdered!” or “My commander was killed!” The sentries had to rescue the prisoners from the lynching mob.

The permanent guards were Dima, Vania, and for some time, Vova, who was nicknamed “Odessa”. They took shifts for 6 to 8 hours. Roma “Beria” also took over shifts.

Security guard Vania was 35–40 years old and originally from Slovyansk. He was tall with light hair and a receding hairline. According to the respondents, Vania was friendlier to the hostages than the others: he brought them tea and took them to the toilet when asked. *“Vania brought me a book; I read it in the evenings. But I understood that if someone sees through the window that I am reading, they could come in and beat me”*, said Vitalii Kovalchuk.

Dima was a local from Slovyansk, too. He was tall, dark-haired, 45–50 years old, wearing a beard and a prosthetic eye. The unlawfully detained called him “Che Guevara” among themselves. He went on the night shift and did not allow the prisoners to sleep. The victims said that Dima repeatedly used a police baton and a stun gun on them. Dima was not only a guard; he also participated in interrogations and torture.

Vova, nicknamed “Odessa”, regularly beat prisoners, sometimes with a police baton. There were cases when he stabbed a knife in the palm of their hands. “Odessa” was taking drugs. He beat Pavlo Yurov for several hours in a row:

“ *I thought he was on amphetamine—it took about 3–4 hours, and his passion remained the same. He was not getting tired, and he did not want to sleep. And he was talking shit I cannot reproduce. Some of these Nazi propaganda ideas, formulated in an irrational, inconsistent way.*⁴¹¹

411
Interview C--37, February 25, 2019.

The barricaded entrance to the SSU building, author unknown, July 2014 (after the recapture of the city)



INTERROGATIONS

Among the militants, there was a specific division into “castes”. The guards, usually locals, were on the lowest level and only followed orders. On the highest level were so-called “specialists”, i.e., Russian officers or Ukrainian officers who betrayed their oaths, and other authorities. Among the “specialists” were specific gradations: one of the “higher specialists” was Igor Girkin (call signs “Igor Strelkov”, “Pervyy”). The “lower specialists” conducted interrogations, recruited hostages to join the “DPR” and made certain decisions. Some of them participated in the torture of prisoners.

When the “specialists” entered the basement, the prisoners were ordered to shut their eyes. Almost all of them wore balaclavas during the contact with the captives. Therefore, it is difficult to identify them from the respondents’ statements.

Interrogations were conducted in the large and the small cells, but also outside and in the garage. Most of the prisoners were blindfolded and had their hands tied. During interrogation, the “investigators” kept log entries, but not always.

During one interrogation, two members of the All-Ukrainian Svoboda Association, Kravchuk and Koval, were told that the “militia” would try them under Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the USSR for counter-revolutionary activities. To “beat out” information, they cut their fingers, pierced their skin with an awl, and beat them with a police baton, particularly on the head and knees. Roma (“Beria”) was in charge of that interrogation.

Kravchuk and Koval were asked what their religion was.⁴¹² Other respondents also reported that the interrogators had a specific interest in the faith of the captives. For them, religion was obviously of great importance.

During another interrogation, the local Evangelist Heorhii Honcharenko was accused of helping the Ukrainian army. He had to endure severe beatings and a simulated execution:

“ Attempts to explain that I did not see the Right Sector were useless. It was an interrogation in the style of 1937. That is, you are being asked, and only the person who asked the question knows the correct answer. Anything else you say will be wrong. You are trying to tell people the truth, but they are not interested in the truth. They are only interested in what they have got into their heads. Then another man came up, standing on the side. He started swearing at me. Then, he grabbed a machine gun, pulled the shutter, put the barrel to my back, and pulled the trigger.⁴¹³

412
Interview C-39, June 29, 2015;
Interview C-24, July 12, 2015, the
name is changed.

413
Interview C-40, August 22, 2015.

Usually, illegally detained were forced to write “confessions” about being Ukrainian saboteurs, members of the Right Sector, etc.

The journalist Hapych, for example, was persuaded to admit that he was a spy and a member of the UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian National Assembly–Ukrainian People’s Self-Defense”).⁴¹⁴ He stayed with his hands tied and blindfolded for almost three days. During that time, there were five interrogations, all of them with the use of force. Yevhen Hapych did not want to admit what he did not belong to and what he did not do. He was starved and thirsty, threatened with a knife.⁴¹⁵

414
Official website of the organization
UNA-UNSO,
<http://unso.in.ua/uk/organization>.

415
Interview C-34, July 13, 2015.

416
Interview C-36, August 19, 2018, the
name is changed.

417
Interview C-38, June 20, 2016.

TORTURE AND EXECUTION

On April 17, 2014, Volodymyr Lynko⁴¹⁶, Vitalii Kovalchuk, Yurii Popravka, Yurii Diakovskiy, and Volodymyr Rybak were sitting in the large room in the basement of the SSU. Diakovskiy was hurt and felt terrible. Around eleven o’clock in the evening, up to ten militants ran into the cell and began to beat the prisoners severely. Vitalii Kovalchuk thought that the militants were given the command to attack: *“At first they did not ask anything, they just took their anger out. An hour and a half passed, maybe two. It is hard to remember because every second felt like an eternity.”*⁴¹⁷ One of these militants turned out to be Dmytro Moskalyk (nickname “Dima Kharkivskiy”).

Dmytro Serhiiiovych Moskalyk
(nickname “Dima Kharkivskiy”)
Born on July 15, 1994,
in Kharkiv, Ukraine
Wanted by the Ministry of Internal
Affairs of Ukraine



Source: Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/2ZkRFhh>

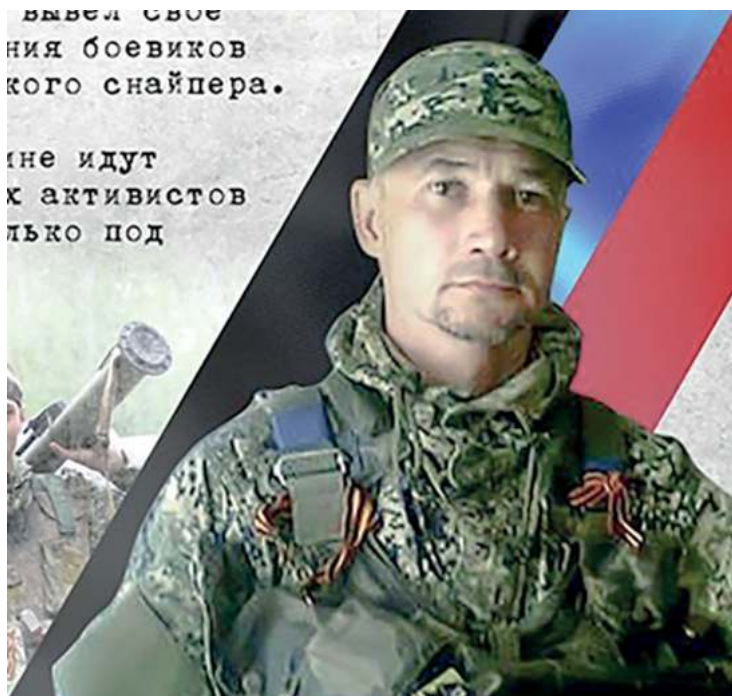
After the beating, the victims were taken one by one to the small room where they were tortured. First, Volodymyr Rybak and an unknown man were brought in. They were interrogated for several hours and finally beaten to death. Vitalii Kovalchuk heard their last gasps. *“An hour later, Yurii Popravka was taken to them. An awl pierced his cheek. They ran a knife through his leg, then bandaged it up because they were afraid it would bleed out. They took him out, and he said, ‘There are already two dead men lying there. The same is going to happen to us.’”* The torture and murders were committed by militants nicknamed “Edvard Pitserskyi”, “Kleshch”, “Balu” and two unknown people. “Edvard Pitserskyi” was a so-called “specialist”. He was one of the few who did not hide his face.

“Kleshch” was a young man, 18–23 years old, average height, slim build.

“Balu” was a man of 45–50 years, 175 cm tall, large build.

Yurii Diakovskiy was taken to the room next. They punctured his body and cut off his finger. The sound of a drill-like instrument was audible. Meanwhile, in the big room, they continued to abuse Vitalii Kovalchuk and Volodymyr Lynko.⁴¹⁸ They put a garbage bag on Vitalii’s head. When he was losing consciousness, he was revived and tortured again.

418
Interview C--36, September 19, 2018.



“Edvard Pitserskyi”
From Kharkiv
About 40 y/o (in 2014)

Source: pikabu.ru fragment from a 2014 poster, <http://bit.ly/30C285g>

At about 3 am (already on April 18), a priest came down to the basement. He suggested that the men take a cross and pray. Kovalchuk was the only one who took a cross and prayed aloud during the torture. He frequently remembers the morning of that day and the words of his friends:

“ *I could smell the morning. I was very tired. They stopped hitting us. Yurii Popravka said that we would all be killed, and he was glad that we were together. We told each other that we were happy to be together, and we were sorry if anything was wrong. We sat back to back with each other because that way, it hurt a little less.*

After midnight on April 19, Popravka, Diakovskiyi, and Kovalchuk were taken outside and put in a UAZ car. They put two garbage bags with the bodies of Rybak and another victim in the car, too. At the last moment, before leaving, the militants pulled Vitalii Kovalchuk out of the car and took him to the basement. Later, Vitalii learned that a few days later, the mutilated bodies of Yurii Popravka, Yurii Diakovskiyi, and Volodymyr Rybak were found in the river Kazenny Torets near the village Raihorodok, Donetsk region.

For a long time, Vitalii could not understand why his friends were killed, and he was not. He even asked the guard Vania about it. He said that there was someone who decided the fate of the captives. This “someone” saved the life of Kovalchuk because he prayed.

USING PRISONERS FOR PROPAGANDA

After reports about the disappearance of the journalist Yevhen Hapych appeared in the media, they stopped torturing him. The militants became concerned about such publicity of their victim and were deciding how to fix the situation:

“ *And then a man came down to me, took off the bandage from my eyes, gave me a piece of paper and a pen. He told me to write down why I was detained. I said I would not write anything because I could not physically write. He said that I should give an interview to a Russian TV channel and that my freedom would depend on this.⁴¹⁹*

⁴¹⁹
Interview C--34, July 13, 2015.

Hapych later identified the man as Ruslan Mykeda from Kolomyia. He was trialed for collaborating with terrorists, but he turned out to be mentally ill. He was diagnosed with paranoia and schizophrenia and was admitted for compulsory psychiatric treatment.⁴²⁰

420

Yevhenii Hapych: Psykhiatrychne likuvannia, yake pryznaczyly separatystu z Kolomyi, tse – hirshe, nizh tiurma [Yevhen Hapych: Psychiatric treatment given to a separatist from Kolomyia is worse than prison], Vikna, March 5, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2KXvS6Y>.



Ruslan Mykeda
Citizenship: Ukraine
Place of residence: Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivsk region
An accomplice of the militants; participated in interrogations of illegally detained in captured Slovyansk

Source: Facebook profile photo, <http://bit.ly/2Zsyazb>

Yevhen Hapych gave the interview together with another hostage, Simon Ostrovsky, an American journalist, who was also held hostage in the SSU building. They were forced to tell lies on a video camera. This so-called “reportage” was conducted by the Russian journalist Yevhen Popov.



Popov Yevhen Heorhiiiovych
Date of birth: September 11, 1978
Citizenship: Russian Federation
Place of residence: Moscow

Officially banned from entering Ukraine due to journalistic activities aimed at propaganda against Ukraine.

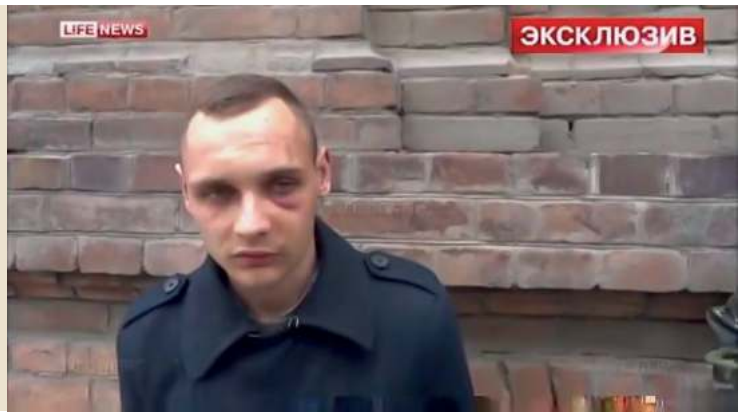
Source: Myrotvorets Center, <http://bit.ly/2NudDld>

421
Interview C--38, June 20, 2016.

After severe torture, Vitalii Kovalchuk was also forced to give interviews to the Russian media. The night before, he had to write a speech all night. The militants did not like what he wrote, so the text was changed three or four times: *“I was writing what I was told. That we came with two bags of weapons, that we were trained in Poland. I have made some things up. The longer you write, the longer they do not touch you.”*⁴²¹

The interview took place on April 20, 2014. On the video posted online, there are traces of assault on Vitalii, and one can hear him being forced to say certain things.

Screenshot from the interview of hostage Vitalii Kovalchuk to Russian media near the SSU building in Slovyansk, April 20, 2014. Source: YouTube video from Artem Lobasov, <http://bit.ly/2ZpfbFL>.



RECRUITMENT OF HOSTAGES

Representatives of the pro-Russian IAG talked to the hostages that Ukraine was weak and had not developed as a state. At the same time, they were told about the “glorious future” of “Novorossiya” and tried to convince them to take their side. The hostages were recruited during interrogations and in private conversations. They were offered to cooperate and go to war on the side of the IAG.

422
Interview C--32, November 11, 2018,
the name is changed.

Viacheslav Yaremko⁴²² was persuaded to cooperate during the interrogation. His interrogators used the fact that the prisoner was a Donetsk region resident and that he would be “one of them”. The fighters explained why it was necessary to support the “DPR”. This conversation lasted about half an hour.

One evening, the hostages were allowed to lift the blindfold from their eyes. “Babai” and a few others were present. They said to the hostages that Ukraine did not exist and started polemically to talk about “Little Russia”.



Mozhaiev Oleksandr Ivanovych
Call Sign: “Babai”
Date of birth: September 21, 1977
Citizenship: Russian Federation.
Residence: Krasnodar Krai, Belorechensk
Wanted by the SSU⁴²³

Source: Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/33U3jz3>

The militants attempted to recruit Vitalii Kovalchuk to fight on the side of pro-Russian formations several times. “Roma, the one [guard – ed.], came to the cell and said that the leadership has agreed that you should fight for us, or we will have to shoot you when we retreat. I said three or four times that I would not fight for them.”⁴²⁴

423
Mozhaiev Oleksandr Ivanovych, Source: Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/2PdtCNj>.

424
Interview C-38, June 20, 2016.



Gogiashvili Teimuraz Vasylyovych
Call Sign: “Gogi”
Citizenship: Georgia
Date of birth: March 30, 1979
Fighter of the IAG “Sparta”.

He was held hostage in an illegal prison in Slovyansk during the 2014 insurgency.

Militants in the photo: on the left, Arsen Pavlov (nickname “Motorola”), on the right Teimuraz Gogiashvili. Source: Myrotvorets Center,
<http://bit.ly/2ZvAZ6B>

In the basement of the SSU, along with other hostages, some wanted to join the ranks of the “militia”. When a new contender agreed to fight, he could be thrown first “to the basement”. Perhaps this was done to test the candidate’s readiness, perhaps for other reasons. One of these hostages was Teimuraz Gogiashvili. He was not tortured. The so-called “specialists” asked the guards how he behaved. Later, Gogiashvili had fought in the “Sparta” division and was the personal guard of the field commander nicknamed “Motorola”.⁴²⁵

425
“Gogi – gruzinskij zjat’ “DNR”, [“Gogi – a Georgian son-in-law of the “DPR”], Inform Napalm, February 25, 2015,
<http://bit.ly/2U99F9k>.

THE TEMPORARY DETENTION FACILITY

The illegal municipal authorities used the building of the City Police Department for its intended purpose. Two young men on duty guarded the City Department, answered the phone, opened the cells, and brought food to the prisoners. Some respondents noted that they were not those local police officers who worked there before. However, they performed the functions of a law enforcement agency.

Until May 21, all hostages were transferred from the SSU to the city's Temporary Detention Facility (TDF). Simultaneously, Vania and Roma ("Beria") were also transferred to the TDF, and the latter remained in charge of the guards. Dima and "Odessa" went to the front line.

In the TDF, there were four other guards:

- Sasha, nicknamed "Molodoy";
- Artem who became a security guard in June; according to the description of one of the respondents, he was "a 35–40 years old local and not very smart, as he could not understand simple things";
- a man nicknamed "Kon" (later renamed "Myron") who was tall and originally from Slovyansk.

One victim who was brought to the police station was the evangelist Oleksii Ruzhenko. The men inside the building prepared a "police report" and then a protocol of the seizure of his personal belongings. *"The most interesting thing is that [my] money was counted twice, by me and by him. The amount was written down and I signed the paper. They tied the money and placed it in a bag... Then they put [me] in a cell and said: 'The investigators will come and sort everything out.'"*⁴²⁶

A person who called himself an "investigator" began questioning Oleksii with the words: "You Baptists, you have sold out to the Americans." He did not give his name, only his nickname "Advokat". Another "investigator" nicknamed "Shchyt" was a local who had served in the law enforcement agencies of Slovyansk before the capture of the city. Together they drew up an interrogation report on some form.

According to the respondents' description, "Advokat" was a tall man (about 180 cm) and about 50 years old (in 2014). He had brown hair, was wearing camouflage, and said that he came from Donetsk and worked in the Prosecutor's Office before the war.

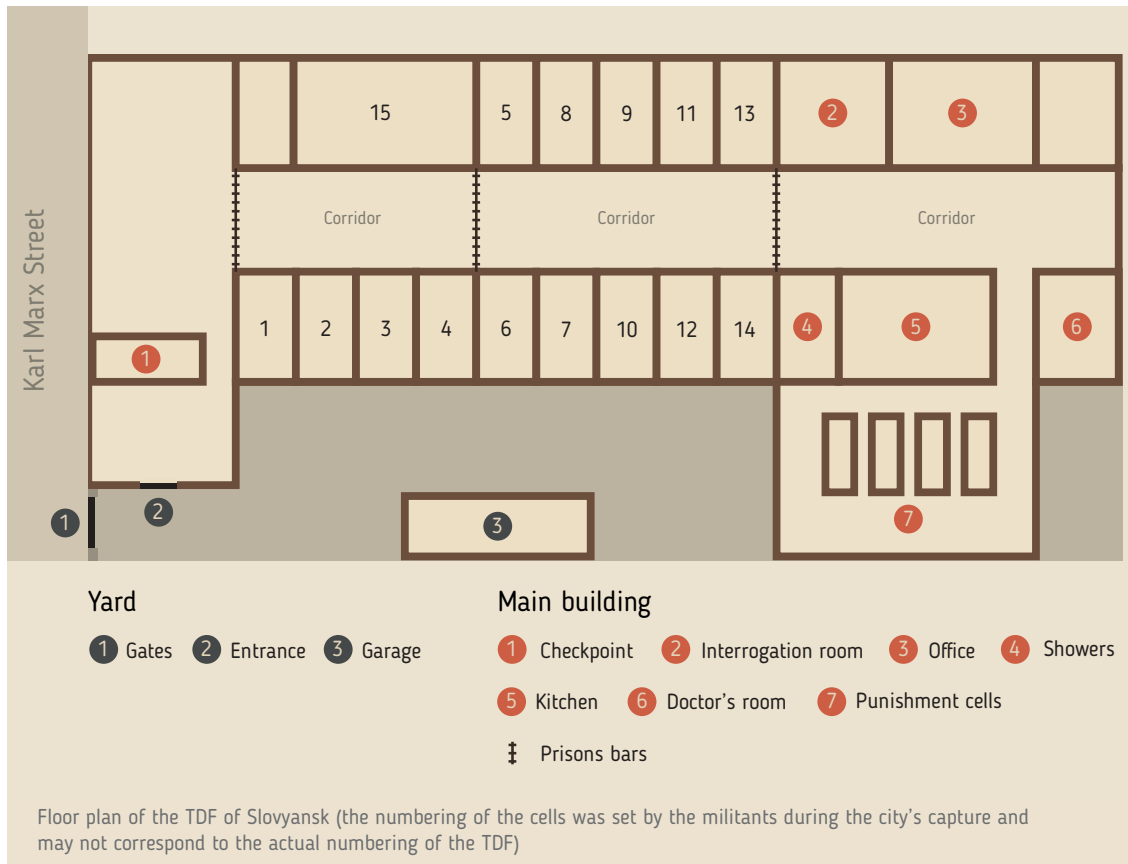
In the TDF premises, the militants held so-called "tribunals" where they sentenced the victims to death.⁴²⁷ This "tribunal" was conducted by "Nos", "Advokat" and others. During the "trial", the food hatches in the cells were closed so that the hostages could not see what was happening outside.

426

Interview C-41, August 14, 2015, the name is changed.

427

Slov'iansk. Vtrachenyi rik rozsliduvannia zlochyniv Hirkina [Slovyansk. A lost year of investigation of Girkin's crimes], Lawyer Yevheniia Zakrevska, July 8, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2U60o10>.



About 40 people were held in the isolation unit at the same time. There were doors near the duty officer's post and behind them a long corridor along which the cells were located. The numbering of the cells was inconsistent. Prisoners were grouped in a certain way: women, militants, mentally ill people, clergies, members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and "political" detainees (also those transferred from the SSU). Among them was even a Russian journalist. In a separate large cell sat those who were in custody at the moment when the militants took over the city.

Cell No. 1 was a women's cell. At first, a woman with a suspected mental disorder occupied it. The militants accused her of spying. She tore the pillow, smashed everything in the cell, and screamed. For this, the guards taped her legs, hands, eyes, and her mouth. She was removed somewhere, and, afterward, three women were kept in the cell. Women sat in other cells as well.

There was an insane man in one of the cells. After the militants seized the Psychiatric Hospital in Semenivka, he was put into the TDF.

In cell No. 2, the militant "Rys" (the one who commanded the checkpoint near the gas station) was held separately from May to

July. His subordinates were sitting in cell No. 4. They were released earlier.

Several other members of the IAG were sitting in the guardhouse. One of them was Vania, a guard who was punished for one day.

In cell No. 7 Valentyn Rybachuk, the ex-Mayor of Slovyansk, was held.

Three members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were sitting in cell No. 5. Later, three other soldiers were held in cell No. 6.

The hostages were sleeping on bunks with mattresses and blankets. Those who got here from the basements of the SSU slept for a long time, and they were not touched. Each cell had a toilet and a washbasin, windows (those that faced the courtyard were painted white), and small ventilation windows that could be opened.

There were power outages in the city, and since the second half of June there was almost no electricity. However, in the City Police Department, a generator was running.

The hostages themselves distributed the food; they were called “balanders” (a word from the prison vocabulary). There were two meals every day: small portions of borscht or a soup and a second course. Cigarettes were also handed out.

Strict prohibitions were not applied. However, the hostages could not go outside. They were isolated from the outside world and deprived of their freedom.

On July 4, 2014, when the militants left the city, the hostages in the cells got out of isolation on their own.

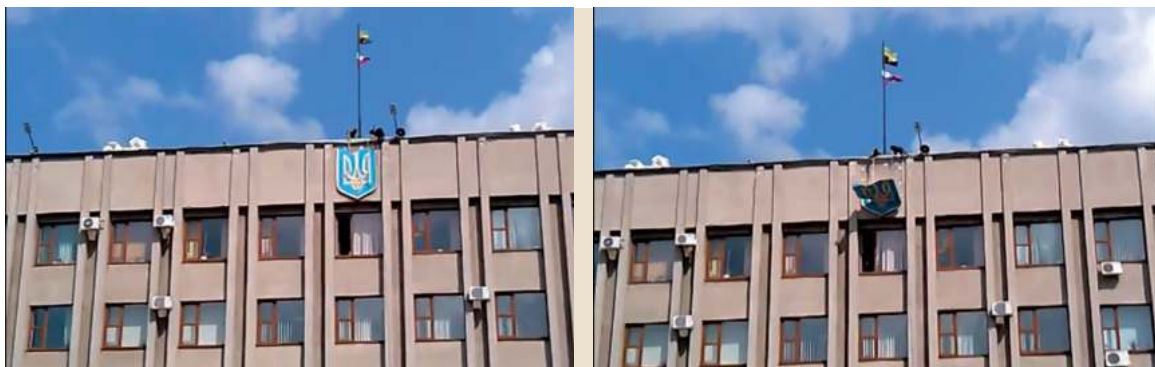
THE CITY COUNCIL BUILDING

The authors are not aware of the number of people who were imprisoned in the premises of the City Council during the capture of the city. However, according to victims and witnesses, it can be assumed that prisoners were held for short and long periods, in different places and conditions.

In April 2014, journalist Volodymyr Lynko was in the east of the country as part of a monitoring mission where he and his colleagues recorded the seizure of administrative buildings by militants. On April 14–15, the journalist was in Slovyansk:

“ At that time, the City Council was captured. There were people in military uniforms with weapons. And if the day before there were up to 10 people, then, on the 15th, they began to equip firing points on the roof. They already started barricading the entrance to the City Council building with sandbags. More people in military uniforms with weapons were walking around the city. I reported about all this.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸
Interview C--36, September 19, 2018,
the name is changed.



Removal of the state symbols of Ukraine from the building of Slovyansk City Council on April 15, 2014. Source: video on Sergey Lefter's YouTube channel, <http://bit.ly/2PgAo4R>

The journalist was standing in a crowd of people in front of the City Council and describing the events when he was approached by unknown armed men in masks who ordered him to go to the building entrance. Volodymyr was taken under guard, his journalist ID was taken away, and he was brought to the security station on the left of the entrance. They started questioning him, searched his personal belongings, and ordered him to tell them his notebook's password. When they found some footage on the computer and phone, the militants accused the journalist of espionage. Volodymyr was immediately told that he was "a drug addict and a right-winger." His hands were tied behind his back with plastic ties, his eyes were taped up, and he was taken to the second floor, where he sat until the morning of April 16.

Viacheslav Ponomariov exercised control over the captured building.⁴²⁹ He decided to take Volodymyr to the basement of the SSU, where he beat the prisoner.

According to Volodymyr, the premises of the City Council and the SSU were seized by various groups that were scattered and did not coordinate actions among themselves. The explanations that he gave to Ponomariov's people, as well as his personal belongings and documents, did not get into the SSU. "The information that was in the City Council, was not transmitted in any way to the people in the SSU. These were two different groups of people".

ROOMS 303 AND 309

Nelia Shtepa, the Mayor of Slovyansk, was also in custody in the City Council building starting April 17. For a long time, from July 2014 to April 2019, she was under investigation by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. The ex-Mayor was released from custody in September 2017 under house arrest when the preventive measure term expired.⁴³⁰ The trial over Shtepa is ongoing.

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For more information on Viacheslav Ponomariov see the section "Not Our Guys".

430

Har'kovskij sud otpustil separatistku Shtepu pod domashnij arest [Kharkiv court released separatist Shtepa under house arrest], Glavred, September 20, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Nh4SjY>.

Shtepa's detention meant that the militants did not let her out of her own office, room No. 303. The doors were open, but the entrance was guarded: one man with a machine gun stood outside, the other one—inside the office. When citizens learned that Shtepa was being held in custody, they went to the square in front of the City Council with demands to release the Mayor. Those residents were immediately approached by unknown people with guns who ordered them to leave the square.⁴³¹ Denis Bihunov recalls how one of the gunmen came to the crowd with the words: *"Here I am. We are here to protect you from the fascists, and you are gathering here! Do not do this! We are all here for one thing—for the people."*⁴³²

431
Separatisty Slavjanska: Shtepa nahoditsja u nas, ona podala v otstavku [Separatists of Slovyansk: Shtepa is with us, she has resigned], UNIAN, April 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2KXx4Hu>.

432
Interview C-42, December 14, 2018.

433
Ibid.

434
Ibid.

435
Interview C-43, January 24, 2019.

After the city's recapture, it was possible to determine the conditions in which Shtepa was held from April 17 to July 5. Her office windows were blocked with furniture; the women's dresses were still in the closet. There was a bed with neat and clean linen, and next to it was a tub of water to maintain hygiene.⁴³³

Other prisoners were illegally held in office No. 309, where Bihunov used to work. Back in May, he tried to get into his office, but the door was locked. However, he heard that someone was inside. A moment later, a man with a machine gun ran up to him and shouted: *"Why are you trying to get to the hostages?!"* After that, Denis quickly walked away. After returning to the city on July 6, 2014, Bihunov entered the office through a broken door. He found a towel tied with tape, which has preserved the shape of a human face. There were two dirty mattresses on the floor and stacked furniture covering the windows. A calendar on the wall marked the date of July 4.⁴³⁴

Pyrotechnics from Kharkiv, who cleared the recaptured Slovyansk of explosives in 2014, also worked in the City Council's premises. One of them, Ihor Ovcharuk, noted that the basement of the building was completely empty:

*"There was nothing in the room where the prisoners were held. Only bare walls. If the rooms where the 'DPR' guys stayed had laid out trestle beds, the other room had a bare floor, only cement, and that is it."*⁴³⁵

THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL AID TO THE HOSTAGES

The hostages in the SSU building sat for weeks in basements without daylight or the ability to maintain hygiene. They were systematically beaten and tortured. Some of the victims had injuries, bruises, and their ribs and limbs were damaged. They needed medical assistance, but it was almost not provided, although medical workers occasionally visited the illegal detention places.

Pavlo Yurov spent half a month in the dungeons of the SSU. He saw the medical staff twice. Once, when his nose was broken during torture. A nurse came and put tampons in his nostrils to stop the blood from flowing. There was no further medication, no further help.

One day, a 15–16-year-old boy was thrown into the basement. Vova “Odessa” began to interrogate and beat the teenager. He threatened the boy and put him on the cold and wet floor of the basement. The boy had an epileptic attack. The militants called a nurse, who helped him. After that incident, the boy was released from captivity.

Both Ukrainian media and Russian propagandists discussed the story of pilot Yevhen Krasnokutskyi. On May 2, 2014, the militants shot down two Ukrainian helicopters near Slovyansk. Only captain Krasnokutskyi survived. He jumped out of the helicopter with a parachute. On the ground, the militants surrounded him, shot him in his leg, beat him, and left him lying in the grass. After some time, another group of militants found the pilot and took the wounded man to the SSU building.⁴³⁶ In one video, filmed by Russian propagandists,⁴³⁷ the militant “Rys” and his subordinates brought Yevhen to the courtyard of the SSU, where a medic helped the victim.

Later, Yevhen was taken to the City Hospital named after Lenin (in 2015, the hospital was renamed to the City Clinical Hospital of Slovyansk), where he had surgery. The local residents Svitlana Ivanchenko⁴³⁸ and Tetyana Manik found out about captain Krasnokutskyi and started visiting him. They had to pass by armed militants who were on duty at the entrance to the ward. Svitlana described how Yevhen looked when she saw him for the first time: his face was blue and swollen from beatings, one leg stretched out. It was essential to get the wounded out of the captured city as soon as possible.

On the one hand, the militants could damage him. On the other hand, the hospital did not have the means and opportunities to treat Yevhen properly; there was a risk of losing his leg. The two women gave him a phone so that he could call his family. Together with other concerned residents, the women came up with a plan to evacuate him, but the captain refused: *“No way. I am a prisoner of war. You may be shot!”* According to Svitlana, he did not want anyone to get hurt.

Yevhen was still taken out of Slovyansk. On May 5, his parents arrived from Kharkiv. The wounded man was brought to the first floor, then he was put in a car, and left. On that day, there was intense fighting, and the militants were busy so that the family

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Istorii z ATO. Pilot iz Kolomyi kholche myrnoho neba [Stories from the ATO. The pilot from Kolomyia wants a peaceful sky], Reporter, April 3, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2zpEEUZ>.

437

Slavjansk. Obstrel vertoleta. Sbityj letchik, kotorogo brosil svoi zhe [Slovyansk. The shelling of a helicopter. Downed pilot was abandoned by his comrades], Kazbek TV, May 2, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Peir76>.

438

Interview C-44, November 3, 2018.

could pass the checkpoints. On the evening of May 5, captain Krasnokutskyi was brought to the Kharkiv Military Hospital.

There were dozens of hostages on the TDF premises. Since June, medical examinations have been regularly carried out here. Once a week in the morning, a nurse came and asked everyone if everything was all right. If necessary, she gave painkillers or other medications. Pavlo Yurov recalled a case when one night there were heavy attacks. From the noise and stress, the woman from cell No. 1 had a hypertensive crisis. After that incident, a nurse periodically visited her and took care of her.

THE LIFE OF VICTIMS AFTER THEIR RELEASE

The majority of respondents admitted having health problems after their release, mostly injuries they received during detention. Due to the irregular diet, constant stress, and extended stays in a cold, dark basement, the former prisoners developed stomach diseases and problems with other organs.

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Interview C--30, August 27, 2015.

440
Interview C--38, June 20, 2016.

The pensioner Viktor Ivanovych, who was kept in the basement of the SSU for two days, admitted: *"I then began to have pneumonia. It barely got better. My lungs still hurt. A hernia was pinched, and my wife brought me to the hospital."*⁴³⁹

Traumatic experiences have long-term consequences, not only physical but also psychological. Some diseases appear later. The victims complain that they are being treated at their own expense, and they have not received any help from the Ukrainian State.

"I did some tests at my own expense. I did an x-ray: there were cracks, but nothing was seriously broken. I treated my kidneys and my liver. I went to a psychologist several times", said Vitalii Kovalchuk.⁴⁴⁰

Professional psychological rehabilitation, which victims need, is not provided. According to Andrii Koval, who went to the hospital for help, the doctor held one conversation with him and prescribed him a course of vitamins.

PROHIBITION OF UNLAWFUL CAPTIVITY AND ILL-TREATMENT

Several international and Ukrainian legal acts prohibit illegal detention, which occurred during the capture of Slovyansk. The respondents mentioned in this chapter were civilians. They neither took a direct part in the fighting nor carried any weapons. They

were detained as a result of baseless accusations or their political views.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 (including the Additional Protocols) contain provisions requiring states to criminalize acts defined as severe violations of these conventions. For such violations, a person may be held liable by any State Party to the Conventions, regardless of where they occurred. Such grave violations include, among others, premeditated murder, torture or inhuman treatment, and unlawful imprisonment.⁴⁴¹

Violations of the Geneva conventions can also be considered crimes under the Rome Statute of the ICC, the first and only permanent international court. The court independently determines the circle of persons who have committed the gravest crimes of concern to the international community. Ukraine has not ratified the Rome Statute, but it recognizes the ICC's jurisdiction concerning crimes committed on the territory of Ukraine since February 20, 2014. Murder, torture, and inhuman treatment occurring in places illegal detention are also covered by the Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute and may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, respectively.

Most detention places were not adapted even for the temporary detention of illegally imprisoned persons and did not meet minimum standards of incarceration. According to the standards of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECnHR)⁴⁴² and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the very fact of persons staying in such conditions is cruel and degrading treatment.

The ECnHR states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrariness arrest or detention, except as permitted by Article 5 of the ECnHR.⁴⁴³ One of these grounds is a conviction by a competent court. For example, the ECtHR has found that a sentence of imprisonment if imposed without due process of law and after a long period of time is not considered "lawful" and is not imposed "according to the procedure stipulated by law".⁴⁴⁴ Another relevant provision in this context is Article 3 of the Convention, which prohibits torture or inhuman or degrading treatment. In its decisions, the ECtHR often draws attention to the fact that improper conditions of detention constitute a violation of this article.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, in one of the cases, the court found a violation of Article 3 in connection with overcrowding of cells and unsanitary conditions, which negatively affected the prisoner's health.⁴⁴⁶ There are, for example, specific standards of living space for detainees. The recommended minimum area standard for single-person occupancy is four square meters per person in investigation cells and seven square meters per person in police stations' cells. The lack of space for the individuals provides

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Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (IV Geneva Convention); Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I) of June 8, 1977; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), of June 8, 1977.

442

More commonly known as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

443

Article 5 (a-f, Article 5, paragraph 1) of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

444

ECtHR decision in *Ilașcu and Others V. Moldova and Russia*, application No. 48787/99, item 462, July 8, 2004.

445

ECtHR decision in *Modârcă V. Moldova*, application No. 14437/05, PP. 60-69, August 10, 2007.

446

ECtHR decision in *Kalashnikov V. Russia*, application No. 47095/99, PP. 92-103, October 15, 2002.

serious grounds to believe that there has been a violation of the Convention.⁴⁴⁷

The Criminal Code of Ukraine, among other things, provides for liability for the activities of the IAG, as well as for unlawful deprivation of liberty and ill-treatment.⁴⁴⁸ Contrary to the norms of Ukrainian law, the “DPR” militants in Slovyansk systematically committed physical and psychological violence against people in illegal prisons. In Slovyansk, the militants did not follow IHL or international human rights law. Upon analysis of their actions, it seems that their goal was not only to obtain information in any way during interrogations but also to morally humiliate and harm the spirit of the people they were illegally detaining.

INVESTIGATIONS OF ILLEGAL DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY

As a State Party to the Geneva Conventions, Ukraine is responsible for violations of the rights of persons under its jurisdiction, in particular for conducting effective investigations of crimes committed on its territory.⁴⁴⁹ During the consideration of individual cases, the ECtHR uses the concept of effective control to decide which state is responsible for human rights violations on a particular territory. This may be a state that has been deprived of effective control over its territory or another state that exercises authority over such territory. Since Russia does not openly recognize its factual control over the captured territories in eastern Ukraine, the ECtHR will determine in future cases who exercises “effective control”⁴⁵⁰ over these territories and, therefore, who is responsible for human rights violations.

However, Ukraine’s obligations do not disappear and do not cease to exist. The ECtHR has established that even in the absence of effective control over its territory, a state can still have “a positive obligation under Article 1 of the Convention to take the diplomatic, economic, judicial or other measures that were in their power to take and that were in accordance with international law to secure to the applicants the rights guaranteed by the Convention.”⁴⁵¹ Moreover, there are specific standards for effectively investigating cases, such as murder, torture, and ill-treatment. According to these requirements, the investigation must be independent, impartial, and subject to public scrutiny, and the competent authorities must act with exemplary care and timeliness.⁴⁵²

One of the main problems of bringing participants of the illegal armed forces in Ukraine to criminal liability is that they are located

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Minimum standards of good conduct: analysis of national and international experience: a practical guide, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2L9Fbjm>.

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Primarily, such crimes are classified according to: Article 115 “Premeditated Murder”, Article 121 “Intentional Grievous Bodily Harm”, Article 122 “Intentional Moderate Bodily Harm”, Article 126 “Beatings and Torture”, Article 127 “Torture”, Article 129 “Threat of Murder”, Article 146 “Unlawful Deprivation of Liberty or Kidnapping”, Article 146-1 “Enforced Disappearance”, Article 147 “Hostage-taking”, Article 258 “Terrorist Act”, Article 258-3 “Creation of a Terrorist Group or Organization”, Article 433 “Violence against the Population in the Area of Military Operations”, Article 438 “Violation of the Laws and Customs of War”, etc.

449

Article 1 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

450

Factsheet – Extra-territorial jurisdiction of States Parties, the European Court of Human Rights, July 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ZssdGr>.

451

ECtHR decision in *Ilașcu and Others V. Moldova and Russia*, application No. 48787/99, PP. 322-331, July 8, 2004.

452

ECtHR, decision in *Muta V. Ukraine*, application No. 37246/06, p. 61, July 31, 2012.

on territories which are currently not controlled by the Government of Ukraine. According to established practice, states must extradite criminals to each other if requested and prosecuted for unlawful acts by competent authorities.⁴⁵³ Sovereign states often use these provisions when extraditing terrorists that are located on their territory. However, the “DPR” and “LPR” are no states, and therefore they are not subjects of international law with full legal personality.

The cases of unlawful detention and deprivation of liberty, murder, bodily injury, torture, and kidnapping mentioned in this section are crimes under the Criminal Code of Ukraine. Ukraine must prosecute the suspects in the commission of such action as efficiently as possible. Therefore, to bring the perpetrators to justice, it is essential to ensure that the victims’ testimonies are recorded properly during the pre-trial investigation.

The research revealed factual information about five injured respondents (out of 15 illegally detained) who applied to law enforcement agencies after their release from illegal detention in Slovyansk. However, they all report low awareness about their cases and the progress of the investigation in general. *“I got a call from the Prosecutor’s Office. There was one call, and they said, ‘Find and send us those who held you there and whom you suspect.’ I said it was their job... It was the only time when we spoke”,* one of the respondents told about the state of the investigation.⁴⁵⁴

One of the main problems is the lack of trust among victims towards the Ukrainian justice system. Some of the respondents deliberately did not apply to law enforcement agencies, and those who gave evidence claim that the crimes committed against them are investigated ineffectively. Consequently, due to the perpetrators’ total impunity, it becomes impossible to restore justice for the victims.

The ineffectiveness of the law enforcement agencies needs to be stressed, too. Some of the victims interviewed do not have full information about the investigation. Others do not believe in the possibility of punishing the perpetrators and, therefore, do not contact law enforcement agencies. Moreover, most of the victims did not receive free medical and psychological assistance.

The main obstacle to the restoration of safety and justice for the victims is the lack of full investigation of the mentioned crimes and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

453

Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons, 1983, and the European Convention on the Extradition of Offenders, 1957.

454

Interview C--37, February 25, 2019.



De-mining in the outskirts of Slovyansk.
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 19, 2014

ONE STEP AWAY FROM DEATH

MINING OF CIVILIAN OBJECTS IN SLOVYANSK

ANDRII MOSKALENKO

Public Committee for the Protection of Constitutional Rights and
Freedoms of Citizens

KATERYNA KOTLIAROVA

Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives

On July 7, 2014, when the “DPR” militants had already left Slovyansk, Ihor⁴⁵⁵ was on his way to a friend who lived near the Regional Psychiatric Hospital located in Semenivka. Until the city’s recapture, one of the headquarters of the IAG was located there.

Traffic was at a standstill at that time, so the man decided to walk.

“*When I was walking along Narvska street towards the Psychiatric Hospital, a wire was stretched in the middle of the road, made of a fishing line, and impossible to notice. I did not see it, so I stumbled over it and fell down. Then there was an explosion nearby, and I lost consciousness for a while. I cannot say how long I was lying there, but I felt pain in my leg, head, and feet when I woke up.*⁴⁵⁶

Ihor looked back and saw only thorn bushes, rocks, and metal chunks in the ground. There was no one around, either.

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The name of the respondent has been changed.

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Interview C--45, December 10, 2018.



The destroyed building of the Psychiatric Hospital, Semenivka.
Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi,
July 19, 2014

“ When I tried to get up, I saw that I could not lift my left leg, and the ground around me was covered in blood. Then I realized that a part of my foot was missing, and I was in shock. I guessed that I had lost much blood and would eventually start to faint. I was already dizzy. I grabbed the remains of my leg off the ground with my hands and began to crawl down the road. I was not able to crawl far from the scene of the explosion. Then I lost consciousness.

Ihor woke up in the Slovyansk Railway Hospital, where a man in a white coat was standing next to him. The doctor said something to him, but he did not hear anything because he was still deaf after the explosion. Later, Ihor realized that he had a concussion. The medic took out a piece of paper with a pen and noted everything that had happened. Ihor was saved by two young men who happened to be nearby. He was in a severe condition at that time: he lost much blood, and one of the two young men agreed to donate his blood for him. The doctor later made the diagnosis that Ihor’s foot had to be amputated.

“ My whole body ached so much that I did not know what to do with myself. I also learned that the doctor had removed a chunk of debris from my body: one of them remained in my shoulder. As time passed, my hearing began to return. I could not imagine how I was going to walk without my foot. The doctors tried to calm me down and provided me with information about prosthetics when I was in the hospital. I knew that my family and I would not have enough money for prosthetics.

Ihor was undergoing treatment and rehabilitation for a long time, and he almost learned to walk again. At first, he felt like a burden to his family because he could not serve himself and earn a living. Today, he continues to undergo rehabilitation.

It is impossible to know the exact number of mine victims in Slovyansk. In June 2019, Vadym Chernysh, former Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons, noted that, according to the Ministry, since the beginning of the armed conflict in the Donbas, at least 977 civilians have been killed by mines and explosive remnants of war, and 1,528 were injured.⁴⁵⁷ Yevhen Kaplin, Head of the humanitarian mission “Proliska”, believes that this data is not accurate: “Unfortunately, in the first years of the conflict, some people were not recorded as having been injured by landmines, and it was sometimes customary to write ‘household trauma’. There are no clear statistics”, Kaplin says.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ “To protect the population and help the victims”, Minister Vadym Chernysh told what MToT is doing in the field of mine action, Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine, June 15, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2m1GNmj>.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

The authors of this section found out that Ukraine does not have a unified state system for accounting for dead and injured civilians during the 2014–2018 military operations, including those affected by mines. Regional state bodies and local self-government bodies of Luhansk and Donetsk regions have different methodological approaches to accounting for war victims or do not keep records at all.⁴⁵⁹

EVERYTHING WAS MINED IN SLOVYANSK, EVEN THE BODIES

The laying of explosives in Slovyansk started at the onset of the capture of the city. Repeatedly, there was information about the mining of administrative buildings, including the SSU, the Prosecutor's Office, the Police Department, and the City Council.⁴⁶⁰ This caused panic—there were rumors that the buildings were being blown up as the IAG were retreating from the city. A soldier of the First National Guard battalion, Pavlo Skshetuskyi, also told in an interview about mined basements in the city where civilians were held.⁴⁶¹ There were also reports that the bridge over the Nyzhni Torets river was mined.⁴⁶²

Residents of the city remember how IAG of the “DPR” mined roads during the capture of the city: *“There were several cases when people were blown upright on the asphalt, a land mine was underneath”*, said Svitlana Miroshnychenko, a resident of Slovyansk.⁴⁶³ She also confirmed that the pro-Russian IAG set up booby traps:

“*They were wearing utility workers' uniforms, allegedly carrying out repair work on the street. They broke the asphalt, put a shell in the hole, and rolled it up again with a roller. They did not care that a child may pass through this place, for example, or that such a mine may not work immediately, but later, in peacetime.*

The militants even mined the corpses of the Ukrainian soldiers—during the fighting for checkpoint No. 1 near Slovyansk, IAG fighters placed grenades under dead AFU soldiers' bodies.⁴⁶⁴

“The fact is that the roads to the city could have still been mined, and not everyone knew which ways have been safe”, the Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayyem stated in a report about the recapture of Slovyansk.⁴⁶⁵ The journalist also described how Ukrainian soldiers checked the City Council. In the conference hall of the building, two boxes with wires were found. The military also found

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Glava MinVOT rasskazal, kak sobirajut dannye o postradavshih ot min na Donbasse [Chief of the Ministry of Defense explained how to collect data on mines victims in the Donbas], Donetskie novosti, June 14, 19, <http://bit.ly/2lJw6oh>.

460

V Slavjanske v zahvachennye federalistami adminzdanija zavozitsja vzryvchatka – MVD [In Slovyansk, explosives are being delivered to the federalist-occupied administrative buildings – Ministry of Internal Affairs], Interfax, May 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/32ZvoUv>.

461

Uchastnik osvobozhdenija Slavjanska: “Uhodja iz goroda, boeviki zaminirovali vseh zalozhnikov”, Fakty [Participant of the liberation of Slovyansk: “Leaving the city, the militants booby-trapped all the hostages”], June 8, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2PtRUkl>.

462

V Slavjanske separatisty zaminirovali most i prikrývajutsja “zhivym shhitom” [In Slovyansk, the separatists have mined a bridge and are taking cover with a human shield. Photo report] Censornet, April 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Wq4aUL>.

463

Meshkanka Slov'ianska: “Teroristy rozbyvaiut asfalt, zakladaiut snariad i znovu zakochuiut kotkom” [A resident of Slovyansk: “the terrorists break the asphalt, lay a shell, and roll it up again with a roller”], segodnya.ua, July 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2m2P8WV>.

464

Terroristy zaminirovali trupy ukraïnskikh soldat na nichitozhennom blokpostu vozle Slavjanska [Terrorists mined the corpses of Ukrainian soldiers at a destroyed checkpoint near Slovyansk], TSN, June 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2MXo7PB>.

465

Slov'iansk. Zvilnennia, Ukraïnska pravda [Slovyansk. Liberation], July 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Pr0W1P>.

a device disguised as a plastic bottle that contained a charge of one kilogram of TNT. “One of the policemen took us to the roof, warning us that there were many mined offices in the building”, recalls Colonel Vlad Voloshyn. He hoisted the Ukrainian flag on the City Council together with his colleagues.⁴⁶⁶

Since July 6, 2014, groups of pyrotechnics of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES) from different regions were sent to Slovyansk.⁴⁶⁷ One of the rescue team workers said that Slovyansk, like other recaptured cities, was filled to the brim with mines, grenades, and shells that the militants left behind in buildings, roads, and fields. The militants mined almost all administrative buildings, as well as the basements of multi-story residential buildings, medical institutions, and even schools.⁴⁶⁸ The SSU building was entangled with such a sleigh tripwire system that it was decided not to clear mines but to blow up its interior.⁴⁶⁹

Only two days after the recapture of Slovyansk, the bomb disposal units managed to defuse 700 mines and dozens of explosive items.⁴⁷⁰ Already on August 28, more than ten thousand explosive items were counted.⁴⁷¹ Ukrainian sappers often encountered OZM–72 anti-personnel barrage mines and tripwires left by the militants in Slovyansk. OZM anti-personnel mines fly up during detonation to a height of 70–80 cm, explode, and hit the victim with hundreds of debris. Stretch marks were often hidden above the head in inconspicuous places. There were also many booby traps disguised as ordinary objects and placed on the floor. At any contact, they detonate.

The SES’s operational headquarters under Colonel Mykola Chechetkin was set up on the Slovyansk City Council’s third floor. They started to work in a broken, looted room with no electricity or telephone connection.

On July 7, 2014, five SES sappers from Kharkiv were among the first to arrive in Slovyansk. Upon entering the city, they were immediately stopped by military personnel with a request to clear the territory near the Slovyansk power plant, where anti-tank mines with remote control wire were found on a bridge.

Such cases were not uncommon in the recaptured city. During the retreat, the militants mined the railway, administrative buildings, roads, and their former positions. The SSU premises, where the headquarters and prisons were located, were also packed with explosives. Iryna Herashchenko, the former Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for the settlement of the situation in the Donbas, also reported that the sappers had to clear about 30 kilometers of railway tracks:

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Chego stoil bojcam ukrainskij flag nad Slavjanskom [What the Ukrainian flag over Slovyansk cost the soldiers], Karachun, July 12, 2019, <http://bit.ly/337VHZ3>.

467

Rescuers of SESU have already completely restored the cities of Slovyansk and Lysychansk destroyed by terrorists, Serhii Bochkovsky, Uryadovyi Portal, September 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2k2GuHj>.

468

Terroristy, uhodja iz Slavjanska, zaminirovali shkoly (video) [Terrorists, mined schools when leaving Slovyansk], Argument, July 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lBxkBY>.

469

Slov’iansk. Zvilenennia, Ukrainska pravda [Slovyansk. Liberation], uly 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2PrOW1P>.

470

SNBO: sapery obezvedili 700 min v Slavjanske [NSDC: field engineers neutralized 700 mines in Slovyansk], LB.ua, July 7, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3b7il7E>.

471

V Slavjanskom rajone posle boevikov obezvrezhenno okolo 10 tys. vzryvoopasnyh predmetov [In Slovyansk district about 10 thousand explosive objects were neutralized after the militants], UNIAN, August 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2l2ojll>.

“The same was with the clearance of ways to the power supply and water supply lines... Now our sappers are working in Slovyansk to create all the prerequisites for the repair teams. Everyday life should be restored there. The most challenging thing is to restore people’s sanity and health. Children were speechless with fear because, for two months, people were killed next to them, mines were blown up, and weapons were used.”⁴⁷²

The operational headquarters received mass requests from residents about the mining of territories and suspicious items. The headquarters collected information about the locations of the IAG: residential buildings, dugouts, and trenches in the fields. “Chechetkin is a professional. He immediately set up capital work: someone here, someone there. And we started working as a mechanism. It was not as chaotic as in the first day,” said Denys Bihunov, a local activist.⁴⁷³ All data were checked, and the bomb squad was going to the scene.

“A week later, there was a wave of information about ammunition and mining,” says Ihor Ovcharuk, Head of the Kharkiv Group of Pyrotechnic and Diving Operations. “People started coming back, and the city was living again. The more people returned, the more information we received. Our sub-division did not rest for the first time until three weeks later: on Saturday when we were given one afternoon off.”⁴⁷⁴

Dozens of sappers from various departments worked in Slovyansk and its environs, including the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, and the State Special Transport Service. The specialists’ first task was to clear power lines, thermal power plants, and water pipes. In a few days, water and electricity supplies were restored, as well as humanitarian aid supplies for the residents of the city.

“Military engineers quickly built bridges near Slovyansk and Kryva Luka, across the river Kazennyi Torets and Siverskyi Donets, restoring transport links in the direction of Kharkiv–Rostov-on-Don. Before the pontoons began to build the bridge at the entrances to the water barrier, the sappers seized 24 explosive items. From now on, the civilian population of many cities and villages in the district can receive humanitarian supplies quickly.”⁴⁷⁵

Ihor Ovcharuk and Andrii Larichkin, two Kharkiv pyrotechnics, had to check 12 kilometers along the water pipeline from the Slovyansk Thermal Power Plant to the village Orikhuvatka. Their team spent

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Iryna Gerashchenko’s Facebook post about the mining of territories and problems of the civilian population of Slovyansk, July 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2m32FY8>.

473

Interview C--42, December 14, 2018.

474

Interview C--43, January 24, 2019.



475

Operational information of the Information-Analytical Center of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (updated), July 11, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2k7gxq6>.

three days exploring the area. To do that, most of the time, they made their way through thickets of young acacia trees. They tore up their clothes and had numerous scratches. In front of Orikhuvatka, there was a water station and a small forest. When the sappers approached it, they saw a pile of abandoned items and clothes left from the militants. As all entrances to the camp were mined, they had to de-mine the whole territory.

476
Interview C--43, January 24, 2019.

Semenivka is a micro-district located on the outskirts of Slovyansk. On the way to Semenivka from Cherevkiivka, there are water channels that supply Slovyansk and the surrounding areas. Also, inside the respective water pumps, sappers found and defused artillery mines that were connected to an electric detonator. *“There were mortar mines. The initiator would be an electric detonator that would cause an explosion of the entire line”*,⁴⁷⁶ Ihor explained.

-  Slovyansk Thermal Power Plant
-  Water pumping station in Orikhuvatka village



Water pumping station in the village Orikhuvatka. Source: Google Maps

These troubles were not the only ones on their route. The sappers moved along the Siverskyi Donets river and examined the water supply and power lines. They came across a car that a landmine had blown up. Inside was the burned body of a man.

477
Interview C--43, January 24, 2019.

*“The land mine was powerful because there was nothing left of the car. The front of the car to the front seats was torn off. Only the back part remained. As it turned out, it was a man: the father was driving with his wife, on the backseat was a small child. The following day, a relative of the deceased came to see me. Only the child survived. It was pure luck that the child was thrown out of the car.”*⁴⁷⁷



On July 3, 2014, a family was blown up by a landmine in Donetsk region: only a girl survived. Source: Podrobnosti TV, <http://bit.ly/2IHgHVI>

After giving first aid, the child was evacuated. The tragedy occurred on July 3, 2014, at 11 am near Kryva Luka, a village in Donetsk region.⁴⁷⁸

After the restoration of electricity and water supply, the sappers began to clear Slovyansk and the surrounding area from explosive substances. The former “headquarters” and bases of the militants had a large number of weapons and explosives. The premises of the Police Department were cleared of dangerous items for three days. *“The entire building, all the cabinets and tables were inspected. Found ammunition and weapons were passed to the SSU”*⁴⁷⁹, the Kharkiv pyrotechnics said. The work in the military enlistment office turned out to be particularly dangerous: an artillery shell hit the ammunition directly, but it did not explode. Therefore, the building could have exploded at any moment.

The militants also used educational institutions to set up strongholds and firing positions. After the city’s recapture, a warehouse with 22 boxes of ammunition was found in the Slovyansk Aviation College. The fighters of the IAG also captured Secondary School No. 4 in Cherevkivka. In one of the rooms, the militants set up a laboratory for making improvised explosive devices. During the school’s inspection, the Ukrainian military found four explosive devices and 500g of plastid for remote detonation.⁴⁸⁰ The Kharkiv pyrotechnics also conducted mine clearance in dugouts near the building.

Some of the locals helped the sappers. Viktor Ivanovych is an older man who decided to stay in Slovyansk during the capture of the city. *“When the ‘DPR’ guys left, I was a member of a team that was demining certain points. At that time, ammunition, shells, grenade*

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Vozle poselka Krivaja Luka na fugase porovalas’ sem’ja: vyzhil tol’ko rebenok [Near the village of Kryva Luka, a family was blown up on a land mine: only a child survived], Podrobnosti TV, July 3, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2IHgHVI>.

479

Interview C--43, January 24, 2019.

480

Terorysty minuiut shkoly i hotuiut provokatsii z vykorystanniam fosfornykh boieprypasiv z Rosii [Terrorists mine schools and prepare provocations using phosphorous ammunition from Russia], July 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ICJWZx>.

Branch of School No. 4 in Cherevkivka where the militants established a stronghold. Photo credit: Kostiantyn Reutskyi, July 18, 2014



*launchers, and rockets were concentrated in several warehouses in the city. The city was blocked*⁴⁸¹, he said.

The pyrotechnics from Kharkiv recall that a local excavator operator agreed to volunteer. The man worked at the Slovyansk Power Plant. When the sappers went on a mission, he followed them on his excavator. *“When we were starting to work, he lifted the bucket in front of his cabin. That was funny. We laughed. I said, ‘Look, we will even take off our helmets so you will not be afraid. Dig, dig!’*⁴⁸², Ovcharuk recalls with a smile.

There were also cases when the locals did not respond with gratitude to their work. In July 2014, the operational headquarters received an appeal about an unexploded projectile from the Smerch multiple rocket launcher systems in a private house near Slovyansk. A group of Kharkiv pyrotechnics went to the site. There, they were met by the spouses of pensioners.

“ — *Good afternoon. Do you have mines here? Some kind of ammunition?*

— *Boys, whose are you?—The couple asked in Russian.*

— *What do you mean by “whose”? Ours, our won—I said.*

— *Ah, you are not “our” people!*

I knew what was coming.

— *What do you mean, “our” or “not our?”—I said.*

— *Where are you from?—The couple asked.*

— *From Kharkiv.*

— *Well, you are “ours” then—the couple was happy.*

— *Well, I come from Khmelnytskyi region.*

Silence in response.

481
Interview C--43, January 24, 2019.

482
Ibid.

— *I understand: you were not waiting for a rescue service; you were waiting for someone else. The ones who put the ammunition in your yard. Maybe we should wait for them to come and take it?*

— *No, no, no! Take it away, please—the pensioners were afraid.*

While performing one of the tasks, Ihor Ovcharuk almost got killed. But he refused to give any details about it.

In general, he sees nothing good in the war. And he tries to find positive things in his dangerous work: He and his team are returning safety to the civilian population.

“ *Whatever the purpose might be, but this is war. I do my job. Someone else does theirs. If I pursue the goal of people’s safety, then someone does not have the same goal. Of course, this is a risk to my life. On the positive side, I was able to do something to make life safer for us. I think this is positive. Thank God, all the people who went with me there returned alive and safe.*⁴⁸³

ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND UKRAINIAN LEGISLATION

According to the requirements of the amended Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices⁴⁸⁴ (hereinafter – the Protocol), the placement of booby traps and other explosive devices is illegal both for members of the IAG and for the Ukrainian military. This Protocol applies both during an international and a non-international armed conflict. If booby traps are still placed on populated areas or near populated objects, the participants of the armed conflict must notify the local population regarding the risk.

The Geneva Conventions for protecting victims of war also provide that parties to the conflict avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas.⁴⁸⁵ According to the Protocol’s provisions, each party to both an international and non-international armed conflict is responsible for all mines, booby traps, and other devices employed by it.⁴⁸⁶ In the future, the parties must demine the territory and eliminate all explosive devices. Furthermore, under any circumstances, it is prohibited to use mines, booby traps, or other devices designed to or capable of causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.

483
Ibid.

484
Article 3 of the amended Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices, <http://bit.ly/2k7HREI>.

485
Article 58 (b) of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva conventions of August 12, 1949, relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I), <http://bit.ly/2k021As>.

486
Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices as amended on May 3, 1996 (Protocol II, as amended on May 3, 1996), <http://bit.ly/2k7HREI>.

Based on IHL, Ukrainian legislation prohibits the use of mines and explosive devices during military operations. The respective norm is regulated by the instruction “On the procedure for the implementation of international humanitarian law in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”.⁴⁸⁷ According to it, it is prohibited to use:

- 1) mines designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons;
- 2) mines that are self-activated;
- 3) mines equipped with a non-exclusion element that can function after the mine has lost its ability to fire, including:

- booby traps;
- any devices or material designed to kill or injure, and which functions unexpectedly when a person disturbs or approaches an apparently harmless object.⁴⁸⁸

In the case of any mine installation which could hit civilians, a notification has to be provided. Exceptions exist where such notifications are not possible due to difficult situations.⁴⁸⁹

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SETTING BOOBY TRAPS

International legal responsibility is provided for violations of IHL regarding the placement of mines, booby traps, and other explosive devices in or near densely populated areas.

The Rome Statute provides for liability for crimes against humanity and war crimes. One type of war crime⁴⁹⁰ is using a civilian or another protected person to protect specific points, areas, or military forces from military operations. Thus, the ICC recognizes the placement of mines and booby traps as a war crime only if it is proven that the conflict is international and the party to the conflict used the civilian population as a shield.⁴⁹¹

Ukrainian legislation also establishes liability for placing mines and booby traps. The CCU criminalizes “*the use of means of warfare prohibited by international law, other violations of the laws or customs of war stipulated by international treaties agreed to be binding by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, as well as giving an order to commit such actions.*”⁴⁹²

487

Paragraph 2(9), Section 1(3) of the Instruction “On the Procedure for Implementing International Humanitarian Law in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”, March 23, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2kuRldf>.

488

Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction, May 18, 2005, <https://bit.ly/31rvGWv>.

489

Paragraph 2, Section III(4) of the Instruction “On the Procedure for Implementing International Humanitarian Law in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”, March 23, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2kuRldf>.

490

Article 8, Paragraph 2, of the Rome Statute (ICC), January 16, 2002, <http://bit.ly/2JCzCJw>.

491

Ibid.

492

Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2KZR9vK>.

VICTIM ASSISTANCE

Today, about 16 thousand square kilometers of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions' territory contain dangerous areas with mines and explosives. In just five years of war, the sappers managed to defuse 430,000 explosive items.⁴⁹³

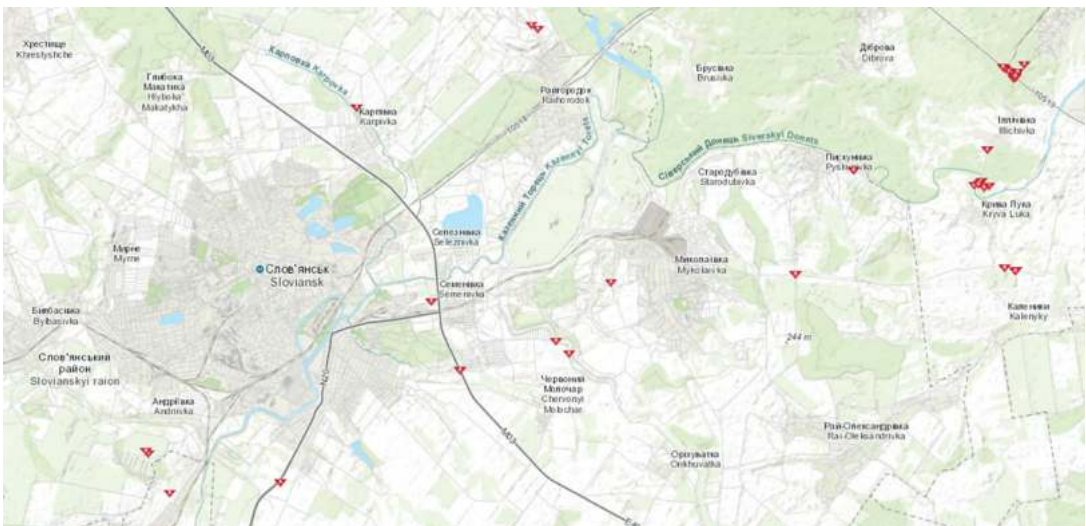
As of February 2021, the interactive map below shows at least 20 locations in the vicinity of Slovyansk and so-called “green zones” (forests, fields) where sappers identified mines and explosive items. The demining problem is still highly relevant, especially when it comes one day to a reintegration of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions that currently are not under the control of the Ukrainian government. A return of control over the whole Donbas resumes the debate on the legal regulation of civilians' protection from mines and other explosive items.

In the light of demining Slovyansk, in January 2019, the Law of Ukraine “On anti-mine activities in Ukraine”⁴⁹⁴ came into force. Before, Ukraine did not have a comprehensive legal framework that would regulate humanitarian demining and anti-mine activities. The law provides for assistance to victims of mines, including medical aid and care, one-time compensations for affected children, and annual recovery aid.

The right to one-time monetary compensation by law applies only to persons under the age of 18. Adults who have been injured by mines and explosive objects have no right to such compensation. Although the state should ensure equal rights and legitimate

493
Since the beginning of hostilities in the East of Ukraine, sappers have checked more than 30 thousand hectares of territories, Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, February 1, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2MvYxz6>.

494
Law of Ukraine “On Anti-Mine Activities in Ukraine”, December 6, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2kmEfij>.



Map of mine contamination in Slovyansk and surrounding areas, February 2021. Source: Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2IGFqJl>

interests of victims of mines and explosive hazards, the state has not yet created equal rights for affected citizens.

Currently, the main problem is the lack of a legislative mechanism for obtaining the status of an individual who has suffered from mines and explosive devices during the armed conflict. Medical and social expert commissions only grant victims the status of individuals with disabilities. Each year, they need to undergo a survey to extend their status. Moreover, expert commissions establish that the cause of disability is a disease, not the explosion of a mine.

Ideally, the legislative mechanism would do the following:

- classify social protection for civilian victims of armed conflict;
- provide for a transparent process for granting status to individuals affected by mines during armed conflict;
- establish a clearly defined system of material compensation that would not pose an excessive burden to the budget of Ukraine.

From our perspective, it is necessary to act according to the logic of the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection”⁴⁹⁵ and separate the victims who received injuries related to the armed conflict into two categories: those who received disabilities, and those who did not.

⁴⁹⁵
Article 4(2) of the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection”, <http://bit.ly/2m2PF1p>.

⁴⁹⁶
Law of Ukraine No. 2203 VIII “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection’ on strengthening social protection of ATO participants, participants of the Revolution of Dignity and families of deceased persons”, November 14, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2m2PHjv>.

The problem of social protection of this category has already been solved by the Law of Ukraine “On amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection’ to strengthen the social protection of ATO participants, participants of the Revolution of Dignity and families of deceased persons”.⁴⁹⁶ The law provides for the establishment of a different legal status of a “disabled war veteran”—including persons who suffered during the demining of ammunition.

As of 2018, the legislation does not contain the term “disabled war veteran”—this term has been replaced for “person with a disability as a result of war”. Persons affected by mines but without the status of persons with disabilities do currently not belong to any of these categories.

AFTERWORD

The absence of a unified state system for recording civilian deaths and injuries caused by mines during the capture of Slovyansk makes it significantly challenging to conduct an objective analysis of the situation. Moreover, it is complicated to establish contacts with victims who have been injured by explosives. Often those victims are severely traumatized, for example, because they have lost a leg or can no longer work. Ihor's story mentioned above shows how quickly the weapons addressed here can change a life completely and forever—in the worst case, they bring death.

The city's capture by illegal armed groups of the "DPR" has still not gone unnoticed. Ukrainian pyrotechnics and private demining missions continue to work on the outskirts of Slovyansk, and there are numerous media reports of deaths and casualties caused by landmines.⁴⁹⁷ In the so-called "green-area" (forests and fields), hundreds of mines have not been cleared yet and pose a massive threat to the civilian population.

For its part, the state should take care of the possibility of providing victims of mines with an appropriate status, which would allow them to receive state assistance and benefits. One of the possible options is to supplement the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection"⁴⁹⁸ with a provision and a legal document that would regulate the granting of the status of a war veteran to civilians who have been injured by mines as a result of the armed conflict. Point 14 should also be added to paragraph 9 to the law: *"Civilians who received injuries from mines related to the armed conflict and did not have disabilities during the occupation of the territory of Ukraine. The procedure for granting the status of a war participant to the above-mentioned persons is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine."*

Besides, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine should adopt a normative act that regulates the procedure for granting the status of a participant of military actions to civilians who have received injuries from mines related to the armed conflict and have not received disabilities.

497

Pod Slavjanskom na mine podorvalsja podrostok [A teenager has been hit by a mine near Slovyansk], nv.ua, March 18, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2tA4DcX>.

498

Article 9 of the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection", <http://bit.ly/2m2PFfp>.



City Clinical Hospital after the recapture of the city.
Source: 6262.com.ua

TRUE TO THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH

MEDICAL AID IN CAPTURED SLOVYANSK

YEVHENIIA BARDIAK

Moloda Prosvita Prykarpattia

After several bombings of Slovyansk residential neighborhoods (Artema, Molochar, Lisnyi, Mashmet, Cherevkiivka, Semenivka, Andriivka, and others), the number of civilian casualties increased dramatically, prompting residents to flee their homes. Among them were also doctors who left the city.

While the situation was relatively stable between April and May, the intensity of attacks increased significantly in June. According to respondents⁴⁹⁹, on June 8, 14, and 20, the influx of wounded exceeded those doctors' capabilities who remained at their jobs. There was a disastrous shortage of surgeons, operating room nurses, and other specialists at the end of the insurgency. It also happened that doctors with a non-surgical profile had to assist in surgeries which often took place during the attacks.

Civilian medics independently sorted out the wounded, communicated with armed militants, and resolved evacuations. Severe cases had to be transported to other hospitals outside of Slovyansk. During the last month of the insurgency, there was no electricity, no water, and no functioning communication network, which significantly complicated the hospitals' work. Moreover, the parties to the conflict ignored IHL norms, according to which health institutions are under superior protection.⁵⁰⁰






During the fighting, medical facilities were attacked as well. Due to damages, the Maternity Hospital and the City Children's Hospital had to close at the end of May. In the City Hospital, the "City Hospital in the name of Lenin" at that time, the traumatology, the

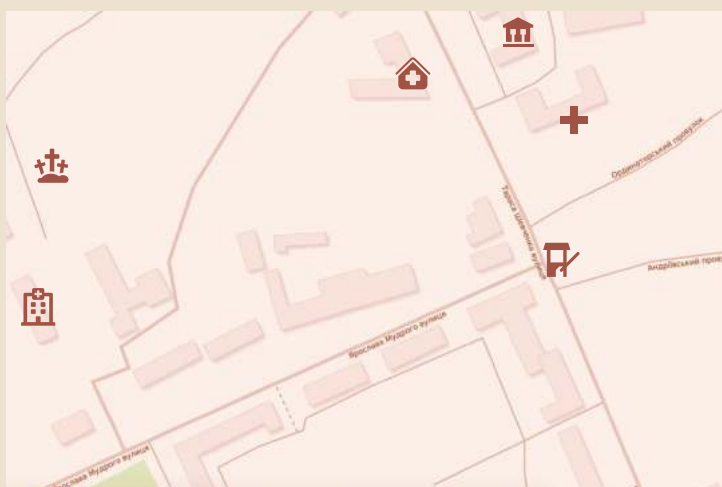
499

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

500

Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, Convention on The Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), of June 8, 1977, <http://bit.ly/2k021As>.

-  Surgery Unit №1 of Slovyansk City Hospital
-  Administration of Slovyansk City Hospital
-  Building of the City Hospital seized by the illegal armed groups
-  City Children’s Hospital
-  Mass grave near the City Children’s Hospital
-  Roadblock of the illegal armed groups



Map of the micro-district in Slovyansk, where the City Hospital and the City Children’s Hospital are located

cardiology, the purulent surgery, and other units had to stop its work, too. They were grouped in one place—in the Surgical Unit No. 1, located in a separate building. Meanwhile, the militants set up their own hospital in the neighboring building of the hospital.

Although the documentation for each patient was kept, not all the papers survived the insurgency. Therefore, there is no official data on the number of injured and dead civilians available today.

This chapter deals with ordinary people who risked their lives to save others. In July and December 2018, as well as in February 2019, the author of this section interviewed ten doctors and one nurse who endured in Slovyansk during the city’s capture. Data from open sources and analyses of international organizations were also used for this report.

It should be stressed that locals called the pro-Russian IAG who were deployed in Slovyansk at that time differently. At first, they were often perceived as “activists”, later they were dubbed “rebels”. This was explained by the fact that the units were formed from the local civilian population, to whom the external military handed out weapons.⁵⁰¹ When the interviews were conducted, different terms and definitions were used: “militants”, “separatists”, “volunteers”, but most often—“rebels”.

⁵⁰¹ Interview C-47, C-48, February 26, 2019.

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE INSURGENCY

Doctors have different memories of the city’s seizure, but all noted that the hospitals were initially not affected. On Monday, April 14, 2014, everyone took their shifts, examined, and treated patients

like every day. The only thing that caught the eye of the City Hospital employees was the construction of a barricade near the hospital at the intersection of the streets of Yaroslava Mudroho and Shevchenka. Later, the militants set up a checkpoint here.

Anatolii Varichenko, Deputy Chief Physician for Medical Work of the City Clinical Hospital, worked as an anesthesiologist at that time. He recalls that it became much more challenging to move around the city after the city's capture: the IAG blocked the roads, and it became impossible to get around by car.⁵⁰²

Mykhailo Andriianov, Deputy Chief Physician for the Examination of Temporary Disabilities, was returning from Makiivka at that time. The medic at first could not enter Slovyansk, as there were checkpoints everywhere.

“ I was in Makiivka with my son. When we returned, we could not get to Slovyansk. The city was surrounded by barricades and checkpoints everywhere, and we were not allowed to enter the city. I know Slovyansk well, so I drove through the “resort” area. There was a small entry point. Later, it was also closed.⁵⁰³

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Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

Later, during intense shelling in June, Mykhailo Andriianov was responsible for organizing medical care in the city, acting as the Chief Physician of the City Clinical Hospital.

From April 14 to the beginning of May, patients with gunshot wounds began to be hospitalized. The Chief of the Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Clinical Hospital of Slovyansk says that he received the first patient with a gunshot wound during the night shift. The ambulance brought a young man aged 21–22 years. The young man was driving in a car with other people, including a child:

“ According to witnesses, the victim did not stop at the checkpoint near the railway station. They started to drive away, so gunfire was opened on them. I am not excusing anyone, but the young man was drunk, and they warned not to drink and drive. Cars of those drivers were taken to the impound lot.⁵⁰⁴

Olena Vintoniak, a nurse of the Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Clinical Hospital, realized that militants captured the city at the beginning of May: “On May 2, I was walking home from my shift, and there were columns of people marching through the city, including our locals. Then we learned that there was an active occupation going on.”⁵⁰⁵

Vintoniak recalls that in early May there were many deaths. On May 5, attacks began on Semenivka, a micro-district on the outskirts of Slovyansk, where the IAG of the “DPR” had installed their positions.⁵⁰⁶ Since then, the City Clinical Hospital has systematically started receiving injured people. First, only the militants, and then also residents of Semenivka.

The closest medical facility to the militants’ location in Semenivka was the otolaryngology department, located separately from the City Clinical Hospital’s main buildings. Wounded militants and, later, civilians were brought there. Doctors provided first aid, put bandages, stopped the bleeding, and then transported patients to the traumatology and surgery.

Mykhailo Buinovskyy, a surgeon and Head of Otolaryngology of the City Clinical Hospital, recalls:

“ *This continued until the end of May. We helped as much as we could. They started making new checkpoints, and our department was cut off from the city on May 27. A few nurses and I took the necessary instruments, several boxes [sterilization containers – ed.], sets for neck surgery, and dressing materials. We then moved to the building of the hospital on Shevchenka Street.*⁵⁰⁷

For the first week, several beds for patients from the otolaryngology department were located in the purulent surgery department. Then, the militants formed their own hospital there. Therefore, the otolaryngology had to move to Surgical Unit No. 1 across the street.

“THERE WAS HOPE THAT NO ONE WOULD SHOOT AT THE HOSPITAL AFTER ALL...”

Considering the norms of IHL, particularly the Geneva Conventions, health care institutions, doctors, patients, and women in labor are under superior protection.⁵⁰⁸ During hostilities, no party to the conflict has the right to attack medical institutions, medical personnel, and civilians who need medical care.

According to the international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch,⁵⁰⁹ in early May, the Psychiatric Hospital in Semenivka micro-district on the outskirts of Slovyansk was seized by militants who placed heavy artillery and mortars on the territory and fired at positions of the Ukrainian army.⁵¹⁰ When the

506

VIDEO. V bol'nicu im. Lenina goroda Slavjanska neobhodimy perevjazochnye materialy, obezbolivajushhie sredstva i drugie medikamenty [VIDEO. The Hospital named after Lenin in Slovyansk requires dressing materials, painkillers, and other medications], Delovoy Slovyansk, May 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lXrP7u>.

507

Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

508

Convention “On the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War”, August 12, 1949, <http://bit.ly/2lAXQLW>.

509

Ukraina: povstantsi pereshkodzhaiut normalnii roboti medychnykh sluzhb [Ukraine: Rebels Hinder The Normal Operation Of Medical Services], Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWoXkN>.

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For more information about attacks on civilian targets, see the section “85 Days under Fire”.



The ruins of the Psychiatric Hospital in Semenivka. July 2018. Photo by Yevheniia Bardiak

threat to patients' life and health became apparent, the hospital administration decided to evacuate the patients. By May 25, all 420 patients were transferred under fire to other psychiatric hospitals.⁵¹¹

On May 30, the building of the City Children's Hospital in Slovyansk was damaged by shelling. The morning bombardment lasted about 15 minutes. As a result, rooms on the first and second floors, the reception unit's roof, and the entrance to the inpatient department were destroyed, and about 100 windows were broken.

*"For the hospital, the trouble started from the moment when at 5 am a shell directly knocked out a hole in the wall. The hospital was 90% windowless. Fortunately, no one was injured"*⁵¹², said the chief physician of the City Children's Hospital Valery Svitlychnyi.

511
Forbidden target: medical facilities under fire, Justice for peace in Donbas Coalition, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2k3D7zW>.

512
Interview C-53, February 14, 2018.



Damaged City Children's Hospital. Source: screenshot from the video on the YouTube channel "Delovoy Slovyansk", <http://bit.ly/2jUaXXQ>

At the time of the attack, there were four children in the hospital, several parents, and one child in intensive care on artificial ventilation. The hospital staff immediately moved everyone to the basement.⁵¹³ From time to time, people from neighboring houses also took shelter from the artillery in the basement. They thought that medical institutions would not be shelled.

513
Consequences of the attack on Slovyansk Children's City Hospital, May 30, YouTube: Delovoy Slovyansk, May 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2jUaXXQ>.

514
Interview C-53, February 14, 2018; Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

515
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018; Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

516
Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

517
Ukraina: povstantsi pereshkodzhaiut normalnii roboti medychnykh sluzhb [Ukraine: Rebels Hinder The Normal Operation Of Medical Services], Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWoXkN>; Interview C-50, February 27, 2019; Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

518
Vo vremja obstrela blokposta terroristov v Slavjanske ubilo medsestru, [During the attack on the terrorist checkpoint in Slovyansk, a nurse was killed], Podrobnosti, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lZ0lpJ>.

After that incident, the Children's Hospital and also a resuscitation unit continued to operate. The parents, however, tried to take their children out, and the surgical care was provided at the nearby located City Clinical Hospital.⁵¹⁴

At the end of May, the Maternity Hospital also suffered and remained almost windowless. In early June, it was closed, and the militants seized the building.⁵¹⁵ "After the Maternity Hospital was closed, a few militants emerged. They were on duty there"⁵¹⁶, recalls Olena Shevchenko, an obstetrician-gynecologist, who was in charge of the gynecological department in the Maternity Hospital before the capture of the city.

On the eve of the Medical Professional's Day on June 14, the City Clinical Hospital also suffered from attacks. Senior operating nurse Tetiana Kurban (Maikova) was going home from her daily duty with her husband when the shelling started. They reached the intersection of Shevchenka and Yaroslava Mudroho streets, where the IAG had established a checkpoint—about 800 meters away from the main entrance to the hospital and 100–200 meters from the Surgical Unit No. 1, where the hospital was located in June.⁵¹⁷ When a shell hit the area, Tetiana and her husband suffered injuries from debris.⁵¹⁸

Olena Vintoniak, a scrub nurse, remembers:

“ The husband was injured. His back was covered in wounds from the wreckage. He underwent surgery and survived.

The location of a former IAG checkpoint at the intersection of Shevchenka and Yaroslava Mudroho streets in 2014. February 2019. Photo by Yevheniia Bardiak



And she had a chip that went through the entire left side of her abdomen from the chest. Blood loss was incompatible with life. However, the doctors fought for her for another 40 minutes on the operating table.⁵¹⁹

At the same time, another shell pierced the roof of the building where the traumatology (3rd floor), the cardiology (2nd floor), and the purulent surgery (1st floor) were located. At the time of the attack, the militants occupied the building on the first floor. The explosion destroyed a significant part of the roof and broke the third floor's ceiling; wards were not damaged.⁵²⁰

“To be honest, there was hope that no one would shoot at the hospital after all. Who fired? Let those who need this information figure it out. In any case, the hospital was hit”⁵²¹, says Arkadii Hlushchenko.

During the capture of Slovyansk, the ambulance station's premises on today's Tsentralna street, which at that time served Slovyansk, the district, and Krasnyi Lyman (since 2016: Lyman), were also damaged. According to the deputy chief physician for medical work, Eleonora Sterliadkina, the roof and facade of the ambulance premises were damaged by shell fragments. On some days, the ambulance dispatchers had to take calls while sitting under a table hiding from attacks.⁵²²

“After several mines got into the ambulance room, the workers were afraid. Some employees took leave without payment and left. It was scary”⁵²³, recalls Mykhailo Andriianov, who in June 2014 performed administrative functions for the city's medical support.

Another hospital affected by the attacks was the Railway Hospital, located near the railway station in Slovyansk. The hospital windows on one side face the Karachun hill, and the Artema micro-district, which was often shelled, on the other.



519
Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Ukraina: povstantsi pereshkodzhaiut normalnii roboti medychnykh sluzhb [Ukraine: rebels hinder normal operation of medical services], Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWoXkN>; Interview C-48, February 26, 2019; Interview C-50, February 27, 2019; YouTube: IVI AzVel, June 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2k3iUdw>.

521
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

522
Uzhasy voennogo Slavjanska glazami vrachej: mesivo vmesto ljudej i mozgi terroristov [Horrors of wartime Slovyansk through the eyes of doctors: a mess instead of people and brains of terrorists], Depo.ua, February 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lXP0b9>.

523
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

The destroyed roof of the Traumatology Unit of the City Clinical Hospital. Source: screenshot from the YouTube channel IVI AzVel, <http://bit.ly/2k3iUdw>

“The blast wave broke our windows twice. The first time we inserted new ones, the second time we covered them with polyethylene”⁵²⁴, says Oleksandr Vozovyk, a surgeon at the Railway Hospital, who was in charge of the clinic at the time.

The head of the health department of Slovyansk City Council, Olena Dzhyh, notes that in total, ten medical institutions of the city were affected by the attacks—somewhere windows were shattered, somewhere the roof or the walls.⁵²⁵

TWO HOSPITALS

Because many medical institutions stopped working and employees left, in June 2014, the Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Hospital became the primary medical institution in Slovyansk.⁵²⁶

Employees of the neighboring building, where the traumatology, the cardiology, and the purulent surgery were located, moved there, as well as the otolaryngology, radiologists, anesthesiologists, therapists, gynecologists, and pediatricians. All medical care was now concentrated in one place.

“Then I had to organize everything. Doctors were leaving, and nurses were leaving, too. You cannot say anything to anyone. And in order to concentrate on medical care, we moved everything to the first surgery”⁵²⁷, says Andriianov.

Since the Maternity Hospital was no longer functioning in June, one gynecologist, two midwives, and two nurses who remained in the city moved to the newly created hospital to provide medical aid.⁵²⁸

524
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

525
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

526
Petraeva: “V Donbasse medikam prihoditsja prjatat’sja pod mashinami skoroj pomoshhi i zhit’ bez zarplat” [Petryaeva: “In the Donbas, doctors have to hide under ambulances and live without salaries”]. Segodnya, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ktZQVZ>.

527
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

528
Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

The building of Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Clinical Hospital of Slovyansk. February 2019. Photo by Yevheniia Bardiak



With the first attacks in early May, members of the IAG helped the hospital staff to put sandbags on the windows so that they would not get shattered from shock waves. The doctors had to work under such conditions until the recapture of the city.

At first, the medical service of the pro-Russian IAG was located on the premises of the armature and isolation factory hospital, which is today called “City Hospital No. 1”. *“At first, we were on the premises of the factory’s polyclinic; it was the location of the ‘rebels’. We were given a room there”*, Liolia, who was responsible for medical work at the IAG Hospital, notes in a public interview.⁵²⁹

*“In my understanding, she had little knowledge in medicine. She was rather rattling with machine guns, snapping here with threats: shoot this one and shoot that one”*⁵³⁰, Mykhailo Andriianov describes the chief of the medical service of the militants.

According to respondents, “Liolia” had secondary medical education and was a protégé of Igor Girkin (Strelkov). Her real name is Olha Vyazovska. *“She always carried a gun. Her holster was hanging, and if she did not like something, she immediately took the gun”*, recalls Mykhailo Buinovskiy.⁵³¹

Later in June, the militants’ hospital was moved to the purulent surgical department of the City Clinical Hospital, located across the street from Surgical Unit No. 1. Fighters of the IAG “Rys” also moved there. “Liolia” continued to coordinate the work of medical care. Moreover, pro-Russian IAG occupied a bomb shelter where they hid from attacks along with their wounded. Civilian doctors and other wounded were not allowed to enter. *“On the first floor was their hospital. And the bulk of the ‘rebels’ was in a bomb shelter. They*

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Liolia about Vandal, YouTube: Andr Savielyev, November 7, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2lxHjzb>.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.



Olha Vyazovska, nicknamed “Liolia”. Source: a screenshot from a video on Andrii Savelyev’s YouTube channel, <http://bit.ly/2lxHjzb>

made their barracks there. Only in the afternoon, they went out to bask in the sun”⁵³², recalls Anatolii Varichenko.

All patients with severe injuries were admitted to civilian doctors. The militants treated patients with minor injuries themselves. According to Arkadii Hlushchenko, the militants had their own doctors for this:

“ There were complex injuries. The small things they did themselves. There was a time when many of our civilians were brought in, and we did not have time, so they treated small injuries themselves. Then, people came after a while, and we asked where they had surgery, they said that there. Between us doctors, there were no misunderstandings.”⁵³³

In the hospital, the IAG worked with doctors from other cities and even other countries. None of them was a local. Doctor Buinovskiy recalls that doctors from Horlivka worked there, a trauma specialist and a surgeon. Anesthesiologist Anatolii Varichenko said that a Russian citizen also worked there:

“ They had different specialists. One even was from the French Legion. A Russian citizen. He worked in Central Asia, studied there, then he went to France, joined the French Legion, where he worked as a nurse in the operating room. When the events in the Donbas began, he came as a volunteer on their side.”⁵³⁴

532
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

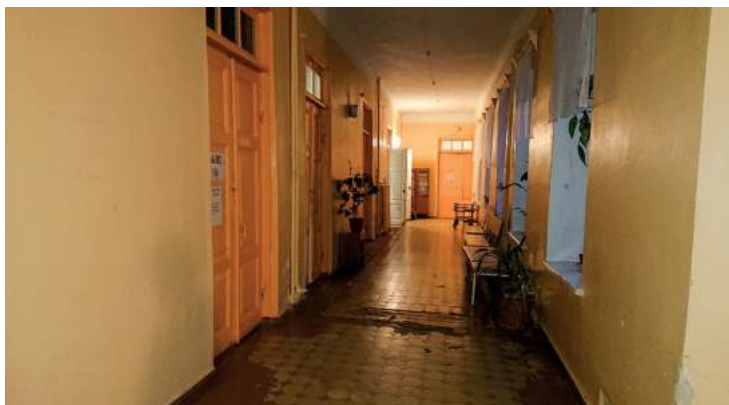
THOSE WHO REMAINED

Every morning, the Unit’s Chief made a work schedule as some doctors left, others returned. The tasks and responsibilities of the medics were distributed according to the availability of specialists.⁵³⁵

“There was one moment when there was no scrub nurse available. The surgery begins, but there is no scrub nurse. I called all the hospitals. You cannot judge people—they have moved away... And then, suddenly, one comes in. I almost started crying”⁵³⁶, Arkadii Hlushchenko recalls.

The most challenging time for doctors was on June 8, 2014. The chief of the surgical unit called that day “the Bloody Trinity”.

“From the very morning, wounded people began to arrive from all over the city. We had stretchers with wounded from the entrance to the porch. It was the first and one of the most difficult days. Such days also occurred again and again later, but we just got used to it”⁵³⁷, the scrub nurse Olena Vintoniak remembers.



Corridors of Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Clinical Hospital. February 2019. Photo credit: Yevheniia Bardiak

On that day, two surgery teams were on duty. At first, however, it was only one team because the hospital did not have enough doctors. A surgery team usually consists of an operating surgeon, one or two assistants, an anesthesiologist, and an operating room nurse. On June 8, one operating surgeon was on each of the two operating tables; a trauma specialist and the acting chief physician Andriianov, a general practitioner, were working as assistants. An anesthesiologist and a nurse provided care on two operating tables simultaneously.⁵³⁸ *“So we were working all day and all night. We saved anyone we could. But there were many whom we could not help. There were also injured children. They bombed from all sides of the city”*⁵³⁹, recalls Ms. Vintoniak.

Ward nurses often served as operating room nurses and nurse’s aides. Midwives, post nurses, and even the nurse’s aides had to work in the operating room.⁵⁴⁰ In the last two weeks before the city’s recapture, only two of the seven operating nurses remained—Olena Vintoniak and Oleksandra Matskova, who was already in her 60s. Both worked day after day. Sometimes, after duty, they had to go back to work the same evening because of the constant inflow of wounded.⁵⁴¹

Almost all surgeons from both departments of the City Clinical Hospital remained in place at one time or another during the city’s capture. Serhii Kushch, head of the department of purulent surgery, was on duty 24 hours a day. Each time on his way to the hospital, he covered a considerable distance on foot because he lived on the outskirts of the city in the direction of Kramatorsk. He repeatedly came under fire—lying on the ground, he had to wait for 1-2 hours.⁵⁴² *“We gave Serhii Oleksandrovysh a ride in the car when we had the opportunity. Sometimes, we were hit by sniper bullets and mortar fire. Once, 4 mines exploded within a radius of 50-70 meters from us”*⁵⁴³, recalls the head of the otolaryngology department Mykhailo Buinovskyyi.

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Interview C-47, C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, C-52, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

542
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

543
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

Other medics also came under fire on their way to work. Anatolii Varichenko once had to crawl to the hospital from Andriivskiy Lane, in front of Yaroslava Mudroho Street, and Andriianov and Buinovskiy had to hide behind fences to wait out the attacks. The head of the children's intensive care department of the City Children's Hospital, Volodymyr Buria, also had to lie down on the ground and, therefore, to come to work in dirty clothes.⁵⁴⁴

In May, the Traumatology Center was still operating, assisting those with minor injuries who did not need to be hospitalized. In June, there were only two trauma surgeons out of seven on duty, and later, there was only one left.⁵⁴⁵ *"I asked Oleksandr Bezpoyasnyi to come at least once in three days. He was assisting us with something specific if needed... He came, although he lived far away, at the exit of Slovyansk"*⁵⁴⁶, says Arkadii Hlushchenko.

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Interview C-50, C-51, February 27, 2019; Interview C-53, December 14, 2018.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Ibid.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019; Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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SMI: V bol'nice Slavjanska ne uspevajú zapisyvat' i schitat' pacientov, Gordon [Media: Slovyansk hospital does not have time to record and count patients], Gordon, June 21, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lxDTW6>.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

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Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

Nataliia Sorokina, a children's surgeon from the Children's Polyclinic, also came to help the newly created hospital: she performed diagnostics during abdominal surgeries. She also operated on injured children, made bandages, and assisted in other operations.⁵⁴⁷

Other doctors also tried to help, Hlushchenko recalls, *"Two general practitioners came. They wiped and washed the wounded in the dressing room as nurses' aides. I told them what to do and went on because I did not have time. There were people like that, and there were many of them."*⁵⁴⁸

In an interview at the end of June, the acting Chief Physician Andriianov said that the hospital continued to function with about a hundred people, hospitalizing victims around the clock.⁵⁴⁹ Cardiologists, otolaryngologists, anesthesiologists, radiologists, and dentists worked there. During surgery, they operated in mixed teams. *"In peacetime, our department alone had about 50 employees. At the same time, there were 153 to 156 employees in the entire hospital"*⁵⁵⁰, the operating room nurse Vintoniak remembers.

The situation was similar in other medical institutions that were supposed to work. According to Oleksandr Vozovyk, out of more than 50 employees, only a few nurses and four doctors were left in the Railway Hospital—two surgeons, one neurologist, and one therapist. The latter lived in Kramatorsk and crossed the front line for going to work on a bicycle every day.⁵⁵¹

Arkadii Hlushchenko, head of Surgical Unit No. 1, sometimes had to work without rest for two and a half days. During the insurgency in July, gynecologist Olena Shevchenko sewed up the nose of a grandmother who was bitten by a neighbor's dog.⁵⁵² The otolaryngology surgeon Mykhailo Buinovskiy and the therapist

Mykhailo Andriianov assisted during operations on the abdomen, chest, lungs, etc., treated wounds, stopped bleedings. *“I am a general practitioner by profession. When I worked in Taiga for ten years, I learned to do small surgical operations. So it is not difficult for me to sew up and dress wounds”,* Andriianov says.

In addition to medical care, Andriianov also served as Chief Physician: he coordinated the staff’s activities and solved household issues with water, electricity, etc. Moreover, he negotiated the evacuation of patients and attended meetings in the executive committee of the captured city, where he defended the needs of the medics and the wounded civilians to the militants.

From June 30 to July 3, the hostilities went on almost without halt.⁵⁵³ According to Olena Vintoniak, the fighting lasted precisely two months—from May 5 to July 3. *“The wounded were brought after and during shellings. When everything was silent, no wounded were coming. We stood the whole time at the table and operated, no matter what. When the windows shook—bags held them, and we were operating”*⁵⁵⁴, recalls Vintoniak.

If the attacks were too close, the operating team interrupted its work for a moment, ran towards the walls, or lay down on the floor to wait.

The anesthesiologist Anatolii Varichenko recalls:

“ *I had one case: during a surgical operation, an air mine exploded nearby. I could not understand what had happened. The shock wave came through the wall, through the windows, and all those bags. It pushed me so hard in the back that I ended up on the operating table next to the patient. The crew—the operating room nurse and the surgeons—were blown away to the pre-operative area. The airstrike was that strong.*

As soon as the militants settled in the hospital next door, they immediately took all the civilian surgeons’ private addresses. Later, they came home to a particular specialist when there was a need for professional help. Armed men appeared without warning, also in the middle of the night; no one explained where and why they took with them the doctor. The militants visited the maxillofacial surgeon, the gynecologist, the otolaryngology surgeon, and others.⁵⁵⁵ After providing help, they brought them back home.

All respondents noted that they were under constant stress and work overload. The doctors paid little attention to their emotions, the suffering of the wounded, and their relatives—they all were only focused on saving the patients’ lives.

553
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-50, C-52, C-55, February 27, 2019.

Surgeon Arkadii Hlushchenko had no time to think; there were times when it was necessary to sort the wounded as quickly as possible:

“*There are some triage principles in military field medicine. It was like this: “Give him drugs, and we will not approach him again.” These issues also had to be resolved. When there are only 1–2 people like this, it is okay. But when there was this “massacre”, my task was to sort out who would go forward and who would go to the room of those who were dying.*”⁵⁵⁶

Patients had fragmentary wounds of various parts of the body, mainly internal organs. Intestines were often resected, limbs amputated, and burns treated. If there were militants among the wounded, they were transferred to the IAG hospital after 2–3 days of assistance. Relatives of other patients tried to get them out of Slovyansk. Therefore, there were always free places for the newly wounded in Surgical Unit No. 1.

People with somatic diseases, such as high blood pressure, heart and stomach pains, also went to the doctors. Three to ten people could come in a day.⁵⁵⁷

In the Railway Hospital, only 15 out of 100 beds were occupied by patients at the end of June. These were people after strokes, heart attacks, renal diseases, etc.—those who had nowhere else to go.⁵⁵⁸

TREATMENT AT GUNPOINT

The majority of male doctors interviewed reported individual episodes of threats from the militants. However, women were not threatened and did not witness such cases: “*We were close to the ‘rebels’. They did not do us any harm. When there is shelling, then you have to be afraid that you will die*”⁵⁵⁹, the nurse Vintoniak says.

The leadership of the IAG periodically asked if there were any complaints from the medical staff about the behavior of their patients. Some patients behaved rudely and even smoked in the wards. “*I once told their chief that two people were lying near the intensive care department and smoking around the clock. He approached them, I do not know what he said, but afterward, they stopped smoking at all*”⁵⁶⁰, says anesthesiologist Anatolii Varichenko. He adds that the militants treated the medics with respect.

“*Those who were not afraid stayed here. It was difficult to humiliate us, and they knew that*”⁵⁶¹, says otolaryngology surgeon Mykhailo Buinovskiy.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

561
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

In the surgical unit, people with machine guns were always present. Some brought in wounded, and others were patients themselves. If the injury was minor, they kept their weapon nearby.⁵⁶² One day, at the beginning of the insurgency, armed men appeared looking for representatives of the Right Sector. The surgeon, who was in the ward at the time, did not allow them to go inside. The uninvited guests did not like that, and they began to threaten the medic with their weapons. In the end, they were allowed to check the wards, but there were no Right Sector fighters found there.⁵⁶³

The continued presence of many armed people on the territory threatened to turn the hospital into a military facility.⁵⁶⁴ On June 14, an operating room nurse was killed under fire. Three days later, her colleagues gathered at the morgue to say goodbye. Semen Pegov, a Russian “journalist” of the channel “LifeNews TV” also visited the spot where he asked the surgeon Arkadii Hlushchenko for a comment. Hlushchenko refused and explained that he would give an interview upon his return to the hospital. After a while, Pegov came along with “Liolia” who ordered Hlushchenko to give an interview.⁵⁶⁵ *“She came with a gun. Who knows what is going on in her head? Anything can happen”*, recalls Hlushchenko.⁵⁶⁶

Journalists often approached the medics. There were different channels—Russian, European, and American—and they either interviewed the acting Chief Physician or the surgical department’s chief. With their cameras, they used to go even to pre-operating rooms and the operating room.⁵⁶⁷

Arkadii Hlushchenko had to endure threats periodically. One day, on June 19, wounded militants were brought into the hospital after his 48-hour shift. He just went out of the operating room when a militant dragged him under fire to carry the wounded from the car. *“The shelling intensified. We were here, where the walls were thick, gathered together. And he got on to me: ‘Let’ us go or I will...’ He threatened me with a machine gun.”*⁵⁶⁸

On the same day, a 4-year-old child was brought in with shrapnel head wounds. The IAG fighter who accompanied the child rushed at the surgeon with threats to save the child.⁵⁶⁹

Once a militant with a complicated fracture was transported to Donetsk for treatment. On the next morning, a man came with a machine gun and took Hlushchenko to the head of the medical service of the militants, the so-called “Liolia”. The medic had to explain his decision to a person who only had secondary medical education.⁵⁷⁰ *“This chief medical officer, whether she was drunk or stoned, begins to tell me how to treat the injured and how to go into a shelter during a bombardment. In the end, everything is*

562
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

563
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

564
Ukraina: povstantsi pereshkodzhaiut normalnii roboti medychnykh sluzhb [Ukraine: rebels hinder normal operation of medical services], Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWoXkN>.

565
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

566
Ibid.

567
Interview C-50, C-51, February 27, 2019.

568
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

569
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019; A 4-year-old baby was fatally wounded by shelling in Slovyansk, and three other civilians were killed, YouTube: Komsomolskaya Pravda, June 19, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2k3IEaO>.

570
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

meaningless without knowledge of the basics of the military field medicine”⁵⁷¹, says the acting chief physician Mykhailo Andriianov.

Another time “Liolia” came to the anesthesiologist Anatolii Varichenko in the middle of the night and, threatening him with a gun, began to question him why the wounded militant is undergoing surgery on his hand without anesthesia. “We went to the dressing room where a drunk guy with a bullet wound was taken care of. The surgeons explained that the wound was superficial and did not require an anesthetic. That was the reason why they did not give him any painkillers. Eventually, she calmed down.”⁵⁷²

Sometimes, “Liolia” and the militants rushed into the operating and the dressing room without any warning. Varichenko remembers:

“ I had a situation at the end of June when we were operating on one of their wounded. Another one with a machine gun came and started running around the operating table. He was hitting the tile wall several times. He demanded that we had to save his friend. Otherwise, he would hurt us. These people were, as they say, of Caucasian nationality.”⁵⁷³

After the doctors complained to the IAG commander, he ordered his people to leave the operating room and not interfere with the doctors.

When they brought in wounded soldiers of the IAG, doctors had to assist in any case, even if the individual, according to the military field medicine’s triage principles, was not subject to treatment. Otherwise, the militants who accompanied the victim misbehaved and began to threaten the medics. As the doctors did not want to risk their own lives, they tried to “save” the patients.⁵⁷⁴

There were also cases when doctors were intimidated and taken to the basement into captivity. When the traumatology was still functioning in the City Clinical Hospital, the trauma specialist on duty was taken to a bomb shelter. “They did not like what he did. I do not know the details, but we were joking that Vasyl Mykolaiovych was taken to execution”⁵⁷⁵, says Anatolii Varichenko.

Oleksandr Vozovyk, a surgeon from the Railway Hospital, was held in a basement for one day. He was lucky: the fighters detained him on July 4, one day before the “DPR” groups were forced to leave Slovyansk, and all prisoners were released.⁵⁷⁶

“No one beat me or hurt me. I was detained, and they were deciding what to do with me. They knew I was a doctor. That is why I got there. If Slovyansk had not been liberated, the story would have been different. I was not praised there, let us say”⁵⁷⁷, Vozovyk recalls.

571
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

572
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

573
Ibid.

574
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

575
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

576
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

577
Ibid.

DOCUMENTATION OF CASES

During an open meeting in December 2018, the authors of this book asked representatives of the local authorities whether there was official data on the number of victims during the capture of Slovyansk. We received the response that, for some reason, they do not have such data. During one interview, the head of the health department of Slovyansk City Council, Olena Dzhyim, noted that it was difficult to distinguish in the hospital between militants and civilians among those who were injured. Not everyone had their documents with them, and anything could be indicated as occupation or employment. Furthermore, not only Slovyansk residents were admitted to the hospitals, but also people who lived and were registered in other cities and regions.

As Olena noted, there is no way to count the patients who received care during the insurgency:

“ *When the militants left the city, they collected all the medical documentation from the hospital, doused it with gasoline, and burned all medical records, journals, and registers of narcotic drugs. The complete documentation for the period from April to the end of June 2014 was burned.*⁵⁷⁸

Those documents that existed before the capture of Slovyansk were sent to the archives as soon as possible. According to the head of the health department, they could be saved.

Dzhyim’s statements were also confirmed by Mykhailo Andriianov, Deputy Chief Physician for the examination of temporary disabilities of the City Hospital, and Arkadii Hlushchenko, Head of Surgical Unit No. 1 of the hospital.⁵⁷⁹ The latter stated that the medics tried to register all patients, although on June 8, on the “Bloody Trinity”, that was impossible. However, the doctors kept all medical records and logs of drug use. Anesthesiologist Anatolii Varichenko adds that the logs of those who received anesthesia were also kept. But when the militants ran away, they broke down the doors with their automatic weapons, ransacked everything, and set it on fire. However, Hlushchenko noted, the medical histories almost all survived.

Keeping records of casualties was also problematic. Some of the people who came in with injuries died and were taken to the morgue. Others came to the hospital already dead. The medics did not even see the latter—they were taken straight to the morgue. Some people were not admitted anywhere because they were buried by relatives or others, bypassing the treatment facilities.⁵⁸⁰

578
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

579
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

580
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

There were still forensic experts working in the morgue up to a certain point, but later they all left. The hospital management appealed to various authorities, but new specialists did not arrive.⁵⁸¹ Often, the dead were delivered without documents. There were cases when there was no one to pick up the dead, and they were lying in the morgue for days. After June 8, there was no power supply, and the refrigerators did not work. There were no staff members either. It was hot outside. There were so many corpses that they could not fit into the room. Dozens of bodies lay in the morgue's courtyard. According to eyewitnesses, there was a terrible stench.⁵⁸² The militants collected all the bodies on a truck and buried them in mass graves. One of these was near the City Children's Hospital.⁵⁸³

581
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

582
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, C-51, C-52,
February 27, 2019.

583
Interview C-50, C-51, February 27,
2019; Interview C-54, C-57, December
14, 2018; Slovi'iansku rozkopaly
bratsku mohyly zakatovanykh
boiovykamy [In Slovyansk, a mass
grave of those tortured by militants
was excavated], Radio Svoboda,
July 25, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ISZXup>;
V Slovi'iansku vyjavleno try bratski
mohyly – RNBO [Three mass graves
discovered in Slovyansk-NSDC],
Hromadske, September 26, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/2IDoH9R>.

584
Vrach-hirurg Arkadij Glushhenko:
“Eshhe 4 ijulja separatisty nachali
vyvozit' svoih ranenyyh iz Slavjanska”
[Doctor-surgeon Arkadii Hlushchenko:
“On July 4, the separatists began to
take their wounded out of Slovyansk”],
6262.com.ua, July 5, 2015,
<http://bit.ly/2IR7ji2>.

585
Interview C-51, February 27,
2019; SMI: V bol'nice Slavjanska
ne uspevajú zapisyvat' i schital'
pacientov [Media: The Hospital in
Slovyansk does not have time to
record and count patients], Gordon,
June 21, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lxDTW6>.

586
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

Arkadii Hlushchenko noted that doctors distinguished who was a civilian and who was a militant. According to his observations, the ratio was ten civilians to one militant or ten civilians to two militants. For example, on the “Bloody Trinity” on June 8, 60 wounded were registered, more than 20 of whom were hospitalized.⁵⁸⁴ “*To be honest, I did not have time to record it then. Some were not recorded. In any case, there were more people. And by that time, there were only 3–5 militants. The rest were civilians. Later, there were fewer civilians. But civilians, in general, have suffered more*”, said Arkadii Hlushchenko.

Acting Chief Physician Andriianov also remembered the day of June 21 during the insurgency:

“ *We had a so-called Bloody Sunday when we received 25–26 wounded. However, I cannot tell you the exact statistics. We did not even have time to make calculations. The doctors were busy assisting. Many people went to the hospital without documents at all. We exactly even did not know who it was. Just physically, the doctors did not have time to maintain the documentation.*⁵⁸⁵

The wounded came from different districts and suburbs of the city—among them were many pensioners, many private sector residents, from the city's center, and the Artema neighborhood. There were also people from Semenivka, where the militants were deployed. According to the observations of the head of Surgical Unit No. 1, during the entire period of the city's capture, the medics provided daily assistance to an average of 20 wounded, both civilians and militants. “*You understand, one day, 40 wounded, another day 5—an average of 20. Maybe, I am a little wrong. But, on average, 20*”, says Hlushchenko.⁵⁸⁶

Anesthesiologist Varichenko said they had to do five to seven surgeries a day.⁵⁸⁷ Andriianov and Buinovskiy recall 15–17 wounded daily with shrapnel wounds and with burns. There were also patients with acute appendicitis, but those were the exceptions.⁵⁸⁸ *“We did not have time to concentrate on any particular patient at that time. We had to provide aid, and that was all”*⁵⁸⁹, says the operating room nurse Vintoniak.

Despite this, all the respondents from the City Clinical Hospital remembered one case with an injured child. On June 19, after another attack on residential areas, a five-year-old boy was brought to the hospital with multiple shrapnel wounds. About 20 pieces of debris entered the skull, and on the x-ray, it seemed to “glow”.

Mykhailo Andriianov describes the situation in the following way:

“*He was dying for 30 minutes. And there was nothing anyone could do. There was no way to save him. His mother was torn apart by a mine right in the yard, and the child was brought in. His grandfather was looking at him in the pre-op room. He was in a stupor himself. He looked at this picture and did not understand at all what was happening to him. He watched him dying.*”⁵⁹⁰

Other children were also injured and killed. Medics recall at least three or four children of different ages: two died, the others survived.⁵⁹¹

ASSISTANCE TO ILLEGALLY DETAINED PERSONS

Doctors describe two categories of people illegally detained by the militants who received medical care: those held in basements and those who had to dig trenches because they violated the militants’ rules in the city. There were no Ukrainian soldiers among them.

According to Anatolii Varichenko, many wounded were brought to the hospital in June after prisoners of the “DPR” got shelled while digging trenches in Semenivka. They were brought to the hospital by militants, who continued to guard them during medical care.

“*There were different prisoners. The majority of them were civilians who violated the curfew. A taxi driver was caught drunk at the wheel. These prisoners were guarded. The militants said that they had not yet redeemed their guilt, so they would have to dig trenches again after the medical treatment.*”⁵⁹²

587
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-51, C-52, February 27, 2019.

589
Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

590
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019; 5-year-old boy, wounded by punishers from a mortar in Sloviansk, died in hospital, YouTube: Russia 24 (DECA Kino), June 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWt40d>.

591
Interview C-50, C-52, February 27, 2019.

592
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

In July, several civilians were taken to the hospital from the basements. They had different fractures; one had a broken collarbone. They stayed in the hospital for up to 30 minutes. Then, they were taken back. After the recapture of Slovyansk, the illegally detained persons were released and remained alive. The medics, except for treatment, could not help otherwise. The telephone communication systems did not work, and the law enforcers who remained in Slovyansk during the city's capture cooperated with the militants.⁵⁹³

BORN IN THE WAR

During the insurgency in Slovyansk, people were killed, but children were also born. In the most challenging period between June–July 2014, six babies were born. Medical care at that time was already concentrated in the City Clinical Hospital in the two-story building of Surgical Unit No. 1. *“The maternity ward worked at first, but then we started distributing women in labor. Some were taken to Mykolaivka. When the hospital's premises were damaged, we stopped working. Employees were no longer there”*, said Mykhailo Andriianov, at the time head of the city's medical service.⁵⁹⁴

Of all the maternity department employees, Olena Shevchenko was the only obstetrician-gynecologist who remained together with several nurses at her workplace, which was moved to the newly created hospital.

Pregnant women in the city could usually not leave Slovyansk through the siege, constant shelling, poor communications, and lack of transportation.⁵⁹⁵ On occasion, they went to other hospitals around Slovyansk but have been denied childbirth assistance there.⁵⁹⁶ Some were at relatively early stages, and some were beginning to give birth prematurely. Out of six such cases, two babies were born prematurely with a weight of under two kilograms. *“There were births at gestation weeks 32–35. And I want to say that the born children were small, premature, but they lived. They seemed to feel the situation that no one would help them. We did not have incubators. There was no access to the Maternity Hospital”*, recalls Shevchenko.⁵⁹⁷

There were no neonatologists either. The respiratory tract was cleaned by a conventional sterile bag. Babies were wrapped in one-time diapers to preserve the heating circuit. Women gave birth in the operating room, the dressing room, or in a separate room with gynecological chairs previously moved from the maternity ward.⁵⁹⁸

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

598

ibid.

Once, a woman arrived with a fully opened cervix, and the duty surgeon Oleksandr Kushch had to deliver a baby.⁵⁹⁹

The women in labor did not stay long. Right after birth, they tried to be evacuated to Kramatorsk or other neighboring hospitals.⁶⁰⁰

Women with other gynecological problems were admitted to the hospital, too. Olena Shevchenko had to do up to 10 operations during that period. Some women came to women's consultations and the hospital, although there were only twenty of them, as the gynecologist notes. After the city's recapture, doctors continued to provide emergency medical services in Surgical Unit No. 1 until the fall, when the Maternity Hospital had been repaired.

PROVISION OF MEDICATIONS

Pharmacies gradually closed in Slovyansk, and those single pharmacies that still worked did not have a proper assortment. To get medicines, for example, from Kramatorsk, which is 14 kilometers away, it was necessary to cover a distance of at least 50 kilometers in different ways, bypassing several checkpoints.⁶⁰¹

In April and early May, there was no shortage of medicines.⁶⁰² However, a shortage gradually began to appear due to many wounded as a result of the shelling. In June, there was an urgent need for antibiotics, hemostatic agents, painkillers, dressings, sutures, and other medications.⁶⁰³

Residents of Slovyansk began taking what they had at home to the hospitals to help those in need. Doctors, public and charitable organizations from Druzhkivka, Kramatorsk, Donetsk, and other cities and countries, as well as the International Red Cross, sent humanitarian aid. However, the militants intercepted almost all cargo, so little of this humanitarian aid eventually reached civilian doctors and patients.⁶⁰⁴

After conducting negotiations and making demands to the militants, the City Clinical Hospital management, represented by Andriianov and Hlushchenko, ensured they shared medical supplies with them. This helped to support the doctors' work in the hospital created in Surgical Unit No. 1 with everything necessary. Tools and equipment remained available from the time before the city was captured. Sterilization took place in an assembly line mode.⁶⁰⁴

However, other facilities like the Railway Hospital did not receive help from the militants. *"I would have been happy to negotiate with*

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

602

VIDEO. V bol'nicu im. Lenina goroda Slavjanska neobhodimy perevjazochnye materialy, obezbolivajushhie sredstva i drugie medikamenty, [VIDEO. The Hospital named after Lenin requires dressing materials, painkillers, and other medications], Delovoy Slovyansk, May 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lkrP7u>.

603

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

604

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

605

Interview C-47, C-48, February 26, 2019; Interview C-50, C-51, February 27, 2019.

*the 'rebels', but no one gave me anything, even though they had a supply of medicines. Since we did not treat their military, but only the civilian population, we were refused medicines", said surgeon Oleksandr Vozovyk from the Railway Hospital.*⁶⁰⁶

The militants helped only those institutions where their hospitals were located. Therefore, Mr. Vozovyk had to seek help independently through friends from other regions.⁶⁰⁷

In particular, there were problems with the availability and storage of insulin for people with diabetes. In June, there was no electricity, and refrigerators did not work. Insulin, therefore, was stored in an outpatient clinic in Sviatohirsk and had to be delivered to the captured Slovyansk.⁶⁰⁸

606
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

607
Ibid.

608
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018;
Petrjaeva: "V Donbasse medikam prihoditsja prjatat'sja pod mashinami skoroj pomoshhi i zhit' bez zarplat" [Petryaeva: "In the Donbas, doctors have to hide under ambulances and live without salaries"], Segodnya, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2IUxMa>.

The blood transfusion station was also not working. While there was enough donor blood at the beginning of the hostilities in May, there was in shortage in June. As there was no electricity in the city, there was consequently no way to store blood properly.⁶⁰⁹

In May, narcotic drugs could still be delivered to Slovyansk from Kharkiv.

609
VIDEO. V bol'nicu im. Lenina goroda Slavjanska neobhodimy perevjazochnye materialy, obezbolivajushhie sredstva i drugie medikamenty, [VIDEO. The Hospital named after Lenin requires dressing materials, painkillers, and other medications], Delovoy Slovyansk, May 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lXrP7u>.

Olena Dzhym, Head of the City Health Department, remembers:

“ We had a contract with a Kharkiv firm. They arrived at the checkpoint with security because drugs have to be delivered with security. They [the security guards – ed.] were thrown to the ground, and their weapons were taken away. They were brought to the Slovyansk Police Department. It cost everyone a lot of effort to free those people.⁶¹⁰

610
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

611
Interview C-50, C-51,
February 27, 2019.

612
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019;
Interview C-49, December 14, 2018.

After this incident, of course, all medical deliveries were stopped.

The hospitals used all available drugs for operations and pain relief. They also took the supplies of the Maternity Hospital, which was not working at that time. Nino Chuiko, the chief medical nurse of the Central Clinical Hospital who remained on duty as long as she could, was very concerned about the provision and distribution of medicines.⁶¹¹

When the militants fled the city, they left behind so much medicine in their warehouses that pharmacists had to be called to sort and distribute everything. Earlier, on the eve of their escape, the IAG fighters had offered the doctors from the City Clinical Hospital to take what they needed.⁶¹²

BETWEEN LIFE AND SURVIVAL

In addition to medicines, means of communication, electricity, and water are equally crucial for saving lives. At the beginning of June, all these resources were absent in Slovyansk. Interruptions to mobile communications already started in May. Since then, one either had to look for separate locations, change operators, or call in the morning to establish a phone connection. Therefore, injured or sick people were not able to contact an ambulance. As long as landlines were working, medics could be reached via 103. However, later that line also did not function. Furthermore, doctors had no contact with other medical institutions and could not agree on patients' hospitalization. People drove at random with directions written out.

Due to the lack of electricity, there was also no possibility to charge mobile phones. The fridges did not work, and the food was rotting. Moreover, there was no light in the hospital because daylight could not enter through the sandbagged windows. In June, the City Clinical Hospital had three generators running simultaneously—one for two operating rooms and one for the x-ray room. The militants provided fuel for this purpose.⁶¹³

The Railway Hospital was located next to the rail station. There was a backup electrical supply from the railroad. Water was pumped to the hospital from a well located in the neighborhood yard.⁶¹⁴

However, the City Clinical Hospital suffered from a water shortage.⁶¹⁵ At first, rainwater was collected and used.⁶¹⁶ Later, water was brought from the wells of the neighboring houses. People went to wash in reservoirs near the hospital. Dirty surgical clothes had to be thrown away.⁶¹⁷ After an unsuccessful attempt to drill a well in the hospital yard with the city water utility employees, regular delivery of water by car was established.⁶¹⁸ *"The big problem was to heat the water. We used primitive stoves, gas cylinders, and even heated water directly on fire in buckets. A habit was quickly formed: in the morning, a bucket of water was boiled—and the entire duty shift went with mugs of boiling water. We drank tea and coffee"*, recalls Anatolii Varichenko.⁶¹⁹

During the insurgency, doctors did not receive salaries and had to live on their savings.⁶²⁰ There was no way to cook or store food. Moreover, food stores were closed. There was a period when people had to starve.⁶²¹

Those patients who remained in the ward did not need special nutrition since they were in a postoperative state. The militants had food and prepared it for themselves. After negotiations and demands from the hospital's management, they began providing food for civilian medics and patients.⁶²²

613
Interview C-47, C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019;
Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

614
Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

615
V Slavjanske oslozhnilas' jepidsituacija, v rjade gorodov Doneckoj regioni problemy s vodoj – SNBO [In Slovyansk, the epidemic situation has become more complicated, and in a number of cities in Donetsk region there are problems with water – NSDC], Segodnya, June 17, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2koX7gu>.

616
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

617
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

618
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

619
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

620
Interview C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019;
Petryaeva: V Donbasse medikam prihoditsja prjatat'sja pod mashinami skoroz pomoshhi i zhit' bez zarplat [Petryaeva: "In the Donbas, doctors have to hide under ambulances and live without salaries"], Segodnya, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lUxMa>.

621
Interview C-47, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

622
Interview C-47, C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

The hospital management, which was based in Surgical Unit No. 1 of the City Clinical Hospital, had to evacuate people. Patients were given the first specialized medical care: surgery, stopping the bleeding, and bandages. When the patient's condition was stabilized, the family was recommended to go to other cities, e.g. to Kramatorsk, Donetsk, Mykolaivka, Artemivsk, Izium, Kharkiv, etc. However, patients had to search for transportation themselves.⁶²³

*"We had a maximum of 20–25 people in our unit at that time. The second floor was almost empty. Evacuations had to be arranged. If this were not the case, then in 2–3 days we would have suffocated here", Arkadii Hlushchenko recalls.*⁶²⁴

Later, transport in the city stopped working. There were almost no private cars, also due to the lack of fuel. Wounded soldiers of the IAG and civilians were often taken to the hospital by militants.⁶²⁵ At the same time, relatives, friends, or ambulances brought in fewer and fewer patients. *"First, the ambulance transported patients. In the first months, when there was a massive number of people. Later I have not seen them",* said Anatolii Varichenko.⁶²⁶

The emergency medical services continued to operate during the insurgency in Slovyansk. At least those who did not leave the city held their position. As long as there was a phone connection, they took calls and went out not only for the wounded but also for other patients.⁶²⁷

Nevertheless, ambulances were also targeted. According to Olena Petriaeva, Head of the Regional Health Department, as of June 16, unknown people fired several times at ambulances in Slovyansk; the cars, however, remained functioning.⁶²⁸

By the end of the city's capture, only two out of nine ambulance teams were working. Valerii Zuiko, chief physician of the Slovyansk emergency medical service station, also remained at work, despite health problems and constant shelling:

“ *We had the same number of people on our staff as before the war. Another question is how many people worked in such difficult conditions when they had to travel under fire. Of course, the further away, the less. In the beginning, it was one number. In a month-two-three, it was less and less. Working was not easy.*⁶²⁹

Moreover, the militants "nationalized" the ambulances for their own use. Sometimes, they even forced the ambulance drivers to go with

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Interview 2, Slovyansk city, Donetsk region, February 26, 2019; Interview C-55, July 24, 2018; Interview with the Chief Physician of Slovyansk City Hospital named after Lenin, YouTube: Delovoy Slovyansk, June 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lxD5kg>.

624

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

625

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019; Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

626

Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

628

Petrjaeva: V Donbasse medikam prihoditsja prjatat'sja pod mashinami skoroj pomoshhi i zhit' bez zarplat [Petryaeva: "In the Donbas, doctors have to hide under ambulances and live without salaries"]. Segodnya, June 16, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lUsxMa>.

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Interview C-57, December 13, 2018.

them.⁶³⁰ This way, it was easier for them to move around the city, carry their wounded, or hide from the Ukrainian military. Cars were also stolen from other medical institutions.

*“Many hospital cars were taken away from us. Mostly, Niva and UAZ cars—cars that come through everywhere. We have only one car left from this time”, Arkadii Hlushchenko describes.*⁶³¹

When the militants left Slovyansk, they even stole ambulances.⁶³² *“They shot down locks from garages with their machine guns and took away 8 ‘Niva’ cars intended for family dispensaries. As well as three new ambulances that we received before”, says Ms. Dzhym.*⁶³³

It is, however, worth noting that militants provided the fuel for ambulances.⁶³⁴ In other cases, it was necessary to pass the checkpoints and go to Kramatorsk to refuel the cars.⁶³⁵

Crossing checkpoints complicated the evacuation of patients. As a rule, ambulances were allowed to pass on both sides of the contact line. Nevertheless, there were cases when they had to turn around due to attacks, take a detour, or wait for a long time at the checkpoints.⁶³⁶ Once a man was taken to a vascular surgeon in Donetsk with an injury of the femoral artery because narrow-profile specialists refused to go to the captured Slovyansk. Instead of one or two hours, the trip stretched for almost eight. The patient’s leg had to be amputated.⁶³⁷ In another similar case, it was possible to help a person: colleagues took the injured person to the other side of the checkpoint. They took him to Kramatorsk Hospital, where a vascular surgeon treated the victim.⁶³⁸

On June 5, an eight-month-old boy was evacuated from the Children’s City Hospital; he was on artificial lung ventilation.⁶³⁹ Volodymyr Buria, Head of the Department of Children’s Intensive Care, recalls:

“ *An ambulance with artificial lung ventilation was provided from Donetsk. We transported the child through the checkpoints. Both sides allowed entry. We had to take a detour—we went through the fields. The child, at the request of his parents, was evacuated to Rostov in Russia. If he had remained in Slovyansk, he would not have survived due to frequent electricity disruptions.*⁶⁴⁰

630

Uzhasy voennogo Slavjanska glazami vrachej: mesivo vmesto ljudej i mozgi terroristov [Horrors of military Slovyansk through the eyes of doctors: a mess instead of people and brains of terrorists], Depo.ua, November 13, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2kdSaXU>.

631

Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

632

Ukraine: rebels hinder the normal operation of medical services, Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lWoXkN>.

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Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

635

V Slavjanske “skorye” ostalis’ bez topliva, a mediki ne poluchajut zarplatu [In Slovyansk, “ambulances” were left without fuel, and doctors do not get paid], Segodnya, June 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2jVGPLM>.

636

Interview C-51, February 27, 2019; Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-49, December 24, 2018.

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Rossijskie zhurnalisty, rabotajushhie v Slavjanske, ne dali jevakuiroval’ 8-mesjachnogo mal’chika so strashnym diaznozom: on nuzhen propagande [Russian journalists working in Slovyansk did not allow the evacuation of an 8-month-old boy with a terrible diagnosis: propaganda needs him], Censor.net, June 4, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2lNGT0C>; seriously ill baby from Slovyansk delivered to Rostov hospital, 161.ru, June 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2kbrGGt>.

640

Interview C-56, December 14, 2018.

“WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH STUFF THAT PEOPLE SEE IN MOVIES”

“The professionals who stayed are fans of their jobs”, Mykhailo Buinovskiy approvingly describes the doctors.⁶⁴¹ Nothing else can be added to this assessment about the work of those who saved others’ lives every day and under fire. Today, when doctors and nurses tell their stories about hundreds of saved lives, they note that they also saved militants.

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Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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V Slavjanske ne hvataet hirurov
[There are not enough surgeons in
Slovjansk], 6262.com.ua,
October 3, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2kf26Ar>.

647
“DONBAS” congratulated the doctors
of Slovjansk (photo), Public Union
“Donbas”, June 19, 2015,
<http://bit.ly/2lQLv6c>.

648
Interview C-48, February 26, 2019;
Interview C-50 as of February 27, 2019.

649
Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.

“I did not feel physically afraid. I just worried that I would be ashamed to look people in the eyes. Because of this, I had an internal tension”, says Mykhailo Andriianov.⁶⁴²

“I did not care whom I helped. We did what any medical professional should do if they are doctors by calling. We have been through stuff that people see in movies. I wish that no one would ever feel this”, says Olena Vintoniak.⁶⁴³

After the insurgency, the doctors of Slovjansk were trained by various experts from abroad and Ukraine. On the frontline territories, stationary and mobile hospitals appeared, where doctors had full-fledged equipment and all the necessary tools. Workshops were held there, too.⁶⁴⁴

“They are equipped. But we worked just like during peaceful times. The same hospital, the same doctors, only the patients were wounded from the fighting. We did not have any experience in treating mine-explosion injuries. Such injuries are quite specific. But we earned experience during our work”, says Anatolii Varichenko.⁶⁴⁵

Some of the doctors later received awards: Arkadii Hlushchenko was awarded the title of the “Honored Doctor of Ukraine”, and surgeon Serhii Kushch was awarded the “Order of Merit of the III Degree”.⁶⁴⁶ However, the awards were given only a year after the assignment.⁶⁴⁷ Some were given only certificates, and some received nothing at all. Salaries were paid in July 2014 for the insurgency months equally to everyone: those who worked and those who left. Some were additionally paid “half-rate” for excessive hours of work.⁶⁴⁸

“I did not want any special awards. Sincere words and understanding that you are valued; this is bigger than anything. This motivates, it says that you did not live that time in vain”, says Olena Shevchenko.⁶⁴⁹

The level of medicine and the status of a medical worker should be improved, Arkadii Hlushchenko believes. Hospitals should have modern equipment, comfortable conditions, and affordable

medicines. *“If you do not invest anything, then you will receive what you deserve. An experienced operating room nurse cannot be paid a little higher than a nurse’s aide can. And a junior doctor is like a nurse’s aide. This does not correspond to their statuses”,* Hlushchenko states, rightly indignant.⁶⁵⁰

At the end of each interview, the respondents were asked why they remained in the captured city and continued to work. The medics answered, without pathos or exaggeration: they did not want to leave their old parents or even neighbors who were unable to move; their homes, so that they were not looted; their beloved pets and animals, which could not be taken out by public transport. Some hoped the insurgency would end quickly. However, everyone felt a personal duty—how can you leave people alone in the war?

“If I did the same as others—just left, who would help, organize? If there was almost nobody at that time?”, Mykhailo Andriianov.⁶⁵¹

“I was working. To leave the job...? There was a hope that it would not last long and would end quickly”, Anatolii Varichenko.⁶⁵²

“How can I look into the people’s eyes? Who would help the injured?”, Arkadii Hlushchenko.⁶⁵³

“Well, someone has to stay. But how? And who has to?”, Mykhailo Buinovskiy.⁶⁵⁴

“I did not go because I got used to my job and saw who was staying. Both doctors and nurses. I am an operating room nurse. Maybe it is possible without a ward nurse, but it does not work the same way with an operating room nurse”, Olena Vintoniak.⁶⁵⁵

“We understood that they could kill us, but it was not perceived that way at the time. If we have to work, then we must”, Oleksandr Vozovyk.⁶⁵⁶

Olena Shevchenko:

“ *In the beginning, I did not think that this is how it would end. And then I did not see the point. Where are you going? Nowhere. Whoever could help, helped. Then, of course, I realized that my life could have just ended. We do not want to seem better than we are. At that time, we were doing our job.*”⁶⁵⁷

All these and other medics and nurses say simple things, but this does not diminish their heroism. Amid complete uncertainty, they did not betray the Hippocratic Oath and fought for every life under bullets.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-51, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-50, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-47, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-52, February 27, 2019.

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Interview C-48, February 26, 2019.

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Interview C-55, July 24, 2018.

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Interview C-54, February 27, 2019.



A boy charges a laptop in the center of Slovyansk.
Photo credit: Andrii Bashtovyi, July 19, 2014

LOST CHILDHOOD

HANNA KUROVSKA

Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civil Initiatives

10

During armed conflict and political violence, children⁶⁵⁸ and young people (especially minors)⁶⁵⁹ are among the most vulnerable categories of the population. They lose access to quality education and are at risk of losing contact with their parents. They may be recruited into armed groups or forced to work. According to a study by the Center for Psychological Health and Psychosocial Support, 86% of the surveyed schoolchildren in Donetsk and Luhansk regions have seen military vehicles, 43% have seen shooting, and the same number have endured personal threats or know about threats to relatives. 25% of the respondents noted a high level of post-traumatic stress.⁶⁶⁰ Children have an increased psychological and emotional sensitivity—they are susceptible to attacks and suffer from a lack of access to drinking water, food and medical services, and violence. Moreover, children and minors often become victims of mines. Experiencing and witnessing violence can have consequences in the form of long-term stress and become a potential factor for antisocial behavior.⁶⁶¹ This chapter deals with young people whose personalities have been shaped due to the hostilities and the capture of Slovyansk in their own bizarre way: some have been traumatized, some have been taught empathy, and some have had their life priorities changed.

THREE MONTHS OF HELL

In Slovyansk, students receive secondary education in 22 public schools. The city also has six higher educational institutions: the Donbas State Pedagogical University and five colleges and technical schools. Besides, there are four institutions for professional education.⁶⁶² In the field of extracurricular education, there are several municipal institutions: the “Center for Children’s and Youth

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The names of the characters mentioned in this chapter have been changed.

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The standard for distinguishing between childhood and adulthood in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Ukrainian legislation is 18 years of age. For a number of factors, this age range is divided into adolescence (10–19 years) and youth (15–24 years). This section uses these definitions of age ranges.

660

Research on psychosocial stress and emotional health among school-age children, Center for Psychological Health and Psychosocial Support (NaUKMA), <http://bit.ly/2LP5qxp>.

661

War and children: a reference handbook, Kendra E. Dupuy and Krijin Peters, 2009, <http://bit.ly/2ZjCz7m>.

662

War and children: a reference handbook, Kendra E. Dupuy and Krijin Peters, 2009 <https://dn.isuo.org>.

663

Na vosstanovlenie shkol i roddoma Slavjanska potratjat 800 tys. Grn [To restore schools and maternity hospitals in Slovyansk, UAH 800 thousand will be spent], 112.ua, August 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2XK50Vi>.

664

V rezul'tate vzyryva povrezhdzhen krysha shkoly No. 13 v Slavjanske – socseti [As a result of the explosion, the roof of School No. 13 in Slovyansk was damaged – social networks], Segodnya, May 24, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Jv5ocx>.

665

Fotofakt: posle artobstrelya Slavjanska v stene detsada pojavilas' metrovaja dyra [Photo fact: after the shelling of Slovyansk, a meter-long hole appeared in the wall of the kindergarten], Vgorod, June 2, 2014, <http://bit.ly/25a1nN8>.

666

V Slavjanske obstreljali detskij dom [In Slovyansk, an orphanage was shelled], Korrespondent.net, May 20, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Y0v5tt>.

667

Situacija v Slavjanske: detskij dom "Topolek" 14 ijulja 2014 [Situation in Slovyansk: "Topolek" orphanage, July 14, 2014], Hromadske TV Donbas, July 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2S6d0EQ>.

668

Detskij dom dlja detej "Topolek", g. Slavjansk. Posledstviya obstrel'ov [Orphanage "Topolek", Slovyansk. The consequences of the attacks], Hromadske TV Donbas, September 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Y29fpi>.

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Interview C-58, November 1, 2018.

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Interview C-11, November 1, 2018.

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Interview C-59, December 22, 2018.

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Interview C-60, November 8, 2018.

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Interview C-61, December 14, 2018.

Creativity” and the “Station of Young Technicians”, two children’s and youth sports schools, as well as different branches of regional sports schools and a network of libraries.

Educational institutions in Slovyansk have repeatedly suffered from attacks. According to media reports, Schools No. 4, No. 9⁶⁶³, No. 13⁶⁶⁴, No. 16, a boarding school, and a local university dormitory were destroyed. Shells also hit the children’s hospital, kindergartens⁶⁶⁵, and the Vitryla Nadii orphanage of the Protestant community Dobra Zvistka.⁶⁶⁶ The media also mentions that the attacks affected orphanage No. 2 “Topoliok”.⁶⁶⁷ During the attacks, children were evacuated from these institutions.⁶⁶⁸ In some schools’ premises, the militants organized “headquarters”: for some time, the armed militants of the “DPR” were based on the premises of School No. 4.⁶⁶⁹

During the attacks, the city’s schools and kindergartens did not work, although the educational process continued until the end of the academic year.⁶⁷⁰ According to eyewitnesses, sometimes, the distance from checkpoints to schools was 120–200 meters, and it was dangerous to conduct educational activities, so some families did not let their children go to school.⁶⁷¹ However, in some technical schools and universities, education continued even during the fighting. “We could see from the window how they were shooting at the checkpoints”⁶⁷², recalls a teacher of one of the technical schools in Slovyansk. Classes at the Pedagogical University continued in mid-April and May when barricades already blocked some paths to the educational institutions. “At that time, it was very unclear what was happening, but the university was not closed, we went to lectures. The following day, they started building barricades, so there was no way to get there”⁶⁷³, recalls a former university student.

A drawing made by children during the capture of the city: “Please don’t bomb us”, Source: tsn.ua





Evacuation of children from Slovyansk.
Source: Twitter profile “@Slovyansk”,
<https://bit.ly/2Vwv5iK>

During the hostilities, some children left the city with their families, and some parents sent their children to children’s camps and resorts. The evacuation of children from the city took place during increased military operations on May 25 and May 28–30, 2014. At the expense of the regional budget, children were placed in resorts in Sviatohirsk, a town north of Slovyansk.⁶⁷⁴ Children from the city also went to health centers in the regions of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa.⁶⁷⁵ In winter 2015, the Donetsk Regional State Administration reported that 1,054 children from Slovyansk visited different recreation centers during the recreation season.⁶⁷⁶

At the same time, 165–200 children were evacuated by bus to the territory of the Russian-occupied Crimea.⁶⁷⁷ According to media reports, the secretary of the Communist Party of Slovyansk Anatolii Khmeliovyyi and the “Materi Ukrainy” organization headed by Halyna Zaporozhchenko were engaged in organizing the transportation of children to the peninsula.⁶⁷⁸ In Crimea, the youngsters should have been accommodated in “Artek”, one of the most famous youth camps in Ukraine. However, in an interview with the newspaper Fakty, the parents of children who were supposed to be taken to Artek on May 25 and 29, said that the conditions and routes of evacuation were significantly different from what was promised them. In the end, the schoolchildren were accommodated in other Crimean youth camps—near Sevastopol, Foros, and Bakhchysarai.⁶⁷⁹ According to locals, returning them later to Slovyansk was problematic due to the border’s closure to annexed Crimea.⁶⁸⁰

Indeed, some children also remained in the city during the insurgency. They witnessed violence and victims, spent hours in

674
600 detej iz Slavjanska i Kramatorska otpravili v Sviatogorsk i Odessu [600 children from Slovyansk and Kramatorsk were sent to Svyatohirsk and Odesa], Segodnya, May 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/32iwpHD>.

675
Otchet ob jevakuacii detej Slavjanska na ozdorovlenie [Report on the evacuation of children from Slovyansk for recovery], Slavgorod.com.ua, November 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Z7GcBY>.

676
Roditeli detej, otpravlennyh iz Slavjanska v Krym: “My chut’ ne posedeli, gadaja, gde oni i chto s nimi” [Parents of children sent from Slovyansk to Crimea: “We almost turned gray, wondering where they are and what’s wrong with them”], Fakty, June 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2XZET6X>.

677
V “Arteke” zajavili o pribytii pervoj partii detej iz Donbassa [“Artek” announced the arrival of the first batch of children from the Donbas], vesti-ukr.com, May 30, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2S7zIN5>.

678
Krovavyj saljut Poroshenko [Poroshenko’s bloody fireworks], Moskovskyy Komsomolets No. 111, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TVmaoH>.

679
Roditeli detej, otpravlennyh iz Slavjanska v Krym: “My chut’ ne posedeli, gadaja, gde oni i chto s nimi” [Parents of children sent from Slovyansk to Crimea: “We almost turned gray, wondering where they are and what’s wrong with them”], Fakty, June 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2XZET6X>.

680
Interview C-7, December 13, 2018.

bomb shelters (more often, in basements unsuitable for people), and experienced a shortage of household goods. The war was etched in their memories by shelling, injuries, and a sense of fear:

“ I experienced a lot of fear. My mom was also anxious because, at one point, I was hit: I had a strong blow here, and my uncle had a cut by debris. We were covered and taken to the basement under the rubble. When we went out, a mine flew in. The roof began to burn, and the house caught fire.”⁶⁸¹

Maryna, who was 13 years old at the time of the events, says that she lived in the Khimik neighborhood. Khimik was separated from the Semenivka residential district, which was destroyed due to shelling, only by woodland. Houses on the massif’s outskirts were repeatedly shelled; a pregnant woman who was on the balcony during the explosions died. “She died on the way to the hospital, in the ambulance. And after that, I realized that Khimik is very dangerous because it is next to Semenivka”⁶⁸², the girl recalls.

681
Interview C-62, January 24, 2019.

682
Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

683
Ibid.

The girl’s family later moved to the Artem district, which seemed safer to her. However, a few days later, the attacks began also there: “They started bombing the bus stop in the neighborhood, and we realized that our windows were shaking. It was horrifying. So the next day we went to the village.”⁶⁸³

IN THE ADULT WORLD

Children remember the violent unfolding of political confrontation, military actions, and acts of violence differently. Those who studied in primary schools in 2014 consider the beginning of the city’s shelling as the conflict’s starting point. However, in the perception of middle and high school-age children, the conflict started with a political confrontation—with the events on Maidan in Kyiv or, on the other hand, from pro-Russian demonstrations in February–March 2014.

For Andrii, a student at Slovyansk Power Engineering College, it all started in a physics class when he heard his classmates discussing a pro-Russian rally.

“ Some of our classmates went to this rally, which was on the square, during studies. And they could not get out of there—some kind of scuffle started. Teachers got scared because they were responsible for them at that time. Then, they came back somehow: they said that the department of the militsiya, as it was called then, was seized, as well

*as the City Council. Some kind of republic was established. There were barricades when I left school, and there were unknown people with machine guns on the main square.*⁶⁸⁴

For Yevhen, then a seventh-grade student, the period of turbulence and uncertainty began already at the end of 2013.

“*Family breakdown, problems with my father’s business... That is, through default, the dollar exchange rate—all this affected the financial stability of our family. This has also affected my life: fewer expensive gifts, figuratively speaking. Understanding all of this came from the time of Maidan: when the first students came out and when they were beaten on November 30, 2013.*”⁶⁸⁵

The standoff forced teenagers to follow the news regularly. Maryna could not believe the rapid development of events: *“Immediately all the people in the city began to watch the news. And we watched every minute as events unfolded. I was shocked. It was something incredible. I did not think that it would grow into something more”*⁶⁸⁶, says Maryna.

At that time, the primary source of information for a significant part of the youth of Slovyansk were social networks, namely the Russian Facebook equivalent “Vkontakte”. According to Yevhen, political “electrification” in the city’s community also persisted among schoolchildren and students:

“*Peers were divided into two parts and regularly brought each other to conflicts: “Here is my position, here I am right, and you are wrong”. And vice versa. There were constant conflicts. Those who understood you supported you, and those who did not understand you were against you. There were two camps between youngsters: “Maidan” supporters and “anti-Maidan” supporters.*”⁶⁸⁷

Meanwhile, the role of educational institutions in shaping children’s views on the events of 2014 was ambiguous. On the one hand, we have references about attempts of teachers to distance themselves from any political judgments:

*“The teachers were neutral. They didn’t talk about it openly. They avoided this topic, and we had discussions exclusively about studying. In other words, this topic was not raised in any way at the technical school”*⁶⁸⁸, recalls Andrii.

At the same time, residents of the city also talked about political appeals that were made to children by teachers and administrators of public educational institutions. In particular, there is evidence

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Interview C-64, January 24, 2019.

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Interview C-65, January 24, 2019.

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Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

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Interview C-65, January 24, 2019.

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Interview C-64, January 24, 2019.

Villa Maria mansion in Slovyansk.
Source: 6262.com.ua



that some local schools' employees participated in political events: *"Larina, who was the deputy director at School No. 12, also organized these rallies. This was before the occupation of Slovyansk. I believe through such people pressure was exerted."*⁶⁸⁹

In May 2014, one of the teachers of School No. 10 was sentenced to 5 years in prison with a probation period of two years under the article "Financing actions committed with the purpose of forcibly changing or overthrowing the constitutional system or seizing state power"⁶⁹⁰, and in 2017, under the pressure of local public activists, he was dismissed from his job.⁶⁹¹ The extracurricular military-patriotic Cossack club under the auspices of the UOC-MP was located on the territory of "Villa Maria", a local architectural monument. Members of the club reported that, before the start of the clashes in the city, this club received pro-Russian propaganda materials, in particular films that attracted minors to watch after training.⁶⁹²

Some of the young people joined the mass protests that unfolded in the city. According to local residents, young people could be found at both pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian meetings. Polina, who was studying in Kyiv at the time of the events, was outraged by anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in the city:

“ I had holidays, and I came to Slovyansk. My friends and I were beginning to oppose all this. As long as nothing happened, we did not care. When there was a conflict, these people... we began to resent this. And we were like: "Let us go to this rally, too, and say something! Who are these people, why do they say they are against [Euromaidan in Kyiv – ed.]"⁶⁹³

Polina recalls that minors were also present at the rallies in the city center: *"I had a cousin who was 16 years old at the time. And she*

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Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

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Criminal Code of Ukraine, Article 110 (Part 2).

691

V Slavjanske sud ne pozvolil prepodavat' osuzhdennomu za separatizm uchitelju, Novosti Donbassa [In Slovyansk, the Court did not allow a teacher convicted of separatism to continue teaching], November 23, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2S8r2pD>.

692

Interview 2, Slovyansk, Donetsk region, June 24, 2016.

693

Interview C-66, January 24, 2019

was like, 'Oh, I want to go!' Well, our moms were communicating, and somehow her mom found out that we wanted to go there. My sister said: 'I also want to go there, I am against it.'⁶⁹⁴

IN CAPTIVITY OF WAR

During the capture of the city, the militants repeatedly committed violence against civilians with pro-Ukrainian positions. Minors were no exception. A college student, an active participant in pro-Ukrainian events on the eve of the city's capture, did not hide his disagreement with the regime established in the city. Only later he learned that the local authorities claimed we would be a member of the Right Sector:

“ And they came home later. Adult men in camouflage came and asked my friends about me: where I live, what I say, in general, they asked a lot about me. Some of my friends called me and told me all this. Then they wanted to shoot me. Yes, they came home with machine guns, as I was told. I was hiding at my grandmother during this period. They said that I should be shot, that I am part of the Right Sector, some kind of gunner, and something else... that I am a “bandera”.⁶⁹⁵

Residents of Slovyansk also reported that militants shot an eleventh-grader in the leg for shouting “Glory to Ukraine!” at one checkpoint.⁶⁹⁶ Some minors were also taken by the militants to basements or were forced to dig trenches. “They took him away just because he probably did not want to stop at some checkpoint. They were saying, ‘You are a young guy, you need to fight.’ He stated that they beat him”⁶⁹⁷, the friends of the detained 16-year-old boy reported. On May 9, a 12-year-old schoolchild was shot in the chest by a firearm in the city center. Locals say that he took part in the procession on Victory Day. Under unclear circumstances, the militants fired at the child. Fortunately, the victim was saved.⁶⁹⁸ Also, there were cases where young people witnessed threats and violent actions against relatives.⁶⁹⁹

Minors in situations of armed conflict often become hostages of the circumstances. They are legally and economically dependent on adults responsible for them, so they are usually referred to as passive witnesses and victims of political violence. Children are used to being treated as incompetent, innocent, and detached from events, losing sight of children's ability to “respond” to the situation and influence the conflict.⁷⁰⁰

694
Ibid.

695
Interview C-64, January 24, 2019.

696
Interview C-58, November 1, 2018;
Interview C-44 as of November 3, 2018.

697
Interview C-67, June 24, 2016.

698
Interview C-68, June 24, 2016.

699
Interview C-62, January 24, 2019;
Interview C-69, September 22, 2018.

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Abilities of children to make balanced and independent decisions is part of a discussion among researchers about the participation and role of minors in armed conflicts (Stenly, Leon, Brett & Speht 2004). However, there is no doubt that young people can proactively participate in political and armed confrontations.

Colors of the Ukrainian flag on a column during the city's capture by the "DPR". Source: photo from Serhii Lileiev's Facebook page, <https://bit.ly/2zvcStD>



Young people in Slovyansk were divided into groups of those who took a detached position, and those who supported the "Donetsk People's Republic". Some youngsters resisted the "DPR", despite the apparent threat from the militants. It is known that an underground movement was spreading Ukrainian symbols during the city's capture of the IAG. According to participants of this movement, minors were also engaged in it. *"We gathered to show our position. Well, we could not just sit there and watch. We could not get out to the militants either, it was weird. So we decided to draw Ukrainian flags"*⁷⁰¹, Polina recalls.

701
Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

702
Ibid.

703
Ibid.

704
Interview C-61, December 14, 2018.

Participants of such sorties drew flags on poles along Vokzalna Street (formerly Sverdlova Street), sneaking out of the woodlots. Two people were riding bicycles and making sure that there were no armed people nearby. *"We just did not understand at that moment that they could grab and do something to us."*⁷⁰²

One day, the youngsters were noticed, and armed men arrived at the scene. But while the militants lingered near a car, the activists managed to escape through the woodland. *"And then we had many minors,"* says Polina. *"I do not know what their motivation was. I think that they just loved Ukraine, wanted to resist somehow and did not want to live in Russia."*⁷⁰³

Locals said that there were also teenagers who helped other citizens during the insurgency. Student Liliia recalls an 11-year-old boy who lived on her street: *"He helped people for free: he charged their phones, and they [other people] came. It was his initiative, he suggested it. They had a well, and their neighbors came to collect water. And this was the initiative of a child of eleven years."*⁷⁰⁴ However, other kids also supported the "DPR" and resorted to active actions like anti-Ukrainian rallies and the setup of barricades. According to eyewitnesses, during the first clashes of pro-Russian

formations with the AFU, some youngsters were involved in distributing information leaflets supporting the “DPR”. *“Then they [the militants – ed.] were running around there with dazed eyes, handing out leaflets. The minors also ran around, handing out leaflets”,* recalls a witness.⁷⁰⁵

WITH WEAPONS IN HAND

One of the coping strategies of children in armed conflict is the interaction with combatants and, possibly, joining military formations. Monitoring conducted by the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives (EUCCI) found at least 14 cases when minors were directly involved in the hostilities in Slovyansk. Moreover, EUCCI has recorded at least seven references to minors groups from Slovyansk associated with armed groups. According to the descriptions of witnesses, the militants’ ranks were often joined by teenagers of sixteen or seventeen years of age. There was also a case of a 14–15-year-old boy participating in checkpoint patrolling. There is evidence that this phenomenon has been widespread. Andrii was told by his fifteen–sixteen-year-old peers that they participated in military operations, even on the front line:

“*They stood on barricades with weapons, walked around the city, patrolled. And when the fighting started, they went to the front line, as they said, and there they shot at “Bandera”. I do not know if it ever happened. It is according to their stories that they participated in the fighting.*”⁷⁰⁶

Maryna says that students of her school also patrolled the checkpoints of the “DPR”: *“Even sixteen-year-old boys who were in the ninth grade stood there. They went there and thought they were cool. Girls from their class were bringing them borscht. Like, ‘our guys are standing there.’”*⁷⁰⁷

A young man from Kyiv with the call sign “Vandal”, who was involved in military operations in Slovyansk through one of the pro-Russian communities of Cossacks, described his experience of participating in hostilities at the age of sixteen in his book. Not without pride, he tells about his adventures together with the odious “Motorola” and other militants.⁷⁰⁸

It is also known about at least one case of participation of a minor in an armed pro-Ukrainian volunteer formation during the fighting on the city’s outskirts. The 17-year-old boy already joined the volunteer formation during the Maidan events in Kyiv.⁷⁰⁹

705
Interview C-70, June 24, 2016.

706
Interview C-64, January 24, 2019.

707
Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

708
Andrii Savelyev (call sign Vandal): War in 16, PolitWera, <http://bit.ly/2XCQ0s1>.

709
Interview C-69, September 22, 2018.

Persons who were illegally held in the basement of the SSU premises during the city's capture noticed that minors were also involved in beating detainees.⁷¹⁰ Moreover, former prisoners recall that minors conveyed illegally detained persons.⁷¹¹

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict⁷¹² prohibits non-state paramilitary groups from engaging persons under the age of 18. Such persons should not take part in direct military operations. According to the Rome Statute, the military recruitment of persons under the age of 15 is a war crime.⁷¹³

There are two possible forms of involving children in armed groups: voluntary and forced. Forced involvement involves coercion by an armed group, abduction, retention, and the use of child labor against the will of the victim. In the case of voluntary involvement, the child himself expresses a desire to join one of the parties to the military confrontation. In the cases reported by EUCCI, the involvement of minors in armed groups was non-violent. However, can we identify non-violent and voluntary participation in conflict? Is a voluntary choice conscious and justified? These questions are difficult to answer unequivocally. Without a doubt, the only thing is the responsibility of unit commanders for crimes and children's involvement in war and danger.

In the media and academic research, there are three typical perspectives on child combatants. The first portrays them as potentially aggressive members of society, sociopaths who "have learned the language of violence" but have not learned enough interaction skills in civilian life. Another portrays them as pawns who are influenced by external forces and unwittingly perceive ideological narratives and perform criminal acts.⁷¹⁴ The third common perspective is the heroization of underage warriors. Young men and women take part in military operations and appear as the embodiment of adulthood and masculinity.

Peers of those who took up arms noted that, in their opinion, the involvement of armed groups looked and was perceived as a game, as a way of self-expression and self-affirmation. "*They joined the 'militia', went around in camouflage clothing with guns, with weapons, frankly, like: 'Well, what do you say now?'*" Andrii explained about the position of his peers, with whom he had a conflict on political grounds. "*I think they do not have any specific position, only some nonsense, some idealistic fantasies of youth*", he adds.

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Interview C-71, June 20, 2016.

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Interview C-72, January 15, 2017.

712

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the rights of the child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, <http://bit.ly/2G6dxlm>.

713

Article 8, paragraph XXVI, of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, <http://bit.ly/2JCzJw>.

714

Turnings and Epiphanies: Militarization, Life Histories, and the Making and Unmaking of Two Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone, Myriam Denov & Richard Maclure, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2007, <http://bit.ly/2ZIKq4h>.

A girl with the call sign “Ryzhyk”, who joined the “DPR” IAG in Slovyansk, told in an interview with one of the “DPR” media resources how she joined the armed formation: *“It started quite unusual. I just went to the barricade to see what was going on. It was April 17. I stayed there for three days, just because I wanted to help these people, I wanted to be with them.”*⁷¹⁵

Some adults believe that some children (who come from families in difficult situations) were motivated by a sense of hopelessness and a desire to take the future into their own hands. Money apparently also played a role.⁷¹⁶

Relatively little is known about the fate of those teenagers who took up arms during the insurgency. Some of the boys and girls retreated from the city towards Donetsk together with the militants and continued to serve as soldiers in the “DPR” formations. Some left for the Russian Federation after the city’s recapture, and some today live on the government-controlled territory.

RETURN TO PEACEFUL LIFE

On July 5, 2014, the Ukrainian army recaptured Slovyansk, but the level of tension in the city’s community remained high. The confrontation between the pro-and anti-Ukrainian camps also took place within the youth environment:

“ *And when I come to the city, they just shout in my direction with sarcasm, “Glory to Ukraine!” or something else. I also had a “United force Ukraine” t-shirt. And when I went out in my neighborhood to walk in the yard, a kid who is two years older than me said: “What kind of t-shirt are you wearing? I am going to spit on it!” It was all fierce. Very cruel. I said, “Do not even try!”*⁷¹⁷

Immediately after the city’s recapture, participants of pro-Ukrainian meetings and demonstrations (including minors) were repeatedly threatened in social networks and through phone calls.⁷¹⁸

It was dangerous and uncomfortable for young supporters of both sides of the conflict. There was a detention of an eighteen-year-old student from Slovyansk (probably by law enforcement agencies) at the end of 2015 because of her “contact with Donetsk”.⁷¹⁹ The family did not know about the girl’s whereabouts for several days.

In 2016, the winner of the “Miss Slovyansk 2016” contest was at the epicenter of a scandal in the city. In the media⁷²⁰, the girl

715
Militia “Ryzhyk” from the squad of Motorola, video interview, YouTube, October 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2LOotbk>.

716
Interview C-67, June 24, 2016.

717
Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

718
Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

719
V Slavjanske propala devushka [In Slovyansk a girl disappeared], Public TV of Donbas, March 2, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2MhCRak>.

720
Miss Slavjansk – 2016 otkryto podderzhivaet boevikov “DNR”: “Jelih urodov-banderlogov treba rassstreljat”. FOTOreportazh [Miss Slovyansk-2016 openly supports the “DPR” militants: “These freaks-Banderovtsy need to be shot”.], Censor.Net, June 10, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2knsI7L>.

was accused of separatism because of photos on social networks with pro-Russian appeals (later, the girl claimed that the photos were posted from allegedly fake pages). It is known that through messages in social networks, the seventeen-year-old girl was threatened with physical violence. *“She is afraid to leave the house. She was already called and told that they would throw acid in her face if she gets out”*⁷²¹, a local activist recalls. Subsequently, the organizers of a weekly meeting on the city’s central square invited the girl to give a public explanation, which she later did.⁷²²

Five years later, residents of the city continue to experience distrust and fear. During a conversation with a local activist in a coffee shop, we had to change the table several times to avoid eavesdropping. *“Slovyansk still has this conflict. And I do not know how to deal with it”*⁷²³, the girl sighed.

These experiences influenced children’s destinies, views, and characters. Someone was physically injured; someone lost relatives or close people. Others were separated from their families by the war. Even those who were not directly involved in the terrible events had to face challenging emotional experiences. Yevhen remembers the period of the insurgency in the city with pain. It was a traumatic time for him:

“*Especially at the age of twelve, of course, it was difficult. It was tough for me. It was hard for me, and it was hard for my parents, as well as for other people in this city, I think. It was a slaughterhouse. And when you know that four people are going to be killed in your city today... And when you just do not know whether you are going to get home or not. If you go through this again, it will be very hard.*”⁷²⁴

Sometimes the stress takes the form of post-traumatic stress disorder. In an article for the newspaper Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, author Alla Kotliar tells the story of two ten-year-old (five-year-olds at the time of the events) girls from Slovyansk. Their family was crossing the checkpoint. The armed men ordered passengers to get off the bus to check the vehicle and not to enter it without their order. One of the girls got scared and started running away from the bus. The soldier held his machine gun up to the girl’s face. As a result, the girl did not speak for a long time, and the other child experienced severe stress. *“The girls are still afraid of loud sounds, fall on the floor, run away, cry, at school, they are afraid of physical education lessons and any noise...”*⁷²⁵, describes the author of the article. It is difficult for children to overcome their trauma. *“Two months ago, a slate fell from the roof of the*

721
Interview C-67, June 24, 2016.

722
Miss Slovyansk-2016 responded to accusations of supporting the “DPR”, 6262.com.ua, June 13, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2kS9q50>.

723
Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

724
Interview C-65, January 24, 2019.

725
Kotliar A. Deti vojny. Strah, kotoryj mozhet vystreliť zavtra [Kotlyar A. Children of war. Fear that may appear tomorrow], Zerkalo Nedeli, July 1, 2019, <http://bit.ly/35ebuXw>.

house, the girls were afraid, thinking that it was shelling again. One of the sisters was temporarily numb again.”⁷²⁶ Teachers and psychologists have made much effort to help the cheerful but now shy seventh-grader Kyrylo to overcome his fear of helicopters. During a volunteer project in the Luhansk region, another girl told how a sound like an explosion was heard. Two girls who had survived the war suddenly panicked because they remembered the sound of artillery fire. Others fear that the war may return to the city. “Some say that the war will return, that it is not over yet. This is the worst”⁷²⁷, says seventh-grader Tania.

However, living in situations of armed conflict can create not only harmful but also prosocial features.⁷²⁸ “I am giving more now. Even if I have not much money, I can give the last of it”⁷²⁹, says Tanya. As Andrii states, the experiences have tempered his character:

“ In principle, this experience has hardened me to life situations and challenges. I was here during the occupation and liberation, and [during] attacks, so, in principle, there is something to compare this period with. If there are now any troubles in life, then you understand that this is nothing compared to what happened. This is an invaluable experience.”⁷³⁰

Training and educational infrastructure were gradually restored after the end of the armed conflict in the city. Damaged schools were repaired at the expense of enterprises and budget funds.⁷³¹ Humanitarian organizations, in particular those focusing on minors, started to operate in the city. Thus, it was possible to implement several projects aimed at the psychosocial rehabilitation of young children and schoolchildren, as well as educational measures to develop valuable skills for young people, such as “Space for Children’s Development” (Save the children), “Best Skills for the Future” (Slovyanske Serce), “School of Social Entrepreneurship” (SE-youth. School of Social Business), school-enterprise development initiatives from the NGO Shift, the Social Initiative Festival (Plan B), and others. Moreover, centers that provide psychosocial aid not only to the city’s residents but also for military personnel and displaced persons from other conflict-affected territories have opened in the city.⁷³²

Children from the city were also involved in all-Ukrainian volunteer projects. Maryna was a participant in one of these events. “I went to the capital with a charity fund. We had 40 children from 7 to 16 years old. We went there together...from Slovyansk, Slovyansk district and Mykolaivka, which belongs to Slovyansk.”

726
Ibid.

727
Interview C-62, January 24, 2019.

728
Adolescents and War: How Youth Deal With Political Violence, Brian K. Barber, 2010, <http://bit.ly/2KNLb2l>.

729
Interview C-62, January 24, 2019.

730
Interview C-64 as of January 24, 2019.

731
Opornuju shkolu Slavjanska ne otkrojut 1 sentjabrja: V chem prichina i gde budut uchit'sja deti (Video), [The supporting school of Slovyansk will not open on September 1: What is the reason and where children will learn (Video)], Donetskie Novosti, July 10, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2HlcPSa>.

732
For example, the Center for Psychosocial Rehabilitation of the National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” (<http://kmarehab.org>).

According to the girl, participation in such youth events had a motivating influence on her and her life plans:

“ *There was a volunteer construction camp, “Building Ukraine together”. And when I started to communicate with people from Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, it was a fantastic experience! Such joy in communication... I realized that I am going forward, I need this.*”⁷³³

Active young people also proved themselves during the liquidation of the consequences of the war in the city. “*And we also went with the same young people to sort out the rubble and helped cleaning the houses that were destroyed*”⁷³⁴, recalls Polina.

Since 2014–2015, several educational spaces for young people have been operating in the city, such as the platform for social initiatives “Teplytsia”, “Happy Hub”, the coworking and event platform “Top Space”, and others. Several large-scale events and projects in the city were implemented by the platform “Zmisto”.⁷³⁵ The youth organizations Molod Hurtom (Youth Together), Molod Skhodu Ukrainy (Youth of Eastern Ukraine), Molodizhna Fundatsiya (Youth Foundation), Slovyanskyi Kulturnyi Tsent (Slovyansk Cultural Center), Zadzerkallia (Wonderland), and others today operate in the city and implement projects. Many social projects were realized with the support of international organizations and local NGOs, and activists. Teenagers recall the positive impact of such initiatives on their condition. Maryna notes that participation in the events of the new youth platform “Teplytsia” has become a solution for her from post-conflict apathy. The girl was attracted by the opportunity to communicate with her peers and attend exciting and valuable events:

“ *I was at every event for two years in “Teplytsia”. I drew, built, embroidered, and, at the same time, listened about business, social entrepreneurship, marketing, web design. I learned about everything. A little bit of everything, at least. I absorbed all the knowledge like a sponge. Because I understood that as long as I could hold on to “Teplytsia”, I was thrilled as long as it was there. I just could not imagine my life without it anymore.*”⁷³⁶

Many of the young activists, who previously took part in pro-Ukrainian political events, started carrying out public initiatives after the city’s recapture: “We have started the project “Park”, which united young people. We wanted to create a corner in the park where we could have fun, conduct some activities”⁷³⁷, said Polina, who was one of the organizers of this youth action.

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Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

734
Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

735
Platform “Zmisto”,
<http://zmisto.in.ua>.

736
Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

737
Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

In addition to the implementation of immediate goals, youth initiatives became a tool for youth consolidation and, to a certain extent, contributed to the formation of an understanding between young people who were on different sides of the political barricades but sought to change their city for the better. The organizer of the actions also recalled her acquaintance with young men of pro-Russian views:

“ We met them at the rally when the guys came out against Lenin [rally against the demolition of the Lenin monument on January 11, 2015 – ed.]. I have a pretty good-looking sister, and two guys were hitting on her. She started yelling “No!” and they kept disturbing her. Well, somehow, they found a common language, began to communicate. And as a result, we then invited them to some cleaning events in the park. They came, though they were with a separatist sentiment.

The girls managed to make friends with them. Polina believes that joint participation in socially useful activities has reduced the degree of confrontation:

“ Maybe somewhere in their hearts, they think something else. But at least they no longer go out to fight against those people who are for Ukraine. Well, they do not do anything. They may resent it, but they will not do anything wrong. They will not be standing at barricades and all that. They have changed.⁷³⁸

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Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

Youth activities aimed at restoring the city have contributed to mutual understanding among active young people and other citizens. In 2016, volunteers restored a house destroyed by an AFU



Meeting of participants of the youth platform “Teplytsia”. Source: Slavgorod.com.ua

shell at Semenivka. Yevhen recalls how the opinion of those who were initially considered the enemy changed:

“ *And the guys came from western Ukraine, and they were there for two weeks. They built this house... and when they came, at first, people almost cursed them, but they still worked. Two weeks later, locals were kissing their hands. They showed by their actions, with their hands, that they were not so bad. Yes, many of us have killed, as our military kills, but this is war. It is always the case. It is here, and in the East, and somewhere in Africa, and during the Second World War... in any case, we are all human beings, we all know how to help, we all have empathy.*⁷³⁹

Since 2018, the target program “Budget of Participation” has been implemented in Slovyansk, allowing residents of the city to offer their projects and implement those that receive the most support at the municipal expense.⁷⁴⁰

However, respondents note that the public sector’s activity, also among young people, is decreasing. Despite their efforts, the participants of the newly created movements did not get access to power in the city: they faced systemic problems and fraud of officials. According to Polina, activism is again declining in the city, as people do not see prospects for themselves in Slovyansk.

“ *I always thought that I wanted to live in Slovyansk. I like living in a small town. If I want some entertainment and fun, to go for a walk, I will go somewhere and take a walk. I do not like living in a big city. And I have always judged people who leave. I said, “How can you do this? This is our city.” But now I am already thinking about going somewhere because it is tough here. And nothing changes. Yes, cafes opened up and everything. But on a global scale, nothing changes.*⁷⁴¹

Maintaining an active youth community lies not only in the political sphere but also in the development of youth infrastructure and the creation of opportunities to develop young people’s professional and economic realization. For Maryna, the situation in the city is also difficult:

“ *The young people understand that... Everyone wants to move forward. You want to think about what you can do. This is why we have this situation. Very hard. And each person who takes an active position in his life, sits and*

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Interview C-65, January 24, 2019.

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Decision of the City Council of December 19, 2018 No. 4-LVI-7 “On approval of the City Target Program in Slovyansk for 2018-2022 (revised)”, <http://bit.ly/2XGUUzI>.

741

Interview C-66, January 24, 2019.

thinks, "What should I choose?" To stay here in Slovyansk and help when you can, and work? Or should I go and find my ambitions and leave this city?

She recalls that all the active teenagers eventually left the city to get some kind of education. *"I think they also had this choice: 'What to do next? I don't want to quit, but I have to.' Somehow, you have to earn money"*⁷⁴², says Maryna.

After the city's recapture, local authorities and social activists integrated patriotic education in their activities as an intended response to the ideologies of supporters of the "DPR" that were present in schools during the hostilities. Local pro-Ukrainian activists have insisted on dismissing several teachers and the head of education in the local council. Immediately after the city's recapture, local activists held mass events in the central square to encourage patriotic sentiments. In the center of attention were national-patriotic circles.⁷⁴³ Furthermore, the wave of popularity of militarism for teenagers also affected Slovyansk. Like many other Ukrainian cities, Slovyansk now hosts the militarized game "Dzhura".⁷⁴⁴ At the same time, its counterpart "Zarnitsa" is played on the other side of the contact line, but under different flags and slogans.⁷⁴⁵

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Interview C-63, January 24, 2019.

743
U shkolakh Slovianska zaprovadyly natsionalno-patriotychnye vykhovannia [National-patriotic education was introduced in schools in Slovyansk], Hromadske radio, September 30, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2Y016Ch>.

744
The city stage of the competition of the all-Ukrainian military-Patriotic game "Sokil Dzhura" took place in Slovyansk, YouTube, April 15, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2Zj8k4z>.

745
The final stage of the Republican defense and sports tourism game Zarnitsa was held in Donetsk, Ministry of Education and Science of the "Donetsk People's Republic", May 22, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2QDwDFu>



Festival "Birthday of the country", August 24, 2017. Source: 6262.com.ua

746
Kontsepsiia vykhovannia harmatnoho m'iasa [The concept of raising cannon fodder]. Spilne, February 28, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2G8SuyF>.

747
"Za vas pacany na vojne umirajut, chtoby vy zdes' sideli na lavoчке" – na Donbasse podrostki demonstrativno proignorovali gimn Ukrainy, ["Boys die for you in the war, so that you can sit here on a bench" – in the Donbas, teenagers defiantly ignored the anthem of Ukraine], Vchasno, August 14, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2JzOoAC>.

748
Interview C-67, January 24, 2019.

However, school education and upbringing's ideologization can potentially have its pitfalls in radicalization and hostility towards groups with different views.⁷⁴⁶ There are, for example, cases when a local activist called the police because a group of teenagers refused to stand up during the national anthem.⁷⁴⁷ Nevertheless, students are willing to participate in patriotic music and dance activities as organized weekly in the city's central square. According to the organizers, even those children whose parents have hostile attitudes to pro-Ukrainian activists participate in these events.⁷⁴⁸

Even though young people could be "on different sides of the barricades", sympathize with opposing ideas and parties to the conflict, it is essential to focus on uniting and achieving mutual understanding.

Children and young people are one of the categories requiring the most attention in armed conflict situations and overcoming its consequences. The attention that children and young people need cannot be limited to individual psychosocial rehabilitation measures, which are nevertheless important. However, overcoming



A district stage of the all-Ukrainian game "Dzhura" in Slovyansk, April 24, 2019. Source: slavdelo.dn.ua

the consequences should also be followed by shaping the future and prospects. First of all, it is the creation of economic opportunities for the development of the urban community and urban youth, as well as providing opportunities to realize the youth potential not only at the grass-roots level but also in local governments. Youth development and community development are inextricably linked because *“the youth is one of the hidden resources available in every society, on the mobilization of which its viability depends.”*⁷⁴⁹ Children, adolescents, and young people are the recipients of social transformations, but at the same time, they are the agents of future changes in the life of the community. As generations, they are carriers of a particular collective experience, whose goal is to change the “agenda” of the community life. Youth in societies that have experienced the tragedy of an armed military conflict is crucial. Moreover, it will determine whether the community will have a future or yet another “lost generation”.

749
Diagnosis of our time, Karl Manheim,
2010, <http://bit.ly/2q4sBe8>.



District stage of the all-Ukrainian game “Dzhura” in Slovyansk, April 24, 2019. Source: slavdelo.dn.ua



A fence damaged during shelling in Cherevkivka.
Photo credit: Mariia Biliakova, November 1, 2018

A PATH TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

11

MARIIA BILIAKOVA, NATALIYA KAPLUN
Vostok-SOS

ANDRII MOSKALENKO
Public Committee for the Protection of Constitutional Rights and
Freedoms of Citizens

The stories in this book illustrate gross violations of human rights and war rules in Slovyansk from April 12 to July 5, 2014. In particular, they focus on what individuals lost, but sometimes also achieved, during this time. Some people lost friends or family members, were hurt and traumatized, suffered material losses, but also lost trust in other people (for example, in those who justified, contributed to, or even committed human rights violations), in state institutions, and the media. At the same time, people had to survive in most challenging life situations and made experiences which are invaluable for building a future in which human rights violations will become impossible.

A RETURN TO PEACEFUL LIFE

With the restoration of governmental control in Slovyansk on July 5, 2014, a new stage in the life of the city's community started. Its residents had to overcome the consequences of a humanitarian disaster, restore the city's viability, and reduce tensions between the government's supporters and people who were hostile to it. Pastor Petro Dudnyk, a social activist and one of the leaders of the Slovyansk volunteer movement, tried to reconcile the residents of the city:

“ First, we started putting up billboards with the word of God, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven,” something like that. And, second, there was a helpful principle that worked then. The principle is straightforward: do good unto others. Because when a person does good unto others, their negative emotions are minimized or even turned into something positive.⁷⁵⁰

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Interview C-15, November 2, 2018.

Volunteers, including Slovyansk residents and activists from other Ukrainian cities, Protestants, and believers of other faiths, delivered humanitarian aid and restored houses damaged by explosions. All concerned people were involved in this work, including those who received aid. Beneficiaries were asked to share what they received with other residents who needed help, not necessarily their relatives. Those who repaired their own homes were given double amounts of building materials to help their neighbors. Through this, the city residents, who agreed to cooperate with volunteers and joined in helping others, eventually felt that they were part of a single, joint movement aimed at restoring the city and healing the wounds of war. *“These were fire extinguishers that extinguished the fire of hatred”*, concludes pastor Dudnyk. *“I believe that something similar will have to be done on the occupied territory after the liberation”*.

IS THE PAST IN THE PAST?

The end of the armed confrontation did not unite the divided community of Slovyansk. Through volunteers' efforts in the summer of 2014, tensions between people were reduced but not entirely overcome. Slovyansk is still divided into supporters and opponents of the actions of the Ukrainian government. There are carriers of different interpretations of what happened in their city in the spring and summer of 2014. For some, July 5, 2014, is the date of liberation from Russian invaders. For others—it is the beginning of an “occupation” by the Ukrainian army. Different interpretations are combined into two narratives about the events of 2014, which differ not only in the vision of the past and future of the city, but also geographically as the pro-Ukrainian narrative is created in Kyiv and presents itself in Slovyansk, and the pro-Russian one is crafted in Moscow and, respectively, the captured Donetsk. The first one has the status of an official narrative. The other one is replicated by the powerful propaganda machine of the Russian Federation.

The pro-Ukrainian narrative in Slovyansk is reflected in the works of local museum workers, local historians, and journalists who closely followed the events of 2014 in the city,⁷⁵¹ in numerous monuments in honor of the fallen Ukrainian soldiers and in the memoirs of citizens who support the integrity of Ukraine.

Pro-Ukrainian activists in Slovyansk were the main force behind perpetuating the memory of the events of 2014; local authorities and intellectuals joined them later. Since the summer of 2014, activists have been setting up memorial signs near Slovyansk

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Presentation of the book *Pam'iat zhyva u Slovi'iansku* [“Memory is alive in Slovyansk”], official website of the National Union of local historians of Ukraine, June 10, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MKbzvV>; permanent exhibition “ATO 2014 Slovyansk” opened in Slovyansk Local Museum, July 5, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2ZvBv4K>; Presentation of the book *Slovi'iansk u viini 2014 roku* [“Slovyansk in the war of 2014”], Delovoy Slovyansk, July 7, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2D705KP>.

where soldiers of the AFU were killed. First, these were wooden crosses, which were later replaced with stone monuments. Now, the number of these monuments reaches more than a dozen. These are signs at the site of the first military clash during the conflict in eastern Ukraine, at places where groups of military personnel were killed, helicopters and planes were shot down.

Vadym Liakh, the Mayor of Slovyansk, explained the installation of the first monuments in the city as follows:

“ *The first of these monuments appeared because volunteers installed them. There was no existing official program. Moreover, there was a problem...in other words, it is good when an ordinary person has an impulse and cannot be stopped, but it is necessary to allocate some land [for a monument – ed.]. And we had all the monuments installed first, and then we legalized them and put them on the balance sheet for maintenance.*⁷⁵²

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Interview C-73, August 13, 2018.

In Slovyansk, three monuments honor civilians who died in the spring and summer of 2014:

- a memorial plaque on the building of the SSU building in memory of Volodymyr Rybak, the deputy of Horlivka City Council, who was kidnapped and killed by the IAG;
- a memorial in honor of the four murdered Protestants of the Transfiguration of the Lord Church;
- A memorial sign for all victims of the hostilities installed in the Shovkovychnyi Park.

The inscription on the monument in the Shovkovychnyi Park expresses the main elements of the pro-Ukrainian narrative in a few words: “*In the eternal memory to the residents of Slovyansk*



A memorial sign to all the victims of the hostilities installed in the Shovkovychnyi Park.
Source: slavinfo.dn.ua

*and other cities of Ukraine who died as a result of the occupation by Russian invaders and terrorist gangs in April–July 2014.”*⁷⁵³ The formulation of the monument inscription can be considered as dedicated to everyone in general, including the Ukrainian military.

The newly created monuments are now part of the city’s public space, and commemorations in front of them are today included in the official calendar of the Slovyansk City Council.

In addition to memorializing and glorifying the victims, the creation of monuments also plays a social and psychological role, since memorials and official events allow the victims and victims’ relatives to feel that the events of 2014 are past and that the dead will not return. However, the entire city expresses its grief for them. This allows socializing the victims, helping them accept the traumatic past, and focusing on solving pressing life problems. They also receive symbolic recognition from the city residents and confirm that the tragic events will not be forgotten, and the community will make efforts to ensure that such events do not happen again.

Now, the policy of remembrance in Slovyansk unequivocally has a military character. In the center of its attention are Ukrainian soldiers who died near the city. During discussions of the author’s team with Slovyansk activists Vasyl Khomenko and Oleksandr Belimenko⁷⁵⁴, the latter confirmed that the attention to the military is not accidental because Ukrainian soldiers liberated the city; without their contribution to the victory, the social and political structure of the city would have been different.

Researcher Enver Djuliman writes that interpretations are born in certain social conditions because *“through the use of a selective approach to historical events, the current social order is legitimized.”*⁷⁵⁵ This explains why the pro-Ukrainian narrative and the politics of memory in Slovyansk were formed first and foremost around honoring the Ukrainian army’s military.

However, there is still no accurate information about the number of dead and missing civilians who were taken hostage in the spring and summer of 2014. The sizeable collective trauma suffered by the city’s residents at that time does not exist in the city’s public space. That is one reason why, the traumatic experience of thousands of people is not yet expressed adequately. However, this is not a purely Slovyansk problem. It is a problem for Ukrainian society as a whole. Perhaps we should not expect its solution until the end of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

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U Donetskii regioni z’iavyvsia pam’iatnyk myrnym meshkantsiam, shcho zahynuly vid ruk rosiiskykh okupantiv [A monument to civilians who died at the hands of Russian invaders has appeared in Donetsk region], 62.ua, January 10, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2P01UQo>.

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Interview C-74, December 12, 2018.

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Reconciliation. Signs along the Road, Enver Djuliman, p. 136, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2UdlACW>.

It is important to note that the pro-Russian narrative is also based on honoring the memory of the fallen combatants of Slovyansk. In it, the objects of honor are the fighters of the “People’s Militia of the Donbas” (military or civilians who took up arms, citizens of Ukraine and the Russian Federation). The narrative legitimizes the self-proclaimed “republic”, and it focuses on the suffering of the IAG fighters for the sake of a future as part of Russia. This is not surprising because the social and political system of the unrecognized “republics” of eastern Ukraine could be constructed only with weapons’ help.

A resident of Slovyansk, Oleksandra Yakovlieva⁷⁵⁶, a pensioner whose apartment was hit by a mine during one of the attacks, recalls 2014 as follows:

“ I saw these separatists. We talked to them, they asked us for water. I brought them water. They are ordinary people. We went to vote: we were for them, for these separatists. Our City Mayor, Shtepa Nelia, was also with us; all this was agreed upon by us. But Poroshenko’s army came and killed them, Shtepa was taken away, and our apartments were mutilated.

The focus on the IAG fighters’ suffering in the pro-Russian narrative makes the suffering of civilians secondary. It precludes the very suggestion that the fighters may have committed wrongdoings or human rights violations. Oleksandra Yakovlieva lives near the SSU building, where there is a memorial plaque in honor of Volodymyr Rybak, who was tortured to death. She does not know his story. After reminding her that it is about the deputy of Horlivka City Council, she answered: “Yes, I remember something, but I do not know for sure. You see, I do not like politics that much.” Besides, she does not consider herself a victim of the events of 2014 and repeatedly emphasizes that the real victims in Slovyansk were exclusively IAG

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The interviewee’s name has been changed. Interview C-75, October 31, 2018.



A memorial plaque in memory of the Deputy of Horlivka City Council Volodymyr Rybak. Source: screenshot from the YouTube channel Novosti Donbasa, <https://bit.ly/3asaFM1>

fighters: *“These separatists, I feel sorry for them. Poor people: they were all shot. Oh, this is so hard!”*

The pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian narratives recorded in Slovyansk show a lot in common when analyzed in detail: the focus on military actions and the fate of armed people. The civilian population is given a secondary role, and civilian casualties are explained as collateral losses justified for the sake of a great goal (returning the city to the control of the Government of Ukraine/defending “the right” to be with Russia). Also, the death of relatives or civilians appears as a motive for revenge, as something for which one needs to take up arms and join armed groups. Both narratives make it clear that the exact number of dead and missing is unknown; responsibility for civil losses and human rights violations is solely assigned to the “other side”.

Thus, the significant psychological trauma that civilian residents of Slovyansk sustained in 2014 is not being processed. Perhaps, this is why most stories recorded in Slovyansk show the difficulty of normalizing relations between people after 2014; they are more about distrust between people than about ways to overcome it. The question of how to build relationships with loved ones who betrayed you, neighbors, and work colleagues who helped the “other side” still hurts. Events experienced in 2014 are not bygone. They still affect the residents’ daily communication with other people.

THE TEACHER

Olena Melnyk⁷⁵⁷ is a primary school teacher and a resident of Slovyansk. Until April 2014, she considered herself an ordinary woman whose life was divided between work and family. When Euromaidan started in Kyiv, she condemned it: *“...how can you make such a mess in the center of Europe, in Kyiv, in the capital!”* However, when she saw representatives of the “new government” on the streets of her native city, Olena wished that she had participated in Kyiv’s Maidan.⁷⁵⁸

On April 14, 2014, a friend called her and told her that the Right Sector attacked the city and occupied the City Council. Olena did not believe it at first: *“No way, let us check it”*. They went to the central square; saw a crowd of people in jackets with the words *“I speak Russian”*. Olena was scared: it seemed to her that some bandits, drug addicts were around, and she asked her friend to leave as quickly as possible before anyone noticed them.

After the city’s capture, the school where Olena worked seemed to turn into a center of propaganda for the so-called “DPR”. Some

⁷⁵⁷
The interviewee’s name has been changed.

⁷⁵⁸
Interview C-76, January 15, 2018.

of her colleagues worked in the commission of the “referendum”, which eventually took place within the school walls. At the teachers’ meeting, the principal stressed that it was no longer allowed to tell children about Ukraine, which startled Olena. Only when it became dangerous to speak out in support of the integrity of Ukraine, she realized that she was Ukrainian:

“*Due to Putin, we became different. We realized that we were Ukrainians. We realized that we have Ukrainian roots... it is as if you get this inner confidence. We realized that we are Ukrainians, and it is impossible to change this, no matter what happens. Even if I am told that I will be shot, I will not renounce it.*

In April–May 2014, when a curfew was in effect in Slovyansk, Olena noticed that someone was drawing Ukrainian flags every night and putting up stickers “Slovyansk is Ukraine” in crowded places. Of course, all these symbols were quickly removed, but for Olena, it was a glimmer of hope in the solid darkness: *“Well, this is nonsense, of course, but for us, it was very significant. We knew we were not alone.”*

The world that was familiar to Olena then seemed to split in half: all acquaintances, friends, work colleagues, relatives who supported the pro-Russian movement suddenly became enemies for her: *“I just walk past them, not that I do not trust them, they have ceased to exist for me. I know it is wrong, I have to talk to them. But I must be a weak person, I just do not want to talk to them. I crossed them out of my life, I do not trust them.”*

During the fighting in the city, the school where Olena worked suffered from shelling. By that time, Olena and her family had left Slovyansk. Therefore, she could not figure out what exactly happened that day. Residents of the quarter blamed the Ukrainian army, but Olena did not believe their words. Residents of the city always, often groundlessly, accused the AFU of all civilian losses and destructions in the city without exception, so Olena decided to just believe that the Ukrainian army is not capable of such terrible things as shelling schools: *“I do not know who fired, but I know for sure that the school was destroyed by the ‘DPR’ guys. That is one hundred percent.”*

Volunteers restored the damaged school. They worked quickly and diligently to ensure that the children came to the renovated building for the start of school on September 1. According to Olena’s memoirs, residents who lived in houses near the school scolded the volunteers, spat in their direction, and said: *“You broke it, so repair it yourself!”*

Olena's colleagues also had a negative attitude towards the volunteers who repaired their school, although they did not dare to show it openly.

When Olena returned to work, she decided that she would do everything to ensure that the "Russian spring" would never happen again in Slovyansk. For this, she changed her environment and teaching style. Since the fall of 2014, in her daily work, Olena began to tell children more about Ukraine and what it means to be a citizen of Ukraine. Olena's position was not liked then and still is not liked by all parents of the schoolchildren. However, the teacher does not give up: "... and I say to the parents 'I am not interested in your opinion, you can tell me what you want [but – ed.] I will raise my children as Ukrainians, whether you like it or not. If you do not like it, go to other teachers or another school.'"

Olena was never able to re-establish relations with her colleagues who worked at the "referendum". Although one of her colleagues was convicted of separatism (he was fired and lost the right to teach at the school), other like-minded people remained in their positions.

“ I, having such a clear pro-Ukrainian position, was isolated. Well, I blame the principal, of course. And in general, the school is in bad shape because of the principal's position, she still says, "Wait, everything will come back". If it was possible just to remove her, give teachers another job. I do not want to hurt anyone, I do not want to kill anyone, just take them away from the children, these people.

In the fall of 2014, Olena became a military volunteer; she found contacts of the Kulchytskyi battalion, began collecting and transporting aid to the military. It was not easy because the work at the school had to be squeezed between correspondence with charity workers and trips to the front line. When Olena visited the military, she always stressed that she came from Slovyansk, so that the military knew that there were both volunteers and activists among Slovyansk residents. However, Olena also had to face stereotypes. One day she was traveling with soldiers of the Kulchytskyi battalion in a car. The military found out where she came from and viciously said, "Oh... from Slovyansk. This stinking separatist city!" Olena began to cry in despair, "Guys, we came to you, I am from Slovyansk. We have brought you so much: food, uniforms, clothing, and what you asked for. And you say that this is a separatist city. I am from Slovyansk!"

Everyday life in a community still divided by the events of 2014, daily communication with people who remain trapped in stereotypes

and prejudices, led Olena to a painful understanding of the futility of activists' efforts to overcome people's hostility to the Ukrainian state—of which they are all citizens of. She understands that to restore trust in the community, extensive and systematic work is needed, changes are needed, but Olena does not know how to achieve that:

“ *We must change everything. We must change ourselves first. I do not think it is Russia's fault. Russia is what it is, and there are ordinary people there. Well, they say that if Russia falls apart into small parts... the war will end. But the war will continue between us, between people who have particular positions. The war continues. We are divided into two parts everywhere: at every enterprise, in the store, in the market. Everywhere there are people with opposing views. And when will all people finally understand? I do not know what has to happen for them to understand all this.*

THE COMMUNITY OF THE DOBRA ZVISTKA CHURCH

The city's Protestant community has already been mentioned several times in this book because it played an active role in the city during the spring-summer of 2014.⁷⁵⁹ About 10–15 people generally expressed pro-Russian sympathies among the Dobra Zvistka Church's parishioners out of 700 believers. However, these 10–15 believers did not take up arms; they believed that the future of Slovyansk was connected with Russia. However, the Protestants managed to unite around Christian values:

“ *Some families were split into two parts. One daughter has pro-Russian views, and the other daughter with her*

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See also the sections “85 Days under Fire” and “The Slavs are Paving the Way to Rama”.



A memorial in honor of four Protestants who died during the capture of Slovyansk. Photo credit: Mariia Biliakova, November 3, 2018

husband is radically pro-Ukrainian. The mother needs to break between two sides and reconcile. The father also watched TV, he is also more on a different side, and the mother needs to reconcile. Everyone had their own processes: from drastic, radical ones to when they were able to talk. Somehow, they tried to negotiate, "Let us not touch the sharp points." But in general, the families managed to stay together by following the wise advice and instructions [of the leaders of the Dobra Zvistka Church – ed.].⁷⁶⁰

The active position of the moral authorities and opinion leaders of this community, its pastors, was crucial for preserving relations between people both in families and in the church community itself. Petro Dudnyk, together with other church leaders, in their sermons and conversations, reminded about the persecution of believers in the spring and summer of 2014, about the sacrificial assistance to victims, which was provided to citizens regardless of their views, about the inadmissibility of violence, about the value of personal freedom, as well as about the democratic choice of Ukraine:

“ After the release, as I said, we decided not to pressure anyone. I just shared my position that I am Ukrainian, that I love this land. I do not want to leave it, and I do not want anyone to come to me from another country and plant their ideology. That is why we have publicly stated this. But we did not pressure anyone who was pro-Russian. We began to teach love for our land. And this lowered the tension.

However, Petro Dudnyk did not manage to avoid pressure on believers with pro-Russian views altogether: “[We – ed.] tried to show the people that if you are here, then love this land. But if you want to go to Russia, no one stops you. Come to us, we will help you, we will collect money for a ticket, we will send you with love. But if you live here...”, Petro Dudnyk cited this statement not as a threat but rather as a suggestion to co-religionists to refuse to “build Russia in Slovyansk” because the majority of the community did not share such a choice. As for the statement about buying tickets, it remained in words only. No one from the church community decided to move to Russia.

An essential role in establishing mutual understanding in the church community was that opinion leaders clearly understood the problem and made efforts to solve it. They tried talking to people, sharing experiences, and suggesting ways to overcome the problem. In the end, the community’s unity was more valuable for the believers than any prospects of the city as part of another country.

Petro Dudnyk admits that the experience of 2014 was crucial for him, and based on it, he divided people into different groups. However, not by their political views and not by the colors of their flags:

“ From my perspective, the war divided people into three categories. The first category responds to pain. They do not ask “Who are you? Why you? What are your political views?” They see the pain and say: “All right, I will help you.” The second category of people does not respond to pain: “Not with me” and all that. “I do not care.” These people do not care what happens and how people suffer... The third category of people are “sofa troops” who condemn both those who react to pain and those who do not respond to pain, and they condemn themselves.

Petro Dudnyk saw different people among the military and civilians on both sides of the armed conflict. He hopes that there will be more people who can see the pain of others. This can become the basis for understanding between people with different political preferences in Slovyansk and Ukraine as a whole.

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The interviewee's name has been changed.

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Interview C-31, December 14, 2018.

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Hryhorii⁷⁶¹ is an entrepreneur who lived in Slovyansk all his life.⁷⁶² He manufactured and sold ceramics and was engaged in this business in 2014. The capture of the city did not come as a surprise to Hryhorii. He is sure that Russian interference in the city's community was supposed to happen, especially if one looks at the close ties of the Slovyansk ceramic business with the Russian one:

“ The fact is that we have such a specific city; we are tied to trade with Russia and are tied very strongly even now. I believe that many of our specialists were funded and received assistance from there. A lot of money is coming from Russia. We have many workshops. Many ceramic products are sold in Russia, and the funds are enormous. Some simply feared [losses – ed.]. I believe that unkind people used the situation, and they turned it all around.

At the end of May, activists gathered during a general meeting of residents in Hryhorii's street: “The community was called to the next street. There they said, ‘We will control officials with our community.’ It was very unclear. I went there, too. The street coordinator lives there. We got together next to her house.” At that meeting, Hryhorii said that he considered the conducted “referendum” illegal. There

were no IAG fighters nearby, so Hryhorii did not pay attention to what he was saying: *"I did not go [to the referendum – ed.]. The Constitution states that one hundred thousand signatures are needed."* As a response to this, an unknown man with his hand in a cast exclaimed: *"Glory to Ukraine!"* A woman recorded all this on her phone. The man screamed: *"What are you recording? Give it back!"* She screamed. Hryhorii pulled them apart: *"We already have many problems. Fighting between neighbors will not do any good!"*

A day after the meeting, armed men came to Hryhorii and showed him a photo taken at the meeting. They asked Hryhorii about the man with the cast on his arm, but he did not know anything about him. They searched the house and found an old warm military uniform that Hryhorii wore as work clothes: *"Oh, you are from the Right Sector! Get ready, take warm clothes with you. You are going to sit in the basement."*

After that, they concentrated again to find the young man with a cast on his arm.

They approached Hryhorii's neighbors, showed photos, and asked who it could be: *"To be honest, the locals were accommodating. Because when I was taken, we stopped by one of the houses on the street and showed the laptop with the picture... Then we stopped by another house. Everyone on the street really tried to help them."*

He believes that it was not just some situational collaboration. Hryhorii claims that he witnessed the functioning of the denunciation system: *"That is, the denunciation worked clearly—everyone was watching someone. Very sad."*

Having made sure that the search was useless, the militants took Hryhorii to the SSU building.

Hryhorii spent about two days there. During interrogations, he had to answer strange questions unrelated to the suspicion of espionage: *"Why are you not like everyone else? Why did you not go to the referendum?"* He answered: *"I need to figure out what this is all about. I cannot do this. Maybe someone can, but I cannot. I need to decide for myself. I need to understand what is going on."*

Hryhorii's wife, who had returned home after work, started to look for her husband. The neighbors did not tell her that Hryhorii was taken to the SSU building. She only learned from friends what happened to her husband.

On that day, not only neighbors but also friends turned away from Hryhorii's family. When they heard that Hryhorii was in the basement, they started assuming that he probably did something

wrong. They even rumored that he was “a drug-addict and from the Right Sector.”

After a day and a half, the woman managed to get her husband released. The day after his release, Hryhorii and his family left Slovyansk.

Now, Hryhorii again has his own business. His uncle still works for him, who even after the incident with his nephew has not lost his pro-Russian sympathies:

“ He [the uncle – ed.] thought all these were “our own boys”. This is so sad. My family supported morons. They did not have enough brains—they supported them. I asked them: “Are you sick? Your nephew was almost killed!” And my uncle said, “Well, but you are alive!” It is really sad.

Hryhorii has to communicate daily with people who, in May 2014, willingly helped people with weapons who positioned themselves as the new rulers of the city. He does not know how to deal with them because the neighbors are sure they did not do anything wrong to Hryhorii. Even today, Hryhorii cannot get rid of a feeling of danger, although Slovyansk has returned to a peaceful life for five years already. He does not know how to solve this problem. It is even worse that he does not believe in any positive changes:

“ It would be good if those who helped the separatist forces were detained. I understand that our prisons are not limitless. And maybe now is not the time to deal with them. Nevertheless, we are in a state of war. God forbid something goes wrong. I am not sure that those who helped the militants will not help again. It is sad. We had time to at least identify them all. They may have been found. I do not know. But people walk around calmly, expressing the same thoughts. And they are not afraid. But we have to be afraid. Fools. Sadly.

THE STAFF OF THE CAPTURED SCHOOL

In this story, it is difficult to single out the main character because it is about the staff of a school in Slovyansk, near which the militants built a checkpoint in the spring of 2014. Later, one of the school buildings was turned into barracks, which experienced artillery attacks from the AFU troops from time to time. Director Serhii Antonenko and the headteacher Svitlana Chumak recalled the story of the school staff.⁷⁶³ The story talks about the possibility of mutual understanding between people when united by a common survival

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Interview C-58, November 1, 2018.
The names of the interviewees have
been changed.

goal. The constant danger of attacks of both sides of the armed conflict affected the relationships within the school—any disputes about which side should be supported turned out to be secondary because all the efforts of the teachers aimed at preserving the lives of the children in the first place, and then the lives of the teachers:

“ *We are merely responsible for children; we have a team of teachers. And people who were responsible understand their importance and their responsibility for preserving every child’s life; most of all, we prioritized children’s lives. And this brought us together and gave us strength and opportunities.*”

Because of this, in the spring of 2014, the school completed its educational process as quickly as possible, graduates received educational documents, and parents were told that children should leave the captured city. As soon as the children stopped attending school, the entire teaching staff went on vacation and were given their work records. “*We experienced this situation together*”, Svitlana emphasizes. “*We had to survive in this situation, and not to argue [with each other – ed.]*” The important thing is that everyone at school understood: “*Sooner or later, wars come to an end, and people remain people.*”

After the city’s recapture, the school management did everything to make teachers feel important regardless of their views. School employees started to return: “*At first, I was very anxious when everybody returned. Some did not return immediately. But we waited for a long time in August. Eventually, people drove up and also returned from Russia. It was very nice when the team almost recovered.*”

Serhii recalls the consequences of 2014. Fortunately, none of the school employees was killed:

“ *In the area behind the school, many buildings were damaged. One of them, the house of a school employee, was utterly destroyed. We helped him with construction materials—at least with what we had. Thank God, there were no human injuries, no victims. God was merciful.*”

There is mutual understanding among the school staff, although, as the director notes, no one openly promotes any sides: “*There are discussions, of course, there are different opinions, but...It is all the same—people come to a consensus because we still need to live together in one community.*” Both Serhii and Svitlana note the precariousness of the balance achieved in the team, which is maintained, in their opinion, by taboos on topics that can cause

disputes between people. In particular, this is true for discussing complex political issues raised in the Ukrainian information space:

“These conflicts are inflated [by Ukrainian media – ed.]. The media should be immediately extinguished; it should not be discussed at all. We hear it from TV screens very often. To put it bluntly, the media ‘helps’ with this issue [conflict – ed.]. It has very harmful effects”.

THE VOLUNTEER’S SISTER

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Interview C-77, December 12, 2018.

Larysa is originally from Luhansk region, but she has been living in Slovyansk for more than a decade.⁷⁶⁴ In April 2014, she worked as an accountant for a private firm. The capture of the city came as a surprise to her: *“In fact, I hoped that the regional leaders would not allow this. But it was clear that there was no help coming.”* Larysa’s colleagues at work reacted differently to the capture of Slovyansk. She was the only one trying to defend the unity of Ukraine. *“One of the employees then said, ‘Uncle Vova will come and restore order.’ The other decided to remain neutral. But, behind their conversations, it was palpable that they do not clearly understand that they were citizens of Ukraine”,* Larysa said.

A few days after the city’s capture, Larysa, along with the director of her firm, was in the city center, near the captured administrative buildings. *“See, the people have risen!”* the director commented on what he saw. Larysa answered, *“What people? Look at these people. I have a job, you have a job. We are at work together. But these comrades are grandmothers, grandfathers, housewives, single mothers who have five or six children....Well, accordingly, this is our Slovyansk community.”* The attitude of Larysa’s colleagues towards the events in the city began to change when they heard from their business friends that the new rulers of the city, the so-called “risen community”, began to seize the property of businesses, including cars and money.

In early May, the company where Larysa worked stopped functioning. Employees took all valuables from the office to their homes to protect the property from looting. Some left the city, and some stayed at home. One day in May, Larysa’s husband picked up their son from school and took him to her parents in Luhansk region, where it was safer at that time.

Almost all of May and early June, Larysa and her husband walked around Slovyansk and watched the city changing. Larysa shared her impressions with her brother, a participant of Euromaidan in Luhansk. By that time, he had already moved to Kyiv, and he was

in contact with the AFU units located near Slovyansk. *“We were the eyes and ears. We just walked around the city. With our passports. Passports and a small purse. We did not attract any attention since we appeared to be indifferent: we had looked inactive and just walked and looked around. Anyway, we had nothing to do.”*

At checkpoints and in the city in general, Larysa and her husband met different people—strangers in camouflage who did not know their way around Slovyansk, as well as close acquaintances: *“I met Fedya there [at the checkpoint – ed.], and when I asked him ‘Fedya, what are you doing here?’ he [replied – ed.]: ‘Well...We have to defend the country from the banderivtsi [derogatory term for Ukrainians – ed.]!’”*

Sometime around that period, Larysa’s husband was approached by classmates who offered to join the “militia”. In their opinion, every man had to join the IAG. Otherwise, Ukraine would be captured by the European Union, and the Germans would take the Donbas’ coal mines.

Larysa objected. The woman explained that her father was a miner, and she knew what the mines were like here. There is no way they can be so attractive to the Germans that they violate the international order for this: *“Do you know how much money is poured into these mines? My father told me six or seven years ago that a ton of coal takes more than a thousand hryvnia of subsidies! The mines are absolutely unprofitable!”* However, the husband’s classmate emphasized to know exactly that the Germans would be definitely planning to appropriate the coal mines, and everyone in Slovyansk would know this. That is why they took up arms. Larysa was surprised: *“This is a secret to me, the first time I have heard this!”*

In June, Larysa and her husband already found it difficult to accept such conversations. From time to time, they tried to explain to their friends that there was another vision of what had happened in the city:

“ *We spoke directly about the deaths that happened, the deaths of soldiers from both sides, the deaths of civilians, the deaths of children, the severed hand of a child... And I just told them that all these deaths are all on your conscience. You ran for the referendum. You shouted that Russia would take you. Have you thought from an economic point of view, who would take you?! A huge country, most of the land is not suitable even for agriculture. And this crowd... you have nothing here in Slovyansk, who would take you?! Why would they [Russia – ed.] take you, parasites?!*

One day in June, Larysa got a call from her brother, who warned her that there would be heavy shelling in the evening. Larysa and her husband prepared for it—they removed flowers from the windowsills, put household appliances on the floor, covered them, collected the most necessary things, and wrote notes with instructions on whom to call if something happened to them. They dressed so that the broken glass would not cut their hands and feet.

“ *It was the month of June, and our artillery was working. They worked so hard...It was the only day I ever heard a whistling sound outside my window. That is, before that, somewhere something thumped, shot, my flowers almost fell from the windowsill, the house was shaking. We had the windows open all the time so that the double-glazed windows did not crack. It was the only day I ever heard an artillery whistle next to my home... Planes were continually buzzing, shooting there, whistling here. Up to, I guess, two o'clock.*

All Larysa’s neighbors, residents of an apartment building, hid in the basement, where they waited out the attack. Larysa and her husband did not go to the basement: *“My husband and I generally tried to stay away from traitors. We had some personal hostility.”*

Larysa recalls that during the shelling, her husband told her: *“I do not mind that this Slovyansk was wiped off the face of the Earth so that this infection would not go all over [eastern Ukraine – ed.]”*

After the second night, the shelling stopped. Larysa’s husband went to bed, and she corresponded with the community, which monitored the situation in the city on Twitter until morning. At dawn, she went out on the balcony and saw the neighbors coming out of the basement. It seemed to her that they were drunk *“because they were just crawling out of there, dazed.”*

In the following days, Larysa and her husband left Slovyansk and returned only after its recapture. Since then, friends and neighbors who supported the IAG fighters have begun to express their thoughts very carefully. Her husband’s classmates, who joined the “militia”, fled to Donetsk, and their relatives sold their property and left for Russia. Larysa and other activists in Slovyansk hoped for a complete change of the local government to purge it of those who had nurtured the “Russian spring” in the city. However, this did not happen: *“We have very soft legislation, and as you can see [nothing happened to them – ed.]. The same people are still sitting in the school; the same people are still sitting in the executive committee.*

The whole city knows their faces.” Now, many pro-Ukrainian activists are disappointed and passive.

In December 2014, Larysa’s brother died near Donetsk. Back in August, he volunteered to defend the integrity of Ukraine, first serving in the 30th mechanized brigade, then in the 90th separate airmobile battalion. Final goodbyes were said to him at the central square of Slovyansk. Although all friends sympathized with Larysa because of her loss, she believes that not everyone was sincere then: *“The same parents told me how sympathetic they were and that they were all patriots. But I know that not all of them are patriots. Just like at school, not everyone is patriotic.”*

At the graveyard where Larysa’s brother is buried, there is also a grave of an IAG fighter who died during the battle for Slovyansk. On memorial days, Larysa sees his relatives. They nod at each other, but they do not communicate.

“ *In 2014, it was all edgy; we had hotheads who were screaming, “Let us get them out of here. We have a soldier buried here, and here [next to him – ed.] this trash is buried!” I said I was against it. We are all the same on earth. We are civilized people. You see, their relatives also are in grief. Even if we are on opposite sides, we are civilized people. I am against fighting with the graves, with the dead.*

According to Larysa, the people who pass through this cemetery react differently to the nearby graves of fighters of IAG and Ukrainian soldiers (next to her brother’s grave, there is the grave of Roman Napiahlo, participant of the battle for the airport in Donetsk): *“People are different—some pass by and say ‘Oh, how young they were!’, some are indifferent, and others are looking with joy. That is, everyone has their own reaction.”*

Larysa has never heard of monuments to the Ukrainian military being desecrated in Slovyansk. Monuments are located in the vicinity, in relatively deserted places, where vandals would not even be recognized. However, she is not aware that anything of the sort has taken place. Larysa and her friends take care of the graves. They plant flowers near them and clean them up because the dead children’s parents come here, too. They are pleased that these places are perpetuated and maintained:

“ *I did not hear that in Slovyansk something was vandalized somewhere. Be that as it may, no one here has ever reached such a level of barbarism. We were anxious, of course [when – ed.] local people came. Some women do not hide where their husbands are...We still live and work in a society where there are different, completely different views.*

“WAITING FOR YOU AT HOME”

The post-war revival of the city included the return of teachers who left Slovyansk during the insurgency and moved to the uncontrolled territory. Not everyone accepted the reality of the “People’s Republic” and subsequently sought ways to return to a safe environment and their own families. In August 2015, the SSU introduced a program for the reintegration of Ukrainian citizens who often, without realizing the consequences of their choice, joined the IAG groups or their activities. The program, which was launched on the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, was named “Waiting for You at Home”.

The SSU Program applies to persons who have not committed murder, torture, or rape, participated in attacks on businesses, state institutions, or other organizations, and *“have a sincere desire to correct their own mistakes by honest work on the territory of Ukraine.”*⁷⁶⁵ The program returns ordinary residents who have become members of the IAG to a peaceful way of life and sets the stage for the general weakening of illegal groups by withdrawing individuals who have joined their ranks by accident.

During the capture of Slovyansk, the militants engaged the civilian population to perform simple tasks: regulating transport, controlling public order, serving at checkpoints, etc. Many residents had to survive the changing conditions of the “Russian spring” to ensure food, accommodation, security, and at least some income. Due to their affiliation with a party that was outlawed after recapture, some civilians left the city for fear of prosecution by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. Accordingly, the issue of releasing persons who did not commit serious crimes from criminal liability to facilitate their return was raised.

The CCU provides the grounds for the decriminalization of members of the “DPR/LPR” formations.⁷⁶⁶ These include assisting in stopping or solving the crimes of a terrorist group or organization, if the person’s actions do not constitute other crimes; or voluntarily leaving such a formation and informing the state authorities of its existence. The procedure involves contacting the SSU, after which information about the person is being verified. Within the program, Ukrainian special services assist in leaving the non-controlled territory and transfer the persons concerned to the law enforcement agencies.

As a result of the information materials distributed by the Ukrainian special services in the non-controlled territories, in 2017–018, the number of people applying to the SSU grew. Simultaneously,

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The official website of the Security Service of Ukraine, SSU Program “Waiting for You at Home”, January 11, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2NEzk8D>.

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Article 258-3 (2) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2Ud9IWS>; Article 260 (6) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, <http://bit.ly/2Zqojif>.

negative comments about the program and videos that discredit the program appeared in the media on the territories currently not controlled by the Ukrainian government. Halyna Pryshchepa, a spokesperson of the SSU in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, believes that the appearance of counter-propaganda is a sign of recognition of their work:

“ They began to say that we are misleading people, that no one will release members of an armed group from criminal liability. Of course, we often have to communicate with Slovyansk residents who are skeptical about the SSU program “Waiting for You at Home”. There are people who have a radical attitude, and there are tolerant people. Of course, there is also positive feedback, so we try to find a mutual understanding between locals, the Government, and former members of IAG.⁷⁶⁷

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Interview C-78, December 13, 2018.

768
Ibid.

According to the information provided by Halyna Pryshchepa, from the beginning of the program until December 2018, the SSU employees received 360 applications:

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Ibid.

“ In Donetsk and Luhansk regions alone, due to the program “Waiting for You at Home”, more than 272 former members of the “DPR” and “LPR” armed groups have already returned to the territories controlled by Ukraine, and they are now again living an everyday peaceful life with their relatives. Among them are sixty people from Slovyansk, including women and minors.⁷⁶⁸

The stories of Slovyansk residents who returned to their hometown through the program “Waiting for You at Home” have a lot in common: usually, it all started with the decision to join the IAG at the invitation of friends, out of ideological beliefs or out of a desire to improve their financial situation. After the first defeats and the city’s recapture, they left Slovyansk together with other “DPR” militants. They found temporary shelter on the territory outside of the government’s control. However, they did not receive the expected rewards from the “new government”. Many people who applied to the SSU believed that the “new government” only exploited them:

“ Former members of the IAG turn to us because of the despair and despondency in the “People’s Republics”. They feel that they have been deceived. Many of them were forced to fight for food. Also, they do not see these entities’ prospects and want to return to their families.⁷⁶⁹

Others could compare their lives with the lives of relatives who remained in Slovyansk. They had food, a roof over their heads, stable income, pensions; in the “DPR”, though, there was complete uncertainty, a legal vacuum, massive unemployment, and a lack of money. The protagonists of the following stories felt these differences and eventually turned to the SSU to return to a peaceful life in their native community of Slovyansk.

FOUGHT ON INVITATION

Valentyn was 22 when the city was captured. He did not have a job and decided to join the IAG on invitation of a friend. His task was to check vehicles at the checkpoint:

“*At first, it was even interesting until I saw two men in uniform beating a man with batons. They were beating him severely and brutally. A few days later, I went to the parking lot, and there were some people attached to the fence with plastic clamps. I have been around for a few days, and I have not seen anyone feeding these prisoners.*”⁷⁷⁰

A few days later, Valentyn was arrested by members of the IAG because he was drunk on the street: “*They dragged me to the basement, and the following morning they forced me to carry bags to checkpoints. I had to do this for three days*”, he recalls in an interview to Komsomolska Pravda. After his release, Valentyn immediately went to Sviatohirsk, where he stayed until the recapture of the city. Later, he found a job, joined a construction company, and carried out orders throughout Ukraine for several years. After the death of his father, he was forced to return to Slovyansk. In his hometown, Valentyn was worried that someone would remember how he checked cars at a checkpoint in the spring and summer of 2014. That is why he decided to make use of the SSU program. “*The trial was on February 16. Today I am calmed down. I found a job delivering bread in Slovyansk*”, he concludes.

I WAS LOOKING FOR A HOME

Mariia⁷⁷¹ joined the IAG after her house was destroyed by shelling. Without work and a roof over her head, she responded to the invitation of a friend and began to help the militants: she was washing and cooking for them. In return, she got a place to sleep in the barracks and the opportunity to eat with the soldiers of the IAG. “*I helped the guys, they were standing with weapons, but they did not give me weapons*”⁷⁷², the woman says. In July 2014, Mariia fled to Donetsk as part of the squad. She could not find a place to

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Uchastnik programmy “Tebja zhdu doma”: Ottuda mnogie hotjat ujeti, vernut'sja k prezhnej zhizni... [Participant of the Program “Waiting for You at Home”: many people want to leave and return to their former life...], Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine, February 6, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2kqeVb4>.

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The interviewee's name has been changed.

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Zhiteľ'nica Slavjanska vospol'zovalas' programmoj “Tebja zhdu doma” (video), [A resident of Slovyansk used the Program “Waiting for You at Home” (video)], Donbass informacionnyj, November 9, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2lB9FRW>.

live or a regular job there and eventually decided to return to her hometown with the help of the program. In a video interview, Mariia urged others not to be afraid and to approach the SSU: “Those who did not kill and did not use any weapons have nothing to fear. Thanks to the program, you will be able to return home and see your beloved ones”.

I BELIEVED IN NEW PERSPECTIVES

Unlike the previous characters, Mykola joined the “People’s Militia of the Donbas” voluntarily due to his beliefs. He believed that the creation of the “Donetsk Republic” would open up new prospects for his native city: “It seemed to me at that time that it was the right thing to do, that we should separate. I thought, well, this is how Catalans think in Spain now.” Mykola received a weapon and served in a detachment of the IAG. However, he never made use of the weapon. Later, he became disillusioned with the ideals of the “DPR” when he witnessed the robbery of an old woman by the commander of his unit. Mykola recalls that they were poorly fed at the time, but he would never have thought of stealing.

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Uchastnik programmy “Tebja zhduť doma”: Ottuda mnogie hotjat uiti, vernut’sja k prezhej zhizni..., [Participant of the Program “Waiting for You at Home”: many people want to leave and return to their former life...], Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine, February 6, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2kqeVb4>.

“ And then somehow I felt ashamed: once I served in the army, I swore an oath to Ukraine. And now, it turns out, that I have to take another oath. Eventually, I decided that I was against the “DPR”. Thank God I did not have to shoot people. When the Ukrainian government returned to the city, I surrendered. There was a trial, I was found guilty but not convicted...Now I have no worries for my family, I work as a locksmith. I also wish that this damned war will be over as soon as possible.⁷⁷³

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS RETURNING

The previous examples do not allow us to draw broad conclusions on the effectiveness of the SSU program “Waiting for You at Home” and its impact on the life of the community of Slovyansk. Sixty residents of the city who made use of this program compared to more than one hundred thousand residents of Slovyansk is a too small number to analyze its impact on the processes of reconciliation. The program creates real opportunities for people involved in the armed conflict who have not committed serious crimes to lay down their weapons, return to a peaceful life and build the community’s future together with other citizens. Of course, the practice of the SSU program “Waiting for You at Home” has significant drawbacks as the information about participants is classified and, as a result, there is a lack of transparency of the

mechanism in terms of releasing a particular person from criminal responsibility, etc.⁷⁷⁴ However, it is an alternative solution for those who want to lay down their weapons that still leaves hope for another way of a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

AFTERWORD

Slovyansk has been living without war for seven years. The stories of its inhabitants show that the real war began not with gunshots but with the division of the community into “us” and “them” and the recognition that violence against “them” was acceptable. Furthermore, of course, the war and the conflict did not end in 2014 when the guns in Slovyansk went silent.

From our perspective, the confrontation in Slovyansk will end only when its residents refuse to “communicate” using the language of hostility—when they see around them not enemies on the one side and like-minded people on the other, but relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers. Each of them lives their own life and has different explanations of the events of 2014, as well as own visions of the future. However, people will have to agree that violence against human beings is unacceptable and that human life and dignity are fundamental values.

This section and the entire book do not include comments or recommendations to the Government of Ukraine or the Slovyansk City Council on specific measures to restore trust. Our goal is to provide information that helps to understand the complexity of the problem. To successfully respond to this challenge, we must change and learn to focus on human rights. Not only officials or residents of Slovyansk, but all citizens of Ukraine have to abandon stereotypes. The condemnation of human rights violations committed in the past is essential not only to restore justice. It is also necessary to prevent new crimes and to restore trust between people divided by war.

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Na tebe chekaiut u SBU. Yak slovyky vykorystovuiut kolyshnikh terorystiv (i ne tilky) [The SSU is Waiting. How security forces use former terrorists (and not only)], *Ukrainska Pravda*, February 26, 2019, <http://bit.ly/30Lqsls>.

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COALITION “JUSTICE FOR PEACE IN DONBAS”



The Coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas” is an informal union of 17 human rights organizations and initiatives, founded in 2014 in response to the outbreak of the conflict in the Donbas. The majority of the Coalition members are non-governmental organizations and public initiatives from the Donbas region. The Coalition’s mission is to build a sustainable and just peace in the Donbas by consolidating civil society’s efforts to ensure respect for human rights and freedoms, particularly for victims of the armed conflict.

The main fields of activities of the Coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas” are:

- the documentation of human rights violations in eastern Ukraine;
- the provision of free legal aid and other forms of assistance to people who have suffered from human rights violations in eastern Ukraine;
- advocacy in Ukraine and abroad to restore human rights violated during the military conflict;
- fighting impunity and restoring justice through cooperation with domestic and international law enforcement bodies;
- awareness-raising aimed at informing the broader public about human rights violations in eastern Ukraine;
- advocating a sustainable dialogue for lasting peace in eastern Ukraine.

THE PROJECT “EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY FOR A TRANSFORMATION OF COMMEMORATIVE CULTURE – NONVIOLENT WAYS OF DEALING WITH THE VIOLENT PAST OF THE DONBAS”

This publication is one of two parts of the edition “The City Where the War Began” prepared in the framework of a partnership initiative with the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHURU). It was prepared in the framework of the project “Empowering civil society for a transformation of commemorative culture – nonviolent ways of dealing with the violent past of the Donbas”. The project aims at stimulating a public dialog about the consequences of war and human rights violations through various publications and communication products based on data from interviews with victims and witnesses.

The project is part of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The CPS aims to prevent violence and to facilitate peacebuilding in crisis- and conflict-affected regions. The CPS is an important part of the German peacebuilding policy funded by the German Federal Government.



The project is implemented by the German organization KURVE Wustrow in cooperation with the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives (EUCCI) and its partner organizations from the Coalition “Justice for

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KURVE Wustrow was founded in 1980 as a training center for nonviolent action in the small town of Wustrow in northern Germany. The first projects started in the late 1990s in the former Yugoslavia and Israel and Palestine. KURVE Wustrow has been active in Ukraine since 2017.



The Eastern Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives (EUCCI) was founded in 2003 in Luhansk. In 2014, EUCCI started documenting human rights violations in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and began to focus on the restoration of peace in the Donbas. In late 2014, EUCCI became one of the founding organizations of the Coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas”.



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