

# MAPPING THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

Public monitoring report

2022 - 2024

WHAT WE ARE DESCRIBING IS WHAT WE SAW OURSELVES



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## INTRODUCTION

It was certainly the most challenging project to date, and one of the first projects to systematically document war crimes in Ukraine. The implementation involved group of people who have working in Ukraine, Russia and other countries of the post-Soviet space in different capacities for many years. A significant part of the implementation was carried out by Ukrainians themselves, who did not leave the country even in times of greatest danger. This is case of our partner organization Maidan Monitoring Information center in Kharkiv.

The experience of these people was and is irreplaceable and has greatly enriched the whole project. However, this is an experience that has been paid for dearly. Some of our closest friends and colleagues have been wounded, and some ave paid the biggest price. Sergey Shalgin from the NGO Petyachatky-BAM accompanied us several times during our monitoring north of Kharkiv. We visited with him the liberated areas from where the Russian army was push out. We visited villages just near the border with Russia and gained interesting insights from people who had survived the Russian occupation. The NGO Petyachatky-BAM is also dedicated to evacuation. On September 19, 2023, Sergei Shalgin drove one of the vehicles with the evacuees across the Oskil River in the town of Kupyansk. And at that moment they were hit by an aerial bomb. We later got to the crime scene. A more detailed description is included in the report below.

This part of the report, and in particular those parts relating to specific cases, was originally intended for law enforcement authorities only. However, our closer cooperation began already during the monitoring process. And it concerns not only documentation, but also facilitating contacts with witnesses. In particular, we are in contact with the Kharkiv office of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Czech Police. The situation has changed significantly and therefore these part of the report may also be published. We are not allowed to disclose only some parts of the interrogation and the identity of some witnesses. However, this is information that does not affect the objectivity of our conclusions.

In some cases, criminal proceedings were initiated and some of the perpetrators - mostly high-ranking officers of the Russian army - were identified. The crimes of these cases concern, for

example, Article 437 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine i.e. conducting aggressive war, in the case of general Andrei Ruzynsky, then commander of the 11th Army Corps, and Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ecocide i.e. committing a large-scale ecological disaster. Here, a notice of suspicion was delivered to the commander of the military district, the commanders of the two armies and the commanders of the artillery and rocket brigade of the Russian Armed Forces.

The most knowledge and testimonies about war crimes and about the occupation were obtained in the town of Izium. We went to the town just after the liberation and spoke to witnesses. We also documented the exhumation of one of the burial sites where 449 bodies were found. One of the witnesses to these crimes is now in the Czech Republic and is cooperating with us. We visit Izium regularly and get more testimonies. We also accompanied Marketa Gregorova, a member of the European Parliament to this town.

The level of destruction of cultural monuments and schools has exceeded all our assumptions. Sometimes it was targeted destruction, sometimes it was destruction caused by "normal" combat activity. As a result, however, in the liberated parts of Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts, most of the schools have been damaged, and some have been demolished completely.

The ecological damage to date is practically incalculable. In Kharkiv and Donetsk, land mining is a huge problem. One of our witness in Dovhenke village (Izium district, Kharkiv oblast described that out of fifty hectares previously cultivated, only two is arable today. There's still an explosion hazard on most of the fields. T4U, together with partners, has been involved in a long-term solution to this problem and is involved in the installation of the demining system BOZENA 5.

We were also able to briefly document the impacts of flooding in the Kherlson area, which occurred after the explosion of the Kakhovska dam, as well as the lesser-known but ecologically similar catastrophe on the Oskil river in the Kharkiv region.

Documenting the Russian army's crimes in Ukraine helps to convey to the Western public the risks and aggressiveness of the Russian regime where Ukraine is only one of the targets. It is not

only about prosecutions of particular war criminals but also about the research of the general Russian modus operandi of war preparation, oppression of their own society, and Russian behavior in occupied areas. Mapping of deviant behavior and functioning of specific structures, security, political, criminal, or “private” military companies, participating in the war and occupation gives us the knowledge necessary for effective defense and later, perhaps transformation of this environment....

There is no reason to believe Russia will behave differently in EU or V4 country than in Ukraine. Aggressive imperial plans, do include Ukraine but at least new member of NATO of in central Europe. The most accepted threats are now for Poland Lithuania and the Suwałki corridor in particular. This is also why it is necessary to look at the broader context of Russian aggression and preparations for it. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has become an opportunity to explore the nature of the Russian regime. In the liberated territories of Ukraine it was possible to obtain testimonies elucidating the role of various security, political, criminal, religious organizations. In the first chapter, we will thus look at these broader contexts. This should help us better understand the nature and urgency of the threat. A shorter version of the text of Chapter 1 was published in Ukrainian media, and the critical comments of readers were taken for consideration into this version.

The report contains key points illustrating the more general conclusions. There are some videos and interviews we are not allowed to publish. All findings relevant for the documentation of specific war crimes were passed on to the Security Service of Ukraine in Kharkiv and some to the Police of the Czech Republic, especially it is the case of materials somehow connected with witnesses who are interrogated by Czech police. This is all in the process. We participated in the interrogations ourselves, helped by filling in information and accompanied the witnesses.

Petr Pojman

# 1. THE MAIN CAUSES OF AGGRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN REGIME AND SOURCES OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY - A CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE BY P. POJMAN

*“The situation we observe today on the Ukrainian battlefield provides an answer to the question of why the Russian leadership has purposefully cultivated violent and criminal subcultures”*



Savur-Mohyla height, captured by “Donetsk People’s Republic” fighters a strategic height in the Donetsk ridge near the city of Snizhne, in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine. Sites of heavy fighting in the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. (Photo by Petr Pojman 2021).

**This Chapter is a criminological analysis, an attempt to summarize all of the most important findings based not only on our monitoring mission in Ukraine but we also build on criminological research that was conducted in Russia from 2009 - 2015. The above statement illustrates the stunning connections that have been found in this regard.**

Attempts to find compromises, the Minsk agreements, the OSCE negotiations, the Normandy format and other talks with the moderate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky did not succeed. The unprovoked Russian attack on 24 February 2022 definitively buried all hopes for a peaceful solution. Today, the path to peace is the same as the path to military victory, which must mean pushing the aggressor out of Ukrainian territories.

If there would be positive changes before 2022 in the internal politics of the Russian Federation, the de-occupation of Donbas and Crimea could in the long run be resolved by a diplomatic way, which could be similar to the withdrawal of Warsaw Pact troops from Czechoslovakia. However, we have increasingly begun to see deviant, irrational features in Russian politics, and especially in the behaviour of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle. And the number of people with a propensity for violent and inappropriate behaviour has reached a critical threshold in the ranks of the Russian security forces. The results of Ukraine's reforms and democratization of the country have already been all too visible to ordinary Russians. All of this, may have been a motivation that influenced Putin's decision.

As a result, on February 24, 2022, one of the worst decisions in the history of Russia was made. This decision will very likely lead to a change in the current regime. Certainly, this is also the goal that the entire Free World should strive for, including those parts of Russian society that would like to be readmitted to the international community. Given that a prerequisite for a successful transformation is the discrediting of Russian imperial nationalism, geopolitical changes in the entire territory of the Russian Federation can also be assumed. The disintegration of the federation should not be prevented. However, that is the subject of another paper. Let us return to deviations.

## **1.2. DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIALLY DEPRESSED SOCIETIES**

During the OSCE monitoring in the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" we often communicated with representatives of the local security forces. We often observed individuals with deviant tendencies. All of this was also linked to substance abuse, such as alcohol and drugs. Several OSCE patrols were threatened by drunken gunmen. In another instance, a member of a local militia in plain clothes threatened male monitors with rape. Today, victims of torture in Ukraine often describe that Russian soldiers sometimes appear to be under the influence of heavy narcotics.

In the second half of 2021, we saw massive leaks about conditions in Russian prisons. Video footage of torture and sexual violence among prisoners was purposely created by the administration. These recordings were passed on by the FSIN (Russian Federal Prison Service) for further use.<sup>1</sup>

Violence has become a common form of communication for a large part of Russian society. Criminal and prison “romance” is popularized in mass culture, and more and more often we find its reflection in everyday life. At a press conference in early February 2022, Putin inadvertently quoted, in the context of Ukraine and the Minsk agreements, a stanza from a song describing the rape of a dead woman: “Whether you like it or not, endure it, my beauty.”<sup>2</sup>

In doing so, he very accurately described his relationship with Ukraine and perhaps inadvertently revealed his main motive for hatred. **As a serial killer, depressed by life’s failures, he is only able to achieve his satisfaction through violence. He feels inferior, he has nothing to offer, he takes revenge on the whole society. At the same time, he is fully responsible for his behaviour!** Putin is not mentally ill, he is fully responsible for his behaviour. The motives must be sought in the environment in which he grew up, the in values that were appreciated here and the “culture” that shaped that environment. These motives cannot be understood through the concepts of logic, compromise and mutually beneficial cooperation. The only logic recognized in this environment is the logic of force, the logic of deceit, the logic of threats and fear.

This conclusion has been confirmed more than once by our experience with “DPR” representatives. In the Russian occupation administration, representatives of organized crime groups or even lower-level criminal elements often play a significant role. Putin himself was shaped in a similar environment. A very important role in the formation of his personality and social contacts was played by his judo coach Leonid Ionovich Usvyatsov<sup>3</sup> he was a mobster also

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<sup>1</sup> [https://gulagu-net.ru/Torture\\_in\\_Russia](https://gulagu-net.ru/Torture_in_Russia)

<sup>2</sup> <https://youtu.be/MblaRRrkYIc>, <https://youtu.be/nu0pp5ME9Zk> (links functional as of 11.6.22).

<sup>3</sup> [euromaidanpress.com/2018/11/25/to-deal-with-putin-west-needs-to-study-russian-criminal-world-eidman-says](https://euromaidanpress.com/2018/11/25/to-deal-with-putin-west-needs-to-study-russian-criminal-world-eidman-says)



known as Lenya the Athlete. Usvyatsov spent 20 years in prison and was killed in 1994 in a conflict between criminal gangs.<sup>4</sup>

Putin is described as a not very successful young man, growing up in poverty and violence. His main motivation for joining the KGB is said to have been the opportunity to decide the fate of others. Putin's life experience is thus fundamentally different from that of politicians in the West. Even an ordinary citizen from Europe or the USA cannot imagine the motivations of people from that background. It is all the more difficult for high-ranking politicians, who often come from wealthy, well-to-do families and are graduates of elite schools. There, however, they could not have learned to read the minds of deviant brutes. These experiences need to be collected in the harsh school of life, on the streets of Russian cities.

The aggressive actions of the Russian leadership were well predicted by my friends originally from Crimea and Donetsk. They knew the level of cynicism and violence. Others believed in logic and hoped for reason.

Putin's psychological profile is the result of deviant processes that degenerate the entire Russian society and significantly affect Russian regions and social classes whose representatives are often encountered in the ranks of the Russian army. The youth in many Russian regions are affected not only by unimaginable poverty, but many children are abused from a young age. I have been in contact with fellow criminologists from Buryatia, and they have been drawing attention to the literally catastrophic state of affairs in this area since at least 2009. The level of violence that we are experiencing in this region in particular is unbelievable. And the cases that my colleagues have described to me are more like horror science fiction than actual cases of police practice.

In Russia, entire criminal subcultures have long been cultivated, and for some social groups crime is seen as the only quick way to success. Even Ukraine itself, as a former Soviet republic, was influenced by these movements. Here, however, they mainly concern the older generation and the east of the country. All this was already used by Russia in the time of the so-called hybrid

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<sup>4</sup> <https://argumentua.com/stati/leonid-usvyatsov-nastoyashchii-uchitel-putina>, 23.12.2015

aggression before 2022. And it was often criminal elements that played an important role in the pro-Russian insurgency. And Ukrainian prisons were under some influence of the Russian criminal environment even after 2014.

In 2021, I personally spoke with a man at the Avdiivka train station who was released from prison in the Dnepropetrovsk region after serving 14 years sentence. He said that he is on his way home to Donetsk and that he planned to join the army and fight for his country. Considering where he was and where he was going, it was necessary to specify which army and for which country. After a longer conversation it turned out that he was not referring to the Armed Forces of Ukraine but to the 1. Army Corp - People's Militia of the so called Donetsk People's Republic. However, the actual context and the fact that he is still government-controlled areas eluded him.

Violence has become a common form of communication. This approach is very clearly manifested, for example, in the youth movement AUE (Arrestantskiy uklad edin/Arrestantskoe urkaganskoe edinstvo) which is the ideology of youth gangs. It can be translated into English as "The Prisoners' Codex is Unified" or "Prisoner's Lifestyle is Unified". Children growing up in this "culture" and socially depressed environment are often victims, only to become perpetrators later as teenagers. And continue the cycle of violence. Similarly, the youth is shaped through political and militaristic organizations such as the "Nashi" („Ours") movement or the Molodaj gvardia – Yunarmija („Young Guard – YouthArmy"). And these movements were also founded in the occupied territories. In Donetsk, it was members of the YouthArmy who were so often seen.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the formalized "elite" associations, we observe entire social strata and depressed regions where there is no hope of improving living conditions. Buryatia is just one such region. In Ukraine we also meet Tuvans, Yakuts and representatives of other Siberian and Caucasian peoples in the ranks of the Russian army.

These people are massively influenced by the Kremlin propaganda. Some believe in the supremacy of Russian imperial nationalism, others in a NATO threat against Russia. Most, however, are fighting for money and the opportunity to plunder. They believe that this is the only

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<sup>5</sup> Krasnaya Vesna news agency, <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/e69234ac>

way they can quickly get what they might never have gotten without crime. Most of them live on the verge of poverty. If in the EU or the Czech Republic we talk about socially excluded localities, in the Russian Federation we observe entire areas, cities and classes of this sort. From these classes and communities, members are recruited into organised crime groups or private military companies, which in turn promote the interests of the main actors under the control of the Russian security or military forces. For a long time, the interests of corrupt officials have been the main focus, and the goal has been profit only. However, by 2013 at the latest, we saw these structures engaging in operations that are financially loss-making, and the Russian leadership is also using them in ideologically motivated violence in hybrid warfare and in what is now an open war against Ukraine and the entire free world. This shift is due to the further degeneration of the Russian political class. It is no longer just about corruption and profit, but about world domination, an inability to empathise and a refusal to discuss freely, even within the Kremlin leadership. This has led to Putin's isolation from the real world, and to his fatal decision in February 2022, when so called "Special military operation (SMO)" was launched.

Not only did a new phase of war and world politics begin, but also new opportunities opened up for certain groups in Russian society. What was previously available only to some is now available to all. Often even for those they don't want. But Putin has avoided a full-scale mobilization even in the third year of the war. It can therefore be stated that a large number of people join voluntarily. Such volunteers, according to our findings, are more likely to commit crimes than ordinary conscripts. For many, the war became an opportunity for career growth. Hopeless waiting, debt and poverty suddenly have a solution "SMO". Gradually, this opportunity has opened up for convicted persons, and nowadays also for the suspects. By 2022, deviants still had limited opportunities. They realized themselves in the military in so-called private military companies in organized crime and common crime. Today they have "SMO". Here everything is allowed and old sins and punishments are erased. When a participant survives he becomes free and returns to normal life. The advantage of this opportunity for new beginning have been used also by serial killers, sexual abusers and cannibals.

The number of persons formed in the above described deviant environment is very high, and such individuals have reached also ruling positions in the Russian army. This is by design, not by random selection! In Russia, crime is not suppressed, but we observe a long-term effort to recruit, intimidate and control criminal elements. When this fails, they are liquidated. This is very visible in the development of the Russian underworld and organized crime. The leading authorities of Thieves' World / Vorovskij mir - thieves in law /vory v zakone have been gradually eliminated. In 2009 Vyacheslav Ivankov "Yaponchik", in 2013 Aslan Usoyan Ded Hasan. Other criminal bosses had to conform to the new trend. Zakhariy Knyazevich Kalashov "Shakro Molodoj" widely believed to be one of the most prominent boss - The New Number One between the Thieves was released from prison in March 2024. One of the reasons may have been his help in recruiting criminals for the war. However, service to the state is prohibited by the traditional Thieves' Code. Kalashov declared in his prison letter that it is an honour for any criminal to fight for Russia. The elimination also affected more modern forms of organized crime, the so-called criminal authorities and the founder of well-known criminal groups. Semyon Mogilevich "boss of all bosses" of most Russian criminal syndicates world wide was supposedly in custody in Russia 2008 - 2009. His current whereabouts are unknown. However, unofficial sources in the security forces say he is living in Russia and is in charge of corruption networks. All under Kremlin control, of course.

If the conclusions of previous paragraph can be considered, due to lack of sources, partially speculative, the following figure - Sergei Mikhailov "Mikhas" founder and leader of the Solntsevskaya criminal group is supporting "SMO" openly. There are plenty of publications on his web and social media.<sup>6</sup> He was awarded by several medals for his support of the "SMO" combatants and veterans. Mikhailov is also Adviser to the President of union "SMO" veterans! He is equally well known for his good relationship and generous funding of the Moscow Patriarchate, which I would also like to point out in the context of the following chapter.

Imperial ideology, mass propaganda, deviant subcultures and organized crime. All of these are exploited by the Kremlin. The situation we observe today provides an answer to the question of why the Russian leadership purposefully cultivated violent subcultures. These groups of

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<sup>6</sup> -<https://sergey-mikhailov.ru/index.php?id=4561>



Mikhailov's Medal for his support of the "SMO"/ "CBO" and hid ID of Adviser to the President of union "SMO"/"CBO" veterans <https://sergey-mihailov.ru/>, [https://youtu.be/qkQ7AjyBOaE?si=HvWGCe9Xuz-\\_X6i0](https://youtu.be/qkQ7AjyBOaE?si=HvWGCe9Xuz-_X6i0), Михась теперь в авторитете у пацанов с СВО, 27.3.24

marginal and violent men are part of Russian tactics and strategy, which is based on high numbers of attacking soldiers and high levels of violence against civilians. And not just violence in street fights, but also artillery and airstrikes on civilian objects, including kindergartens and hospitals. Even elite troops, including the highly qualified ones such as pilots are affected by this violent subculture. This violence has only one goal – to break society, which will then demand peace at any price. And this is another mistake of the Russian leadership. Each attack only provokes more hatred and determination to fight, even in those regions and communities that still harbored some pro-Russian sentiments before February 2022.

## 2.2. CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN ORTHODOX FASCISM

*"Yes missiles are fired from Russia, but it's God's punishment for our heresy."*  
 (One of believer in an interview with our monitors.)

According to the criminologist and founder of the St. Petersburg Centre for Deviantology, Professor Yakov Gilinsky, with whom I have consulted several times, even long before the war, the groups described above were the "reserve of the high command" in the fight against the "color

revolutions” that threaten Russia. And the Russian regime is threatened by any expression of freedom, because at this point it is already a fascist regime, i.e. based on the leader principle, radical nationalism, militarism, the cult of death, power and domination. Everything in Russia is subordinated to the imperial interests, which are understood by a large part of society as a collective benefit that is superior to individual human destiny. The Russian regime sees itself as a “victim” (this is a manifestation of the complexes of its leaders) and this justifies any action against its enemies, it rejects liberalism and the influence of foreigners (foreign agents). **Professor Gilinsky has been pointing out for many years that Russia fulfills all the textbook characteristics of a fascist regime.**<sup>7</sup>

In retrospect, it really looks like Putin thought that the fall of Ukraine would be a matter of days, and the population would welcome the Russian forces. However, only a man cut off from the real world could have come to such a conclusion. It must have been clear to anyone who has walked through Ukrainian towns and villages at least once that not only would these people not welcome the Russian army, but that they had been preparing for its possible attack for the last few latest years. Overconfidence is also one of the characteristics of fascist leaders.



**‘Brutal crimes are a result of brutal policies’**  
Criminologist Yakov Gilinsky on a life spent navigating war, crime, and state censorship

<sup>7</sup> -Yakov Gilinsky, Ordinary Russian Fascism, <http://www.index.org.ru/journal/24/gil24.html>, 24/2006  
-Гилинский, Я.И., Глобализация и девиантность, Saint Petersburg, 2006.  
-Гилинский, Я.И., Конструирование девиантности, Saint Petersburg, 2011.

Russian soldiers who participated in the attack were convinced that they were coming practically on friendly territory, and after breaking the resistance of a few militant radicals, the local population would host them. They were also convinced of this by their commanders. But what they experienced during the first days of the attack spoke rather to the contrary. Hundreds of thousands of people, including old men and women, were involved in the defense of the country. Even children helped to set up defensive posts, which were built in all the villages. People often used their own cars and equipment, hunting and sporting rifles, etc. The soldiers of the Russian Army realized sometime around the 5th day that the original idea was completely wrong. From this time on, we also started to see attacks on civilian objects and violence against civilians. This was avoided by the Russians in the first days of the attack. Now, however, they have begun to retaliate. This, too, fits logically into the pattern of the behaviour of complex deviants. We have heard about torture from witnesses and have seen the use of cluster munitions ourselves. Artillery and even aerial attacks on residential houses are quite common.

The Russian military has been humiliated, humiliated in a country that Russia has traditionally described as a failure, ridiculous, weak. The army of that country put up a fight, and in the very first phase of the war made considerable gains. The Russian soldiers, humiliated in their civilian life, and further humiliated in a Russian army full of bullies and thieves, were humiliated again, but this time by the Ukrainians, who, in the words of their commanders, were to welcome them as liberators.

All this has an effect on the psyche of individuals whose psychological profile has already been so damaged from a previous life. These people then see in the occupied territories an affluence that is beyond their ideas of wealth. In places formerly occupied by the Russian army, witnesses described to us that Russian soldiers considered Nutella for breakfast to be a great prosperity, often did not know how a kettle worked, did not know how to use a gas stove, and considered a plasma television to be a painting, even electricity in the house was something new to some.

These soldiers then gained absolute power over the members of the nation whose army had humiliated them. A power they never had in their lives. The result is apocalyptic violence. But even in the Russian army, according to witnesses, there were soldiers who avoided unnecessary violence or even helped civilians. But this does not change the overall picture much. The Russian government still manages to attract those interested in serving in the army, and they are mostly willing to commit war crimes. For some, it is even the main motivation. Especially after the failure of the original Russian “special operation” plan, interest in serving is declining. And, for example, the Free Buryatia Foundation registers daily complaints for legal assistance for the termination of service from those serving in the Russian army.<sup>8</sup>

When we look for motivation we may find various answers. And they can all be true! The reasons for starting the war were mainly ideological, combined with a poor assessment of the situation in Ukraine. The imperial ideology and the fascist regime of contemporary Russia do not allow the correction of these erroneous conclusions. Now the goal is to be achieved at any cost. And it will be paid for with soldiers' lives.

Casualties even in the early months of the war exceeded many times the number of soldiers who died during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. General Valerii Zaluzhnyi admitted that he had expected these high losses to bring a changes in Russia. However, Russian society did not react adequately; Russian society is not Soviet society. It has turned out that the cheapest in Russia today are human lives. The people of Russia are willing to die in an aggressive war. Sometimes for money, sometimes out of compulsion, sometimes because they believe in the tsar and the patriarch.

We have already written about money and poverty and the criminal underworld as for the motivation of “Special military operation - SMO” participants. We have been thinking about motivation of number of deviant figures who can used war to realize their perverted desires. But ideologies - furred by propaganda play a role across all groups. Russia's ruling class believed in its own propaganda, the soldiers believed the führer and the propaganda. They believe they are

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<sup>8</sup> BURYATS refuse military contracts – so what HAPPENED? Garmazhapova, <https://youtu.be/ebhY16CU6mc>, <https://freeburiatia.org/>, 7. 7. 2022.



fighting on the right side. There are not many cases where professional combatants would change sides just for money. Basic orientation and understanding of what is good and what is bad seems to be important despite all the financial benefits. What is good and bad, however, is decided in the unfreedom of the Russian fascist regime. So it's about faith rather than discussion.

It makes little sense to talk in details about contemporary Russian ideology. It is a simple compilation of attitudes and attributes from the past. It brings nothing new in principle. Russian imperialism and fascism is represented today by "philosophers" with whom there is no point in wasting time. For the purposes of this text will abundantly suffice if we recall that Putin himself often turns to the ideas of Ivan Ilyin. Ilyin was anti-communist supporting Mussolini and Hitler and dreaming of the return of the Tsar to Russia. Putin increasingly defends Hitler's actions - most recently in an interview with Tucker Carlson.<sup>9</sup>

Here we see the real nature if nowadays Russia the power layer - the masks are torn off. Similar ideas are used in TV propaganda. People here can support Putin and the war from the comfort of their homes. But to get personally involved, however, the propaganda may be insufficient. One of the very important instrument used for further indoctrination is a church - The Moscow Patriarchate (MP) of Russian Orthodox Church.

Moscow Patriarchate is closely connected with the Russian state. Professor Zubov and other historian are describing it almost as a part of Soviet and Russia secret services. An as such Moscow Patriarchate is playing its part in "SMO"- both in the ideological defense of aggression and in the motivation of individual soldiers.

The role of the Moscow Patriarchate was omitted in the original version of the article. However, the role of the Moscow Patriarchate should not be underestimated. Let's remember then-hidden role of Konstantin Malofeev "The Orthodox oligarch," as he is sometimes called, in supporting Igor Girkin (Strelkov), who coordinated the actions of russia forces on the Crimea and first of all on Donbass in the spring and summer of 2014. Malofeev is also the chairman of the

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<sup>9</sup> Norton, T., Fact Check: Putin Defends Hitler's Invasion of Poland in Carlson Interview: "Putin claimed that Adolf Hitler had been "forced" to invade Poland in 1939": <https://www.newsweek.com/fact-check-putin-defends-hitlers-invasion-poland-carlson-interview-1868582>, 7.2.2024.

media group Tsargrad, dedicated to Russian Orthodox Christianity play an important role in propaganda.

After 2022 the Moscow Patriarchate involvement in the the war is more official. In the course of the documentation we have learned about the activities of MP dignitary in occupied Izjum, and we will write about this in the relevant chapters; in this introductory chapter it is necessary to focus on some central figures and activities that influence the masses of believers. In doing so, we rely on two articles by Eva Ceplova, each of which deals with the two main tasks that this Church fulfills in this "special operation".

Archpriest Andrei Tkachev said at the beginning of the war that the time had come for the Great Patriotic Special Operation, which he interpreted as a struggle between good and evil. In it, on one side stands a strong Orthodox Russia defending pure Christian values. Against it is the rotten and morally decaying West, which captured Ukraine, and which has become his fighting dog. "There is no human enemy before us. Russia is fighting the world's Satan, the horned one with goat's feet and fiery tail. The opponent is smart, dangerous, used to winning. And that's why you have to forget about petty disputes and fight against this infernal evil. Look at how the Muslim Chechens now stand side by side with the Russians. This is the fight against Satanism, the West has long since forgotten Jesus Christ and has sunk into the moral mire. Europe is the mother of fascism and the vampire of humanity. Only we were blind and didn't see it," says Archpriest Tkachev.

In this "fight between good and evil", he calls Ukraine a traitor who, like Judas once, deceived his Russian brothers, and is now paying God's punishment for the betrayal . On the contrary, Mother Russia is the only one on Earth, according to him, who did not succumb to the Western satanic lure and at this time stands firmly in the front line of the fight for the Christian world. Youtube comments and videos tend to have hundreds of thousands to millions of views. The war brought Archpriest Tkachev to prominence. He is one of those who give Russia-Ukraine a directly religious character and liken it to a holy war. Father Tkachev overlooks the sins of the Russian Empire against other ethnic groups. Violence is abhorrent to him only when it is committed by the West. Even before the Russo-Ukrainian war, he routinely used rhetoric similar to Islamic

radicals. He publicly proclaimed that women should be beaten in marriage or that they were created by God only to serve men. Tkachev is so forceful and convincing in his rhetoric that anyone who might have hesitated about Putin's mission has no doubts after watching his videos. And he is certainly not alone in supporting the Kremlin in its murderous campaign in Ukraine.

Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov, a well-known priest and televangelist in Russia, whose imagination often knows no bounds, exhibits very sharp rhetoric, including the spread of misinformation and lies. "The Russian peacemakers have launched a special operation to start the 'Nuremberg Trial' over the whole of Europe," he said in March during one of his sermons. Vladimirov also accused Kyiv, without a shred of evidence, of persistently killing the country's Russian-speaking population, who allegedly refused to submit to Ukrainian neo-fascism, for over 25 years and then selling their organs to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Although the highest leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church avoids such strong and hateful comments by the likes of Tkachev and Vladimirov, it quietly supports the Kremlin's murderous campaign. The most striking example in this regard is Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. At first it seemed that he would obviously prefer that no "special operation" had taken place, for he skirted the subject as best he could and on the day of the attack merely called on everyone to pray for peace and brotherly love. By the beginning of March, he had already begun to sharpen his tone and indirectly accused the West, led by NATO, of war, saying that "certain foreign forces" were trying to bring discord to Holy Russia. He also devoted most of his sermons and prayers to the Donbas, which he said rejected "Western values" in 2014. On 3 April, the highest leader of the Russian Orthodox Church had already performed a service in the main church of the Russian armed forces, during which he de facto justified and sanctified the Russian military incursion into Ukraine. Back in 2014, Kirill not only failed to condemn the annexation of Crimea and Russia's meddling in the affairs of eastern Ukraine, but in a speech urged citizens not to rebel against the Kremlin's actions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> „О священной войне с коллективным Западом в 2022 году". Артемий Владимиров.“ на YouTube <https://youtu.be/yC5KHszwo-o?si=Mx7PuNHjW2JQa4XG>, 5.3.2022.

<sup>11</sup> Ceplova E.: „Svádíme na Ukrajině boj se satanem,“ hlásá ruská pravoslavná církev <https://www.voxpot.cz/svadime-na-ukrajine-boj-se-satanem-hlasa-ruska-pravoslavna-cirkev/> 10. 06. 2022.

The Russian Orthodox Church has always been close to the militant world. The RF army also exploited its dignitaries in Ukraine, and we will describe some of the cases of collaboration of Orthodox Church dignitaries in the chapter on Izjum. In April 2023 Patriarch Kirill established a new senior ecclesiastical position to oversee the Church's activities in Ukrainian territories. Archpriest Dimitry Vasilenkov, who is a clergy member of the St. Petersburg diocese, has been named acting deputy chairman of the Synodal Department is in charge of cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies. As a the chief military chaplain of the clergy he is in charge of servicemen of the Russian Armed Forces and employees of other security agencies in the area of "SMO".<sup>12</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church is increasingly making inroads on the front lines. It proudly shares its presence there on social media and in state media. It is slowly becoming one of the Kremlin's most powerful propaganda tools. Its an indispensable part of the Russian army. They enjoy growing popularity and unprecedented authority among the soldiers. They remove fear and doubt. They give hope and courage. They make do with little: a cross, incense and an icon of the Mother of God. Their main triumph is the word. Thus they spread Kremlin propaganda and reassure the gunmen that they are dying for God. And sometimes they leave "miracles" in their wake.

"I will definitely come back here! It's my duty. Our fight is right and the victory will be ours!" says Vasily Marchenko, the 38-year-old priest, originally from Yakutia, said to have been brought to the touchline by the call of his heart. And he does not regret his spiritual commitment one bit. For he makes no secret of his conviction that Russia is fighting both "Nazism" and the rotten West here."They are demons, nothing else. Look at the culture they carry, the LGBT parades..., the family background they want to destroy," the priest preaches to a group of gunmen.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> -Russian Orthodox Church Establishes 'Head Military Priest' Post: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/06/russian-orthodox-church-establishes-head-military-priest-post-a80742>, April 6, 2023.

-Протоиерей Димитрий Василенков назначен и.о. заместителя главы синодального "военного" отдела <https://mitropolia.spb.ru/news/otdeli/?id=222830>, April 7, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> В окопах атеистов нет! Священник из Нерюнгри вернулся из зоны проведения специальной военной операции Um-Redactor, <https://индустриясевера.рф/v-okopah-ateistov-net-svyashhennik-iz-neryungri-vernulsya-iz-zony-provedeniya-speczialnoj-voennoj-operaczii/> 20.10.23.

According to Roman Lukin, an expert on religious issues from the Russian Academy of Sciences, the first weeks of the so-called special military operation have shown that there is a great demand for clerics among the deployed troops. Exactly how many have passed through the front in the nearly two years of the invasion is unknown. But Lukin estimates the number to be in the upper hundreds. Each unit chooses a heavenly patron and has a badge made for it with a specific holy image. This is then worn by the soldiers on their uniforms. But as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow said in an interview on the Russian Orthodox Church website, more and more priests are coming to Ukraine. Supposedly because the soldiers themselves demand it.<sup>14</sup>

As Roman Lukin confirmed, the state and the Church have never been so close in recent decades. According to him, during the Chechen wars, it was mainly enthusiasts who went to the front and were not financially supported by the Kremlin.<sup>15</sup> Today, priests go to the front in an organized manner. They are blessing weapons including missiles. They extol militarism, the cult death, power and domination. They support the words of Putin who spoke of the fact that, many men die senselessly in crashes or drunkenness but Russian “SMO” offers the heroic death.

Sermons are a continuation of propaganda by other means. However, this also happens outside the front in the temples where civilians go. It is also the aforementioned TV Tsargrad that serves for massive dissemination among the faithful. Even before 2022, this channel could be watched in some parts of Ukraine. The penetration of this propaganda even among Ukrainian boilers is still ongoing. Its influence is incomparably lower than before 2022, which is all the more shocking from the experience of interviews with some believers. *“Yes missiles are fired from Russia, but it’s God’s punishment for our heresy”*; stated one believer in an interview with our monitors.

**The incomparably larger scale of the war, the closer connection between the state and the church, the involvement of criminal elements and organized criminal**

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<sup>14</sup> [www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6092806.html](http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6092806.html) Достучаться до сердец и приобщить воинов к святым таинствам Церкви 9.1.2024

<sup>15</sup> „Umři za Boha i Rusko!“ Jak pravoslavní kněží zvyšují na frontě bojového ducha Eva Čeplová <https://www.voxpot.cz/umri-za-boha-i-rusko-jak-pravoslavni-knezi-zvysuji-na-fronte-bojoveho-ducha/>, 05. 02. 2024.

**groups, creates a large space for the committing of war crimes. Especially when the perpetrators are convinced that God is on their side.**

## **2. FEBRUARY 2022, ONE MONITORING MISSION ENDS, ANOTHER BEGINS, BY PETR POJMAN**

*“Back then, we stood upon the brink of a precipice”*

February 24, 2022 - Russia has finally abandoned hybrid warfare tactics and committed a full-scale invasion. The biggest conflict in Europe since 1945 has begun. Russian invasion is the most significant shock to the global order since World War II. On that February morning, our lives were changed forever and the new reality of war put everyone in their place. Within days, our T4U team expanded to include a military section and the Czech Ministry of Defence became a key partner of the team overnight. The first deliveries of equipment were taken by T4U members, under coordination of Jan Hermanek, across the Polish-Ukrainian border the following week. From March onwards, regular transport of equipment to the defenders of Ukraine and also war crimes monitoring started, building on previous cooperation with partners from Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia.

Some members of the current monitoring team that implemented this project, were still members of OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in February 2022. The entire OSCE mission has been evacuated from Ukraine and there is no viable replacement to date. Thus, this Visegrad project was one of the first to follow up on the monitoring, which is even more important today as given the number of war crimes than it was before February 2022.

Immediately after the involuntary evacuation of the OSCE mission, in early March 2022, We conducted two monitoring trips to Ukraine. We understood that, at this tragic but historically unique time, we must not waste time. Both trips were risky but at the same time very informative. We also gained the respect of our colleagues and partners on the ground. And we continue to draw on the knowledge and contacts gained to this day. In this chapter we will focus on a

comparison of the dynamics of the war in the first months after the invasion began. So it will be more of a global perspective and we will look at individual war crimes in the chapters that follow.

- **First monitoring mission March 2022 (Rivne - Kyiv - Kharkov with MMIC)**
- **Second monitoring mission May 2022 (Sumy - Poltava - Chernigov - Okhtyrka - Kyiv - Bucha - Odessa - Mykolaiv with Vostok SOS)**
- **Systematic monitor with permanent team of local monitor MMIC in Kharkiv started immediately after the the invasion in coordination with local SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) office.**

During the 1st trip there were checkpoints all around the Ukraine including in western part. All the cars were stopped and checked. Especially at night, passwords were always required. The



Evacuation of the OSCE from Ukraine. Despite the language framing the departure of OSCE staff as a “temporary” measure, it seems doubtful that the SMM will return to Ukraine. Russia has little need for a monitoring mission in a country which is a subjecting Russian aggression. The departure of the SMM means that the international community loses awareness of what is happening in Russian-controlled areas.

soldiers at the checkpoints were nervous and often inexperienced. During the 2nd trip we did not see any more checkpoints in the west. However, the night curfew and the use of passwords for passage was even more of an issue. Movement around the country was very restricted.

**Kyiv:** A quite fundamental difference between the 1st and 2nd trip was seen in Kyiv. At the end of March, throughout the whole city, there were blockades, a dysfunctional city, closed shops and empty. During the 2nd trip in May, traffic jams, open shops, cafes, people returning, the only things left of the checkpoints were the ones on the access routes around the city, and the remnants like concrete barriers or Czech hedgehog were piled on the side of the roads - ready for use.

During the 1st trip it was not possible to drive along the route Zhytomyr - Kyiv as this highway was under shelling and we had to drive through town of Bila Tserkva. During the 2nd trip this road was already open and we saw only traces of the impact of rockets and artillery shells on the construction sites, especially on the gas stations, which were mostly completely demolished.

Russian troops were in the northern suburbs of Kyiv during the 1st trip. On arrival in the city on 26 March, the soldiers told us that dropping of Russian paratroops is expected, the nervousness in the city was high, and the nervousness of the territorial defence soldiers at the checkpoints, on the access roads, corresponded to this. Even with the password, we were not allowed in. And when we tried to find a place to sleep near a gas station on the outskirts of Kyiv, we were surrounded by a group of Territorial Defence soldiers, and we were pulled out of the cars with guns pointed. After we had said our passwords, we were allowed to stay there over night.

During the 1st trip, traffic rules, signs and traffic lights were ignored by the drivers. checkpoint were often wrongly marked for tactical reasons as well, and this caused fatal accidents as there were always massive concert barriers on the streets.. Car wrecks were often left in place.

During 2nd trip, the city functioned as normal at first glance and traffic increased significantly. We observed long queues at block posts, but these remained only at the entrances to the city.



Within the city, traffic was no longer restricted in any practical way. The security situation in Kyiv also looked considerably calmer. Kyiv is still the target of rocket attacks.



The first monitoring mission after February 24, 2022, Kharkiv, March 29, Petr Pojman with Pavel Zatulin. The car we use till now.

**Kharkiv:** The way from Kharkiv to Kyiv was difficult by the fact that some bridges were undermined or demolished. It is necessary to take a detour via Pereislav in the south. During the March journey, rockets or artillery shells fell on the city practically every hour. Our car was fired upon during the night by soldiers standing on an unmarked block post. It looked like it was out of order, which is quite common. The order to stop was two shots from an AK 47. We gave the boys flashlights, and asked them to flash them next time. Again, the situation improved throughout the Ukraine and during the second trip such incidents no longer occurred. The soldiers gained experience and the situation calmed down. There are fewer unfortunate incidents and accidents.

**Northern suburbs of Kyiv:** During the first trip it was not possible to visit the northern parts of Kyiv and its surroundings. It was only during the 2nd trip that we got there. From the description of local commanders we learned that one of the key clashes that probably prevented the occupation of much of Kiev occurred between the towns of Bucha and Irpin. According to the description, it was largely down to luck and the tactical ability of the Ukrainian defence. There were not enough forces on that section of the front to repel a massive attack. The defenders of

Irpin blocked the town with concrete mixers from a local company that made them available. Bucha was occupied by the RF, Irpin only around the edges and was especially heavily shelled. The town was badly damaged, but Russian forces did not control it. Between the towns is the Bucha river. Here the Russians tried to cross with heavy equipment to continue on to Kyiv. One bridge was blown up, the other bridge over the river was blocked by Ukrainian forces, so that every time the Russians tried to cross the river, a tank came out from the local supermarket over the river and fired at the passing Russian, then hid again. This was repeated several times. The Russians did not know how many people, or how much equipment was on the Ukrainian side. The Ukrainian soldiers changed the call signs for radio communications every day and generally gave the impression that there were many more on the ground than there actually were. Kiev was saved thanks to the ingenuity of the commanders on the ground.

**Mykolaiv:** We visited the city by car from Odessa. We were told that the fact that Mykolayiv had not fallen had saved Odessa from attack from the sea. Mykolayiv was a real front-line town. At night we saw a rocket (said to be S 300) flying towards the Russian positions. At the beginning of the war there were only about 10 cars here according to the local police chief. Even today the town is half empty. There is a high police and army presence and control of movement around key facilities. There was a noticeable nervousness in the town. Most of the shops, restaurants and cafes are closed. We found only one fast food place open on with a Kebab. The owner, an Azeri. He said that he too had been closed for a few days, but he feels like a local and doesn't know where else to go.

**Chornomorsk (near Odessa):** I visited Chornomorsk in mid-May. However, we have been working for a long time with the local Municipal Police, which is headed by Petro Kanaryan. Petro described to me that at the beginning the situation was very confused. The local administration did not want to provoke anyone or cause panic. Therefore, Petro, on his own responsibility and with the help of the locals, coordinated the building of checkpoints and firing positions over the beaches. People used their own cars to fill sandbags. When it became clear that the country and the people were determined to defend themselves and Kyiv asked what measures were being taken on the beaches of the Black Sea, the mayor thanked Petro very much.

After the sinking of the cruiser Moskva the risk and number of strikes on the city has been greatly reduced initially Russian ships were seen on the horizon no longer seen at all.

**Fuel shortages in May:** During the 1st trip, we did not experienced any shortage of fuel. Theoretically, we knew about the problem, but it did not affect us practically. On the second trip it was a major limiting fact. We arranged refueling through friends at the General Staff or had up to 100 liters of back-up diesel and petrol. There were long queues at petrol stations or fuel was unavailable. It was only exceptionally possible to pump a full tank. We were lucky to get even 20 liters. In Chernomorsk, we got 20 liters of diesel only after the intervention of the mayor. The price per liter was min at 50 but sometimes 70 hryvnia per liter. Problem was solved and later we never encountered such a problem again.

Based on this short monitoring March - May 2022 were key moment in the war. It has become apparent that Putin's "Special Military operation" have failed. Not only Ukraine but the whole world was and still is in great danger. But a quick Russian victory. Such as the Kremlin was counting on, in which it was, quite incomprehensibly, supported by many Western intelligence agencies, would have led to a catastrophe of unthinkable scale. The Kremlin's original plans were grandiose. Ukraine was to fall in a matter of days. Under the aura of victory, some other countries of the former USSR - Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, or at least the northern part of the country - were to fall at Russia's feet. There would certainly be a strengthening of extremist party movements across Europe. These have long been supported, exploited and cultivated by the Kremlin. Putin was very likely to consider an attack on the Baltics. He believed that NATO would not help them in such a situation. Back then, we stood upon the brink of a precipice. However, this assumption proved to be completely wrong, and Putin made one of the worst decisions in Russian history. But the Kremlin has learned from its mistakes and may not repeat them in the future. Even Ukraine's defenders may not be so lucky anymore. A longer war is to be expected.

Today we already know that the security forces of Ukraine were counting on Russia's attack. And days, or at least hours before, they were preparing for it. Thus, the response to the intelligence and warnings of the British and Americans was not as lax as is sometimes described.

However, the Ukrainian government believed that of late, complicating the effectiveness of the defense. It must be admitted, however, that believing that Ukrainian cities would be attacked by Russia's submarine-launched missile Kalibr launched from the Caspian sea was still difficult even for some member of OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in Donetsk.

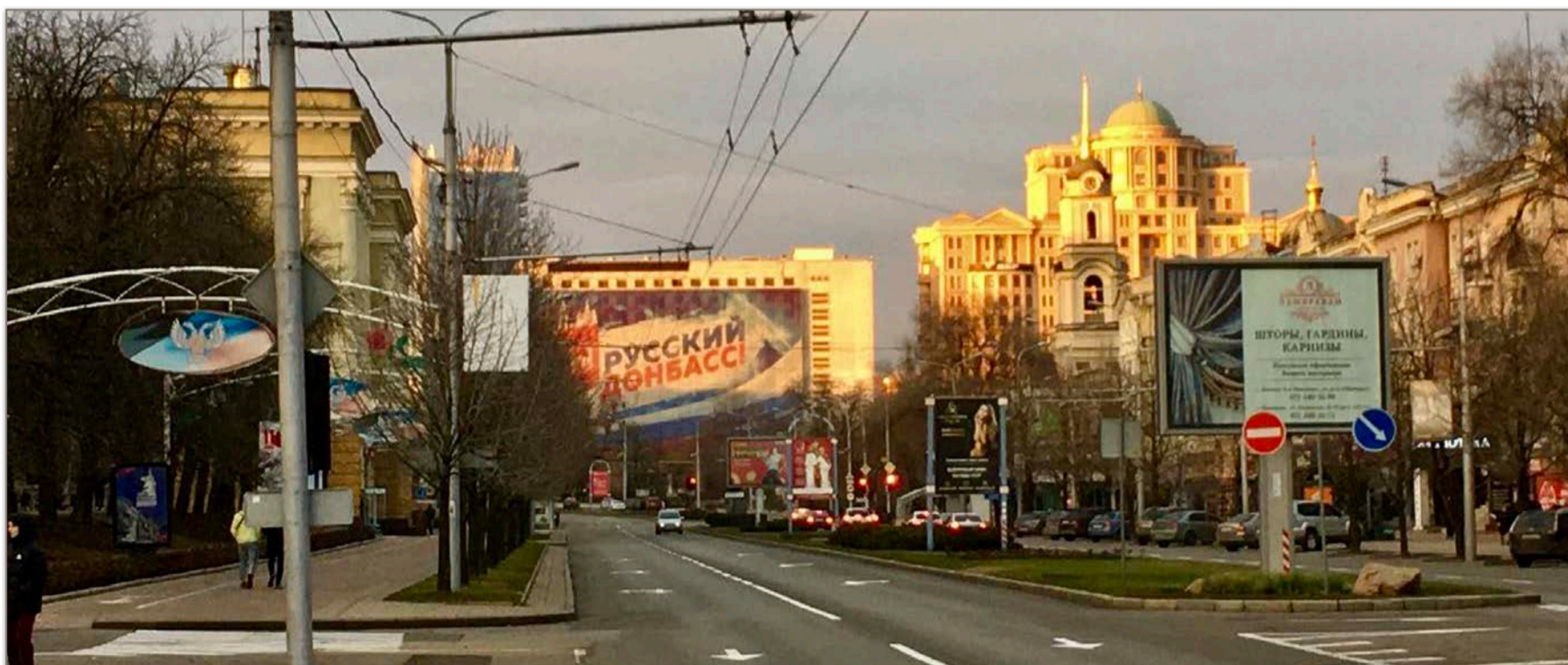


Petro Kanaryan, Inspecting the beaches of the Black Sea in Chornomorsk

Even the mission reports before the war did not indicate that Russia was planning such a large-scale invasion. The situation was tense. Some patrols had to be terminated prematurely. We ourselves witnessed mortar fire in Avdiivka in February and had to abandon our observation post. But this was nothing that the mission had not been used to in its many years in the Donbas. Russia, however, has bought forces elsewhere, in Belarus, in Crimea and on its own territory. There, the OSCE monitors had no access. There were no significant movements of forces on the territory of the so-called people's republics that were consistent with preparations for a major war. And it is therefore not surprising that the front line, for example, near Donetsk, did not move for a

long time. And Avdiivka which is almost a suburb of Donetsk was not captured by the Russians until February 2024.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine poses a risk to Central Europe as well. The risk is always derived from the specific threat. And the threat is Russian imperialism! This is being implemented at the moment by the fascist regime of Vladimir Putin. Previously, the same imperial interests were pursued by the Tsarist autocracy or by the Soviet dictatorship. The documentation of Russian war crimes tells us much about the nature of the threat, and the analysis of the functioning of the Russian occupation administration makes us aware of the risks that other countries will face in the event of a Russian victory.



Donetsk, November 2021- Russian propaganda had already abandoned the narrative of separatism before the invasion. Novorossiya movement has been completely forgotten. Donbas was supposed to become Russian. The separatists turned out to be collaborators.

The whole of this material does not only attempt to describe war crimes, but also attempts to examine in detail the nature of the current Russian regime and Russian occupation methods the modus operandi!

### **3. WAR CRIMES AND WAR DESTRUCTION BY PETR POJMAN**

Monitoring has been ongoing with varying degrees of intensity since March 2022. It was initially carried out without any funding. Only later a grant from The International Visegrad Fund was obtained, which is now followed by another grant from the US Embassy in Prague. The most important findings that we are still building on, were made just after the war started in 2022. In this Chapter we will focus already on specific cases that document some of the more general conclusions presented in Chapter 1.

We are not describing all crime scenes, all testimonies, or all impact site assessments, we have been doing during the monitoring. It is technically impossible. We have photos and video of all of it. It is thousand cases and tens of thousands photos and videos. Some of them are in this report, some have been published on our web and social media. Importantly, however, all the findings have been used in research and are being processed for police investigations

**There are two main reasons why monitoring was so important in the first months of the war. It is equally important in the future to start monitoring in the newly liberated territories as soon as possible.**

**1] Some situations were unique and were not repeated later.** In the early days of the war, the Russians avoided attacks to civilian targets and no mass committing of war crimes was recorded. Witnesses in the areas around Kyiv and Kharkiv from where Ukraine managed to dislodge the Russians a few months after the attack spoke of this change in the behaviour of Russian soldiers in the first days of the war.

**2] In some cases, we are continuing to follow up cases.** There is need to highlighting the town of Izjum in particular. We arrived in the town with Ukrainian army troops in September 2022. That same month we spoke to witnesses and monitored exhumations. Witnesses are now cooperating with the police in CR and speaking publicly about their experiences.

### 3.1. KHARKOV, FIRST WARTIME MONITORING BY T4U, MARCH, 2022

**Establish LP/OPs (Listening and Observation posts):**

- Kharkiv, Chernysevska Street, 27
- Kharkiv, Baturynska Street,
- Kharkiv, Heroiv Nebesnoi Sotni sq.
- Kharkiv, Petrol station OKKO, Kovpaka St.
- Kharkiv, Haribaldi Street, School 167
- Kharkiv, Petrol station OKKO, Kovpaka St.
- Kharkiv, Akademia Kurchatova Ave
- Kharkiv, Naukova street Kharkiv,
- Kharkiv, Akademia Kurchatova Ave
- Kharkiv, Naukova street Kharkiv,
- Kharkiv, Akademia Val' tera Street,
- Kharkiv, Bilhorodske Hwy, Memorial
- Kharkiv, Akademia Proskury St.

- Contact SBU representatives covering Kharkiv and involved in gathering evidences of war crimes in order to get update of security situation.

**Standing Patrol Tasks in patrol's AOR:**

- Interact with local population talk about situation.
- Monitor and report attack, explosions.
- Gather information and report on the security situation.

On Tuesday 29 March 2022, T4U a MMIC monitors conducted a patrol to assess the security, war, and humanitarian situation in Kharkiv. Only personal observations of patrol participants and testimonies of local citizens were used in the report.

It was an irregular special monitoring patrol taking place in the context of active kinetic activity. The outskirts of the city were shelled throughout the stay. However, due to limited time, we did not have the opportunity to count them. The strike was heard about every half hour, but it was not only about the impact but also the return fire of the city's defenders. We saw smoke rising from the Impact side probably village Zhukovs'koho.

**T4U monitors examined violent intrusion into the local NGO office, shooting, damage...**

**Chernysevska Street, 27, Maidan Monitoring information center MMIC office, 50.0010033, 36.2377938**  
 Maidan monitoring is a major Kharkiv NGO its representatives showed us a damaged office forcibly opened the door manually forced a hole in the wall from the next office of other owners, traces of shooting and disposal of all office equipment damaged sanitary facilities and all office equipment. N. Zubar MMIC, Chair was informed about damages in the office on 4th March 2022 and on 6th March she went to inspect the office. (...)

11:29 - 11:49 PE made short Impact side assessment (ISA), Haribaldi Street, School 167, 48.005766, 36.352975 (government-controlled)  
 Local monitors from NGO Maidan Monitoring spoke to witnesses. According to their testimonies, the attack took place on March 27, 2022 sometime at 16:45. The entire neighborhood was under artillery fire. There were 2 shots to the School 167 the first one next to the school and the other directly to the roof.



11:50 On the way PE observed undetermined impact to Selyshche Zhukovskoho. Description and photos of impact will be added later.



13:00-  
 Kharkiv, Akademia Kurchatova Ave, 31, Bilhorodske Hwy, School of Physics and Technology of University of Kharkiv, 50.003825, 36.263276, (government-controlled)



**Shortened version of the First monitoring report prepared in the war.**

Tasks in AOR (Area of Responsibility): Monitoring Kharkiv and surrounding settlements in the period of active military activities. At the beginning of this section, we insert a shortened version of the First monitoring report prepared in the war. We have drawn on previous experience. The different parts of the Patrol were recorded both on the basis of witness testimony and our own observations. We were taking photographs and writing down the exact position of the posts. Then we will summarize the most important conclusions, supplemented by the findings obtained later.

**Early findings from monitoring in Kharkiv in March 2022 indicated that the Kremlin was planning to eliminate the local elite. From what we have seen and heard, one of the intentions of the Russian occupation forces was to physically liquidate opinion leaders, local politicians, NGO activists, well-known volunteers, etc. as quickly as possible.** These people had already appeared on the lists of enemies of Russia or "DPR"/"LPR". See: N. Zubar <https://youtu.be/ahoKs1dixJE>

We have learned from one of our colleagues, former local MP and well-known volunteer Artem Fisun, that the Russians are trying to get information about his movements. Nataliya Zubar, Maidan Monitoring Information Center (MMIC) and her colleagues were in a similar position. The MMIC office in Kharkiv was penetrated by an unspecified Russian intelligence group. This facility has no military significance. Most of the evidence of penetration was destroyed when the rocket hit the house opposite (the Interior Ministry clinic). However, members of the MMIC searched the site before the rocket hit. It looked like the group was looking for documents, addresses. Even the old MMIC office not used for a long time was attacked too. Someone threw a grenade in.



Maidan Monitoring Information Center offices in Kharkiv, March 2022

In November 2024 publication by the head of the Ukrainian Military Intelligence, HUR, General Kyrylo Budanov confirmed that Russia was preparing for the genocide of Ukrainians long before the 2022 invasion and they also already prepared death lists.<sup>16</sup> We confirm these statement by testimonies from witnesses who are listed on the Russian death list for Kharkov. Later we will write about testimonies from occupied Izyum, where the Russians had already managed to liquidate some of the people on the list for Izyum. Systematic liquidations have been taking place in occupied areas of Ukraine since February 2022.

If Kharkiv were occupied by Russian troops, N. Zubar and her other colleagues would be very likely killed, or more likely, she would have disappeared without a trace in Russian prisons

<sup>16</sup> RUSSIA WAS PREPARING FOR A NEW GENOCIDE OF UKRAINIANS LONG BEFORE THE FULL-SCALE INVASION, KYRYLO BUDANOV November 23, 2024: <https://gur.gov.ua/en/content/do-novoho-henotsydu-ukraintsiv-rosiia-hotuvalas-zadovho-do-povnomasshtabnoho-vtorhnennia-kyrylo-budanov>



and later she would end up in an unmarked grave. Indeed, witnesses often describe situations where they were tortured and the Russian occupying power tried to get detailed information from them about other people and activities.



N. Zubar in front of the damaged and searched office of the Maidan Monitoring Information Center and on one of the lists of "Accomplice of the Nazi Kyiv regime" There are more such lists. They are created in Russia and in the "DPR" and "LLR".

📅 Дата рождения: 25.01.1965

📍 Место рождения: Украина, г. Киев

📍 Адрес регистрации: [Харьковская область, город Харьков, переулок Слесарный, д. 10](#)

☎️ Номер телефона: [+380685506682](#); [+380685506687](#); [+380999229755](#)

📄 Паспорт: МК 582771 выдан ЦВМ Дзержинского РВХМУ УМВД Украины в Харьковской области 12.08.1997

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📄 Описание обвинения: подозревается в совершении преступлений, предусмотренных ст. 128.1 УК РФ «Клевета», ст. 205.1 УК РФ «Содействие террористической деятельности», ст. 205.2 УК РФ «Публичные призывы к осуществлению террористической деятельности, публичное оправдание терроризма или пропаганда терроризма», ст. 276 УК РФ «Шпионаж», ст. 280.1 УК РФ «Публичные призывы к осуществлению действий, направленных на нарушение территориальной целостности Российской Федерации», ст. 282 УК РФ «Возбуждение ненависти либо вражды, а равно унижение человеческого достоинства».

📄 В случае получения какой-либо информации в отношении гражданки Зубарь Н.В., просьба сообщить в Telegram-бот обратной связи УВД ВГА Харьковской области @mvd\_kharkov\_ru\_bot.

📄 УВД ВГА ХАРЬКОВСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ



The lists contain personal data, including addresses.

It was at these moments that we began to understand: It is important not only to document Russian war crimes, but to describe and analyse in detail the methods of the Russian occupation - the modus operandi used by the aggressor. There is no reason why Russia should behave differently in other countries. We already know that a similar list applies to other countries, including the Czech Republic. They are still less accessible, less official, not so clearly linked to Russia or the self-proclaimed republics "DPR" and "LPR". On one such list we found the names of members of our organization and other people who support Ukraine's struggle for freedom. In the event of Russia's reoccupation of the Czech Republic, the occupation administration would liquidate all democratically minded persons. In particular, key personalities of politics and public life, members of the security community, academics, journalists, clerics, in short, all similar groups about which the head of HUR, Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov writes, are at risk.

It is the same procedure that we know from the Soviet era. Later, however, local collaborators are also liquidated. The Kremlin relies mainly on its own cadres, others are seen as temporary figures - we have already seen this since 2014 in the "DPR" and "LPR" and other occupied territories.

The fact that the Russian occupying power had prepared very well for the war from the Chekist<sup>17</sup> point of view was gradually confirmed. In the larger towns it was possible to hide longer, it also depended on who was in command at a particular place and what units were present.

In Kharkiv in march 2022 civilian infrastructure, including residential buildings, are becoming a frequent target of rocket, artillery and aerial bombardment. There is a great need for heavy weapons, aircraft and air defense! We have personally visited several such objects. In march in Kharkiv in some of the damaged houses, inhabitants were hiding in the cellars. Suffering from water shortages, electricity supplies are often interrupted and they have a shortage of food.

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<sup>17</sup> The Cheka was the first secret police created by the Bolsheviks in 1917. Today, members of the RF secret services proudly refer to themselves as "Chekists".



The following important finding from Kharkov (and latter we have seen similar cases in Kyiv) is that Russian forces, especially missiles and the air force, focused on the liquidation of the Fire stations. In Kharkiv there were at least on two places where where we saw the fire brigades of its equipment destroyed. A possible explanation is perhaps that Russia wants to complicated by firefighters interventions after the impact of rockets and bombs on other objects.

RF forces attacked kindergartens and schools: We visited three places where schools and kindergartens were hit by rockets or bombing. According to what I have heard so far, attacks on these objects did not occur until the beginning of March. From the beginning of the attack, the Russian Federation avoided these objects in order not to provoke the anger of the inhabitants, who they thought would welcome them.

Now such attacks on objects like schools are quite common. And they affect all cities in the east of Ukraine. But these objects are no longer used for their original purposes. Without good shelters they cannot be used and children often learn on-line. In addition to civilian targets, cluster munition is also used: The photo below shows a cluster munition that hit the Memorial to the



Fire station between Baturynska and Kvitkynska streets.  
service

Damaged fire trucks - still in  
service

Victims of Totalitarianism. In March 2022, we considered the use of these munitions in a civilian populated area to be a completely extreme violation of the laws and customs of war. Later, however, it became clear that their use was so common that it was not within our power to document it.



Schools and kindergartens in Kharkiv. And our first record of the use of cluster munitions. March 2022

### **3.2.DAMAGES REPAIRS IN LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE**

In this report you see a lot of visible damages. However, the full depth of the problem needs to be understood. There are a lot of destructions. It is very time consuming to monitor it and to describe it. I am even not talking about technical assessment and repairs. And what should be particularly underlined: Some damages are not so visible, but are very serious. These impacts can only be assessed by long-term monitoring. However, unless repairs are made, frost and ice continue the work of destruction. Ice-damaged pipes make heating impossible. We understood later how important it is to visit the same places again. Sometime there were regular attack to the same place, by various weapons. Sometimes it is not possible to see all damages. Some of the are latent or far from the impact side. This is one of the example from Kharkiv. The first two photos are made in March 2022. Three photos, with roof and inside in December 2022. In March we have seem damage to nearby houses due to the impact of an aerial bomb. But in December we also research the house from its roof the big photo were made. And we have seen massive damage to the roof, which as a result of the pressure wave completely lifted and fell back into place. The

walls of the building are tilted. Technical specialists say that at least the roof needs to be completely rebuilt. The house is about more than 100 meter from from the impact and explosion of the bomb.

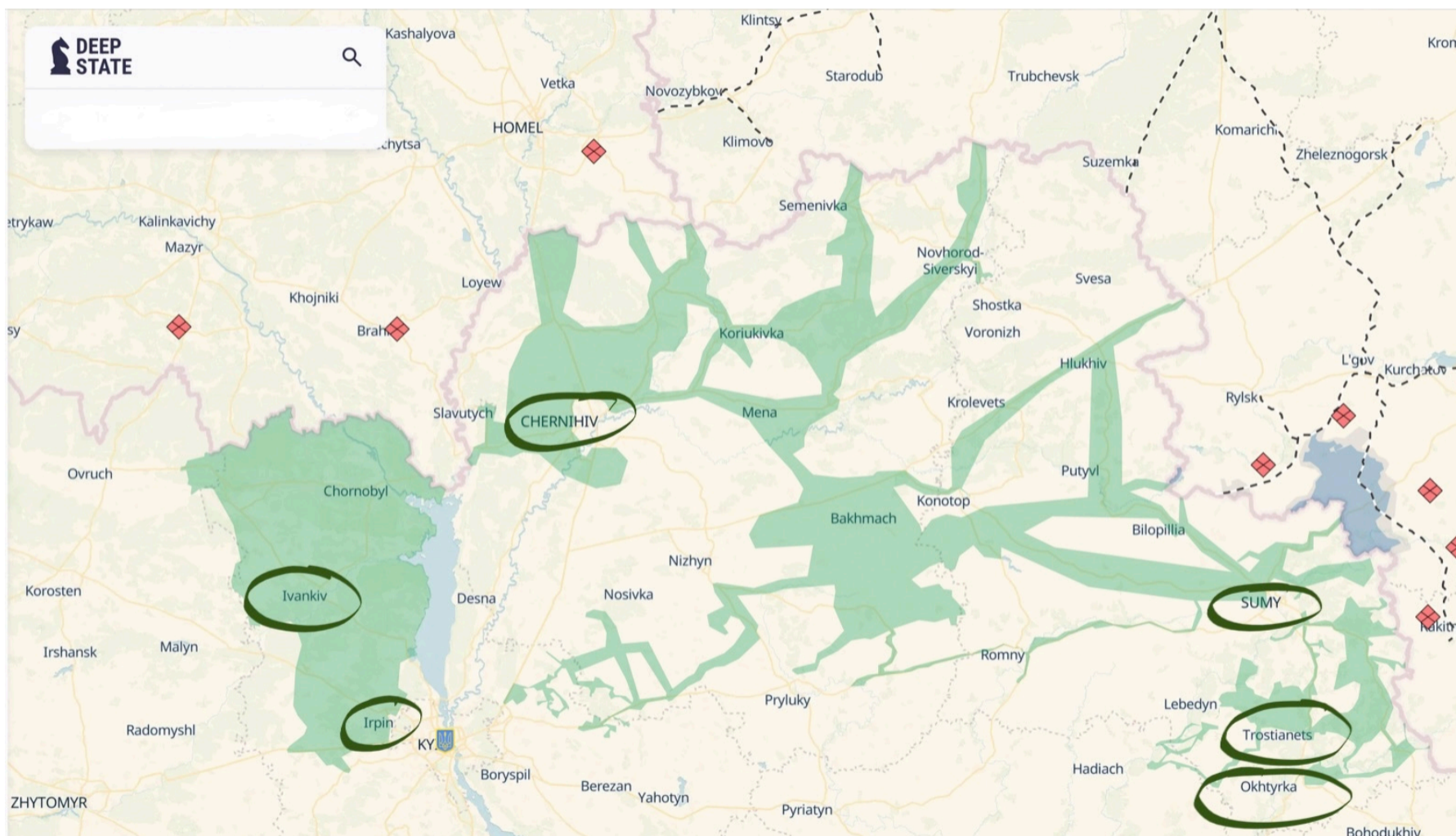


First 2 photos above - March 22. 3 photos, with roof and inside - December 22 Sq. Heroiv Nebesnoj Sotni, Kharkiv

A number of houses are waterlogged because the water pipes were damaged as a result of the intervention or they were waterlogged as a result of extinguishing. All this increases the damage to the object. In the case of other buildings, it is usually just a basic protection against rain and thieves. In buildings where people live, electricity, water and gas are repaired. This usually happens very quickly in Kharkiv and is carried out by the local Technical Services. We often meet their employees during monitoring, often with a truck full of OSB boards, plastic pipes and electrical cables. These people are the unknown heroes of this war.

### 3.3. NORTH-EAST OF KYIV AND SUMY OBLAST, MAY 2022

In May 2022 together with Vostok SOS we carried out monitoring on liberated areas north-east of Kyiv and Sumy and Chernihiv oblast. See the map below.



Green colour shows liberated territories.

When Russian armed forces enter Ukrainian settlements in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions, they deliberately attack civilian targets: private cars with civilians fleeing the war, homes, civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. According to the, head of the village of Katyuzhanka, northwest of Kyiv, 8 residents were shot while trying to escape the Russian

occupation in their vehicles, including a couple and their daughter. The adults, a man, who died on the spot, and a woman who died a day later, were buried by locals on the territory of the village school, as they were forbidden to enter the cemetery by the occupying forces. The girl who survived was rescued and taken by a local priest to the hospital. At least three other residents of this local community suffered the same fate and three others received injuries.

**Chernihiv oblast:** Chernihiv oblast, close to the border with Belarus, comes early under occupation and bombing (artillery shelling, aerial bombardments, cluster bombs. We have speak with witnesses. At the very beginning of Russian invasion in February 24, 2022. The city of Chernihiv was under siege and the neighboring villages of Bobrovytsa, Novoselivka, Kyselivka, north-east of Chernihiv, are heavily destroyed. In Novoselivka, out of 328 individual houses, 280 are ruined. According to the prosecutor of Chernihiv region, 477 civilians are dead and 72 were missing because of occupation and fighting. The investigation is underway into the facts of summary executions, torture, arbitrary detention of civilians, as in the village of Yahidne, facts of pressure and threat against representatives of local territorial communities 8 officials have been detained and one brought for interrogation in Russia.



Chernihiv, an apartment house in the city center.



Russian soldiers also intentionally fire on private homes, these prohibited methods of combat directly endangering the lives of civilians. When a column of armor entered the village of Ivanivka, Chernihiv region, on March 5, the Russian military fired rounds at private houses.

In Yahidne, 15km south of Chernihiv, a similar situation occurred in early March 2022, when a family fled the occupation by car. The adult passengers died as a result of the shooting, but a 13-year-old girl with her mother was rescued - escorted by RF occupiers of Tuva origin and taken to the basement of the school, where about 370 residents were locked up. Since the liberation of the village, she has been receiving medical care in Poland. Even though fleeing civilians hung white cloth on their vehicles and wrote "children" in capital letters on the windows, these precautions do not protect them from indiscriminate fire.



Damaged Bus in the center of Yahidne.

**Sumy oblast:** Sumy oblast at the Ukrainian borders with Russian Federation, comes under Russian occupation - 4 out of 5 districts. There was 153 aerial bombs –starting from February 24 and 25, 2022 The total record of civilian victims is 149. The city of Sumy where not occupied directly but there was some Russian military presence in the city and war crimes against civilians

were committed. Ukrainian police and prosecutor office were working and even during the RF presence gathering evidences of war crimes. One of the Russian tank commander Vadim Shishimarin was accused of murdering a civilian in the Sumy. A court jailed Shishimarin for life for killing a civilian at the first war crimes trial since the invasion. Captured soldier Sgt Vadim Shishimarin was convicted of killing Oleksandr Shelipov, 62, in the north-eastern village of Chupakhivka (Okhtyrka Raion of Sumy Oblast) on 28 February.<sup>18</sup>

The town of Okhtyrka, where Ukrainians troops resisted and halted the advance of the Russian army, was heavily bombarded on February 26, March 3, 8, 14, that cause destructions in the city center and death of 30 civilians. The town of Trostianets was occupied by Russian military, there were: 50 dead, 22 wounded, 6 tortured and 18 missing persons.

Medical facilities have also been targeted by Russian shelling, as in the case of the hospital in Trostianets, south of Sumy, nearly 30 kilometers from the border with Russia and under occupation since 24 February. The Russian military (the 4th Guards Tank Division Kantemirovkaya division placed their tanks and other armored vehicles, heavy artillery pieces, tankers, in the central squares and surrounded the city with checkpoints, preventing the possibility of leaving. One of these checkpoints was set up in the south of the town, at the top of a road leading to the hospital, where around 60 people, the most seriously ill and medical personnel, were thus blocked in these premises. "The first week, Russian soldiers behaved more or less normally with us. From time to time, they let our emergency doctors go out to treat the wounded or even let them pass," says local doctor the head of the medical service. Later, when the Russians left, the Buryats arrived, and finally the forces of the "DPR", the self-proclaimed republic of Donetsk. With each new shift, the attitude towards us deteriorated. The "DPR" "soldiers" were the fiercest and said they wanted to make us pay for the eight years of war in their region. They did not let us provide medical care. One lady had a stroke, but they would not let her relatives take her to the hospital"

It should be noted that this testimony echoes similar accounts collected in other occupied villages and towns: the more the Russian soldiers were under pressure of a counter-offensive, the

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61549569>, 23 May 2022

more they suffered losses and the more the hopes of a military blitzkrieg receded, the more they terrorized the civilian population. And this contextual factor seems to overlap with other structural factors such as the degree of violence in Russian society and the socialization to violence from an early age; the recruitment into the Russian Armed Forces as the only way of social promotion for nationals of some of the poorest territories of the Russian Federation.

Coming back to Trostianets hospital, the denial of access to medical care by the occupying forces is thus systematic, except for a few wounded brought to the hospital by their relatives or pregnant women who go there as a precaution before the term. In these difficult conditions, the staff continued to care for the trapped patients, cooking meals for them in the courtyard, delivering babies to 7 women and helping 28 wounded. However, the shelling on 18 March marked a new stage in the hospital's daily life under occupation: the medical staff saw a Russian tank approach the premises and fire several rounds in its direction. The facade of the colorful building, brand new before February 2022, still bears the marks. In the following days, as the fighting intensified, the mobile staff and patients decided to evacuate to survive. "The occupiers were under pressure, shelled by our troops and suffering heavy losses. All their attempts to force their way to Poltava or Sumy and from there to Kyiv were defeated. These remnants of the defeated Russian army found themselves in Trostyanets, cracking down on us. There was only one option left to us: to try to flee," explains Hanna S.. "On March 24, we tried to evacuate, leaving some twelve colleagues with about twenty heavy immobile patients". Hanna S. accompanied a woman who had just given birth with her baby from the hospital to the town streets and then home: "God was there for us. We did not blow up on the numerous bobby traps on the hospital territory, we managed to hide from the Russian soldiers. We managed to save ourselves. The next day, Russians left".

Civilian infrastructure is deliberately targeted by Russian forces also in non-occupied settlements, but which are subject to heavy fighting. Thus, from 4 to 30 March 2022, the school in Kolychivka, south of Chernihiv, was regularly shelled from the nearby village of Ivanivka, occupied by the Russian army. This while 150 civilians, women and children took shelter in the basement of the school. The intensity of the fire, especially between March 7 and 9, as well as the



School in Kolychivka



Okhtyrka local administration



Borodianka, Bucha Raion - Apartment buildings destroyed as a result of aerial bombardment

encirclement of the village by Russian troops prevented these civilians from evacuating the place and made it practically impossible to deliver supplies. The last delivery of bread to the village was on March 4. Only the courage of some local volunteers who venture out to find food allows the inhabitants of the village blocked in the school to survive. Director of the school, showed the monitoring mission members heavily damaged premises: roofs collapsed in places, holes in the facade, blown out windows. The shelling of civilian objects (administrative buildings, thermal power station, water pipes and drains) was also intense in the town of Okhtyrka, south of Sumy, where the advance of Russian troops was halted on February 24-25. Air bombs were dropped on February 27-28 on residential buildings on Kyivs'ka Street between numbers 92 and 103, damaging roofs, walls, blowing out windows and causing at least thirty civilian casualties.

### **3.4. ARBITRARY ARRESTS, DETENTION OF CIVILIANS**

We collected testimonies about arbitrary arrests and detention of Ukrainian civilians in settlements under Russian army occupation. At the Trostyanets railway station, traces of blood are visible on the wall of one of the basement rooms.

According the station manager, it was in this room that five people were found with their hands bound with iron ties after the departure of the Russian troops. Ruslan K, an electrician of the city's electrical networks, also spent a few hours in this basement. He was arrested in the middle of the street while working on damaged electric cables and was taken there by Russian soldiers. "The Russians banned us from moving around the city. If you move, then you are an informer or a fire corrector for the Ukrainian army. Even though I told them I was an electrician, they still arrested me and forced me to undress completely. They looked for military tattoos on my body, asked me if I had served in the army, but found nothing on me. This practice of inspecting men's bodies in search of patriotic or military tattoos, revealing previous combat experience, or even weapon marks on the shoulder is systematic. We spoke with Ruslan K in more detail he also said the RF soldiers looked to be under influence of some heavy narcotics.



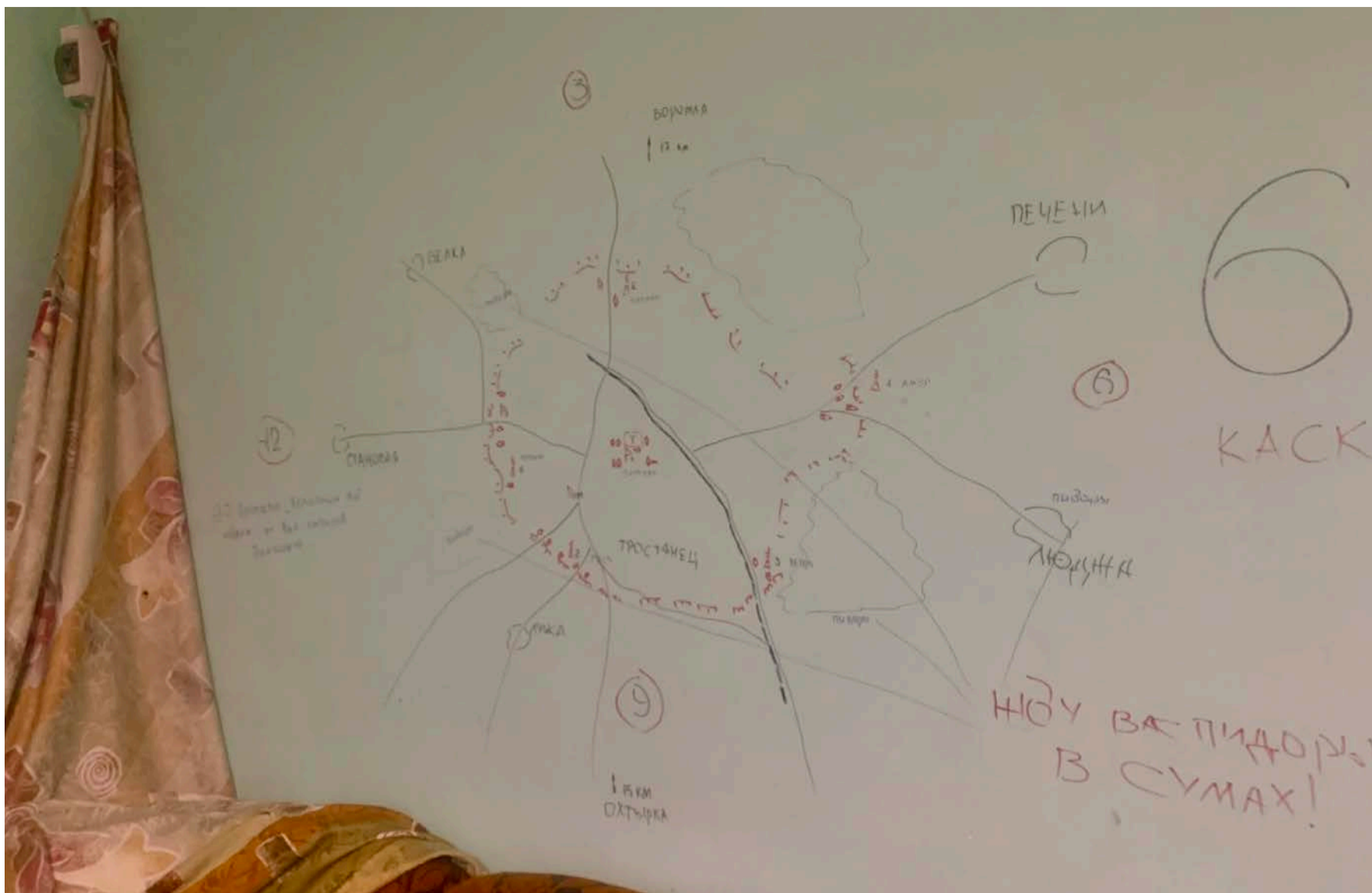
Trostyanets railway station

Torture chamber in the basement of station.

Ruslan K on the very right

According mayor of Trostianets, about 30 people passed through this detention place in the basement of the station. In total, out of nearly 20,000 inhabitants of Trostyanets, nearly 50 died, 6 were tortured, 30 people were taken prisoner and 36 are missing (May 2022).

A Russian army local headquarters was located upstairs in the same building of the Trostyanets railway station. A map was drawn on the wall of one of the rooms, on which the occupants depicted their military positions and the types of weaponry available there.



Insults are written on the walls "Fags (Ukrainians), I'm waiting for you in Sumy".

A detention center was improvised also in the basement of the school in Katuzhanka (northwest of Kyiv) where the Russian army installs one of its headquarters. According to the school director, about 14 civilians were held in this place, about 10 of them were brought to Russia after the withdrawal of Russian troops.

In the village of Andriivka, still northwest of Kyiv, the members of the mission took an anonymous testimony from a former detainee. At the end of February 2022, as he was returning home, he was arrested in the middle of the street of the village already under Russian occupation. For seven days he was detained in the cold, hands and feet tied, without food. It was then that he got frostbite on his hands and feet; since then he walks with difficulty and cannot feel his left arm. Later he was taken to a prison in Kursk, Russia, subjected to interrogations by the Russian FSB, regularly beaten. From there, he believes he was transferred, eyes covered with tape, to Crimea to be part of prisoners exchange between Ukraine and Russia on April 14, 2022.

Russian troops are carrying out arbitrary executions of civilians. In Andriivka, northwest of Kyiv, nearly 40 civilians are reported to have died after a month of Russian occupation, and this count is not yet final. For example, Yuryi K. was shot in front of his house on March 9, 2022, for allegedly giving the Ukrainian army information about Russian military positions. His wife managed to escape the execution, begging the occupants to let her live for her two children. Yuryi's parents, Mykola K. and his wife, went to the Russian checkpoint with a white sheet attached to a stick to get permission to bury the body in the cemetery. The soldiers ordered them to do it in their garden.

In Ivanivka, south of Chernihiv, the Russian military executed a man in his sixties on March 9, 2022. According to Oleksandr, the son of the deceased, two soldiers entered his father's house at Vyshneva Street, Ivanivka, shot him with three shots and, as they left, opened the gas and threw a grenade inside. Oleksandr was able to go to the ruins of the house only a few days later. He found two burned bones of his father, which he buried in the garden of his grandmother's house. According to the testimonies gathered by Oleksandr from the neighbors, the man refused to leave his house, while the Russian soldiers were evicting the civilians from their homes to install their headquarters and concentrate their tanks and armor in this part of the village. A Russian armored vehicle was parked in the garden of the house. It is therefore to punish a recalcitrant that the Russian military would have acted in this way.

These acts of violence spread terror among Ukrainian civilians under Russian occupation. All the witnesses we met during the monitoring mission stated that in order to protect themselves and their relatives, they hardly left their homes and took refuge in their basements. They were also reluctant to evacuate for fear of being shot on the way. It was not until March 12 that the first cars managed to escape from the village of Katyuzhanka, northwest of Kyiv, to the nearby village of Demidova, from where fleeing civilians were evacuated to Kyiv. In Trostyanets, the first evacuation by bus and private cars took place only in mid-March.

Nearly 350 people, including at least 50 children, from Yahidne, south of Chernihiv, - the youngest is one and a half months old and the oldest 90 years old - were detained from 3 to 30





The crime scene Ivanivka in May 2022. The house was destroyed in result if explosion.

March in the basement of the village school. They were used as a human shield by the Russian military, who took up residence on the ground and upper floors of the building, set up firing positions, and deployed tanks, armored vehicles and artillery on the territory of the school, but also in the streets, courtyards of apartment buildings and vegetable gardens. Traces of the soldiers' presence can be seen everywhere on the territory of the school (boxes of dry rations of the Russian army, opened cans of food, clothes, shoes, mattresses) and in the village (burnt out military vehicles, remains of war, a civilian car crushed by a tank).



Wrecks of civilian cars damaged by gunfire and a Lada run over by tanks.

People of Yahidne – many of whom came to the village from Chernihiv to join their relatives and in the hope of being far away from fighting but found themselves trapped – spent 28 days of arbitrary detention in the cold, humid and stuffy environment, without room to move, sleeping on chairs or on the floor. One of the witnesses we met on site, Halyna, 47 years old, explains that she lived with 36 other people in a cramped room measuring 7m x 7m. These civilians also spent 28 days with a minimum of food: Russian soldiers, occasionally and depending on their mood, let some of the detainees go to their homes for 10 minutes to collect food supplies. Provisions thus brought back are then cooked in the basement and shared among all arbitrarily detained. Trapped civilians also spend 28 days without any news from the outside world, occupation troops having expropriated their cell phones. This practice of expropriating cell phones for fear that civilians would share information, especially about positions of Russian troops and heavy weapons, is systematically reported in all occupied settlements.



The Russians parked military equipment near civilian houses, schools... and not only in Yahidne. People who didn't want to leave the house were driven from their homes forcibly or killed.

### **3.5. SCHOOL IN KATYUZHANKA**

The town of Katyuzhanka north-west of Kyiv was under Russian occupation. According to the testimony of the local headmaster, Mykola Mikitchik, the school in Katyuzhanka was transformed into a Russian military headquarters with a large concentration of soldiers and military personnel

(there were about 500 soldiers and officers). The football field was used as a landing area for military helicopters and for decorating ceremonies for soldiers. This is confirmed by open sources.



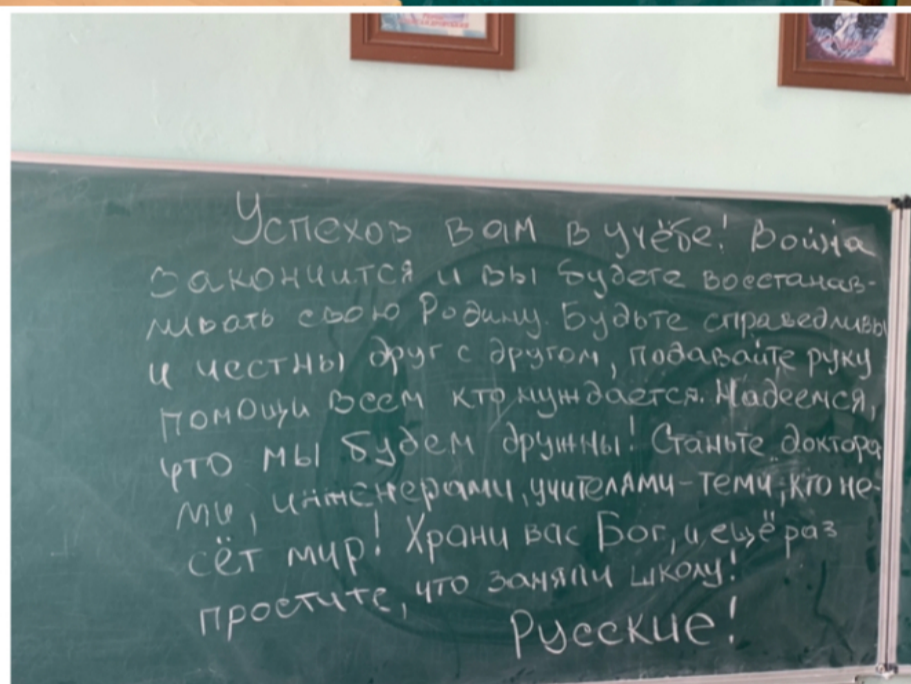
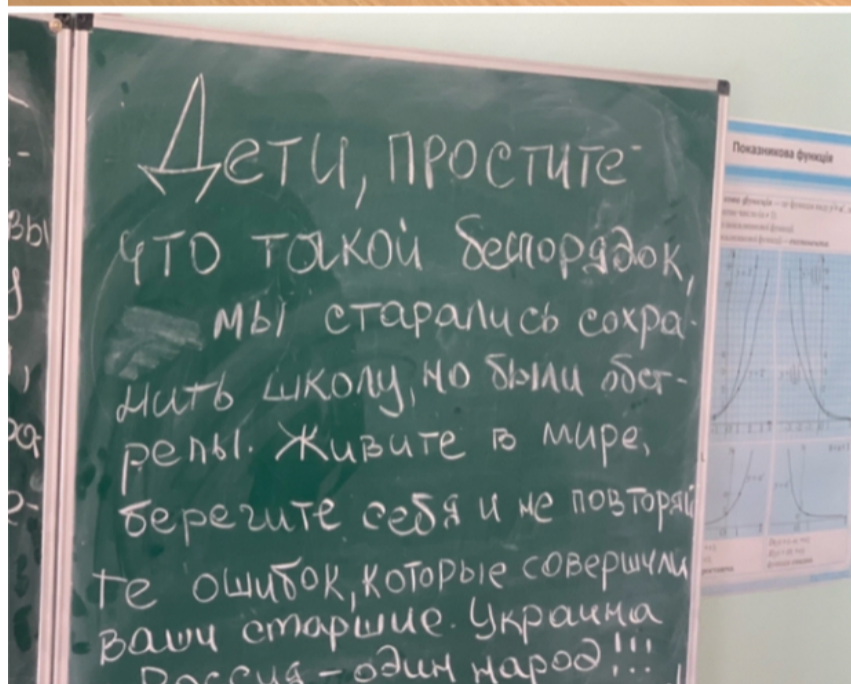
School during the monitoring in May 2022, and during the occupation

37 trenches were dug on the school grounds for the installation of heavy artillery, which regularly fired volleys at neighboring villages. The headmaster of the school estimated the damage at around 5 million UAH.



All the electronics were removed from the desktop computers - leaving them empty cases.

When the Russian soldiers hastily withdrew, they ripped out or cut all the cables, destroyed all communications, broke doors and ransacked classrooms. More than 40 new computers, interactive whiteboards, 30 projectors were stolen and smashed; projection screens were cut up. Many other valuables and worthless items - such as crockery, placemats...



Messages on the school blackboards in Katyuzhanka school, author unknown.

The Ukrainian army liberated the city and the Russian forces had to withdraw quickly. They left the school in a hurry. And they left a lot of material and clutter, maps, lists of personnel, orders of honors were left behind. In one of the classrooms, a soldier left a chalk note on the blackboard for the Ukrainian children, apologizing for the mess left behind. They defended himself by saying that Russians and Ukrainians were brothers and wished them to live in peace.

When we saw this message, we wondered whether this message was a reflection of the ideological indoctrination to which the Russian army is subjected or a sign of its cynicism. There was also some suspicion as to whether this was some kind of "installation" or "prank" by Ukrainians who had been in the school just after the occupation. The message is written all too neatly - in teacher's handwriting.

In all the localities we visited, we observed signs of systematic looting of shops, pharmacies, public facilities, private houses and apartments. Locals said that violence by Russian troops, was increasing as the objectives of the Russian military invasion set by the Kremlin were failing and Russian soldiers were coming under heavy and regular shelling from Ukrainian forces. The worst atrocities are thus often committed in the second half of March by soldiers who have suffered casualties elsewhere and retaliated against civilians.

Witnesses report that the violence in Katyzhanka was mainly committed by RF soldiers from Buryatia, in Yahidne Tuvans, in Trostyanets there were forces from "Donetsk People's Republic". At the same time, we often heard about the dispute that prevailed between different national groups in the RF army. Especially between Russians and Chechens or Russians and Tuvans.



Traces of Russian presence, including graves, from which civilians were exhumed. (People were buried next to Russian trenches. A similar situation would later be observed in Izjum as well.)

### 3.6. IZIUM FIRST DAYS AFTER LIBERATION



With UA Unit 'Gostri Kartuzy' in Iziium.  
the Russians to navigate

The directional signs on Iziium have been taken down to make it harder for

Town of Iziium is located in the Kharkiv oblast and before the war the town had about 40 thousand inhabitants. After the Russian invasion in February 2022, it became the site of heavy fighting for many weeks, facing deliberate destruction of infrastructure and residential buildings. Eyewitness accounts from those who fled testified of manhunts, looting, and kidnappings. After the liberation during the Ukrainian army's counter-offensive in September 2022, a mass burial site was found on outskirts the town. 449 bodies were exhumed, including women, children and the elderly. T4U and MMIC groups were among the first monitors to visit the town.

The Iziium case is one of our most important case ever. We are involved in both police investigations and public reporting on what happened in the city during the occupation. Our work has contributed to the identification and collection of evidence against specific Russian officers suspects. It is practically impossible to describe all the findings from that crime scene here. However, I will try to give the best possible picture of the situation in the city and the process of documentation, which will be followed by some specific results of the investigation.

Officially, Izyum was liberated on September 10, 2022, but the Russian occupation power was weakening gradually. So for some, the liberation had already occurred a fall of days earlier

and parts of the Russian troops were still there after that date. And the vicinity around the cities was not yet safe. Iziun was the first town we monitored immediately after liberation. We realized how much difference between official dates and real individual stories on newly liberated areas.

In September 13 and 14 still some “clean-up” operations still continued in Iziun, and shooting could be heard from the surroundings areas. We spent the night in a house made available by local residents, we darkened the windows, as a source of electricity we had an electro-generator and internet via Starlink. We parked the cars in different places in yards and in the surrounding area, so that they were not concentrated in one place, the soldiers kept a guard in front of the house all nights.



Russian tanks

Armored infantry vehicle Tiger

Self-propelled howitzer 2S19 Msta with the ammunition inside

The Russians fled from Iziun in general very quickly, leaving behind a large amount of equipment and ammunition. September 15 we saw in Iziun dozens of artillery grenades, several tanks and howitzers including self-propelled howitzer 2S19 Msta with the ammunition inside. This

equipment is repaired, refueled up with diesel, for example, from the damaged gas stations and sent back to fight but now on the Ukrainian side.



For most of the population, the only source of information during the occupation, the internet connection was not available. The internet connection only worked far outside the city. It was difficult to plan evacuation from Izium.

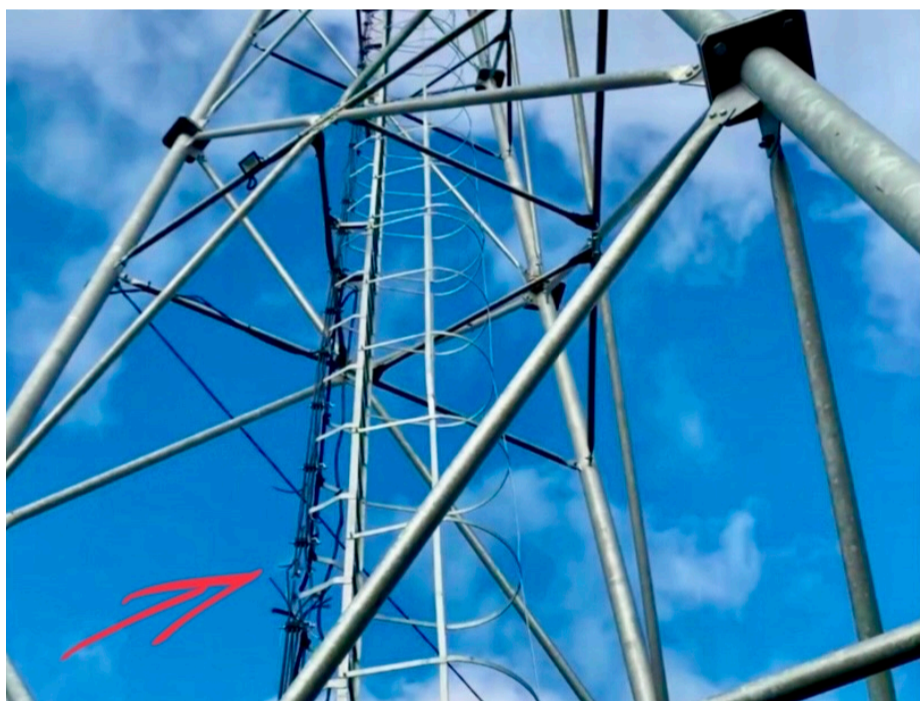
The situation in the liberated territories of Kharkiv oblast can be characterized by the following words: hope, happiness, mistrust, shock, uncertainty, and hunger. In order to understand the situation, it must be emphasized that people in Izium lived in isolation, electricity did not work, the internet did not work, and it still didn't work after the liberation. Internet connection was available in some places via Starlink, provided by the Ukrainian army to local citizens too. The biggest current need in the liberated territories was supply of food, water and electricity. "Information" during the occupation was available through the local Russian-controlled press which was old school newspapers.

Any humanitarian aid was not delivered during the first month (march - april) of the occupation. People with small children left Izium to western Ukraine, Kharkiv or the EU as early as March. Part of the people left Izium later to Russia or via Russia. Those who have relatives in the Russian Federation and finances for the trip could go to the Baltic states via Russia and then to the rest of EU. People who do not have relatives in the Russian Federation had to accept status of refugees in RF then they are prohibited from leaving the Russian Federation for two years. Families



were also offered to send their children to camps in Russia for the summer. Some of them left recently before liberation. Witnesses in Izjum did not describe that the Russian side carried out forced deportations. However, going to Russia was the only possible way out of the war zone.

People living right in the city had no or little food. It was better to live in houses with a garden, where there was a larger food storage. The Russian occupying power gradually began to disburse, at least pensions in rubles, but there was almost nothing to buy with them. Larger shops were destroyed or looted. There were some improvised shop only. People also indicated that part of the money was probably embezzled by the occupation administration. Most of the liberated territories we passed through did not have electricity supplies for a long time, and there was no access to the internet. A Base Transceiver Station (BTS) were distorted or equipment has been removed from them or or both. So people talked about absolute isolation and lack of any trustworthy information.



The cut cables of Base Transceiver Station (BTS)



The improvised shop in the town of Izjum

Witnesses described that during the occupation, in addition to the RF Army and collaborators, the Russian FSB was also active. There was targeted terror, which was aimed mainly at people known for their affiliations with the Ukrainian police, army or patriots in general. It looked like a long-laid Russian plan. And just on the end of 2024 when we are finishing this report Ukrainian military intelligence has published information about Russia's preparations for genocide against the Ukrainian people before the full-scale invasion it included the creation of

execution lists, mobile crematoria, and mass graves. The experience in Kharkiv confirms this suspicion too.

Chief of the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov emphasized that the current military and political leadership of the aggressor state of Russia had been purposefully preparing for the genocide of Ukrainians long before the full-scale invasion. In particular, in an article by Russian dictator Putin published in July 2021, the Kremlin leader once again denied the right of the Ukrainian nation to exist. Russia's propaganda, the highest state authorities, high-ranking officials, and the entire state machine, having received such a blessing from their leader, have repeatedly called for the destruction of Ukrainians. According to the military intelligence, total Ukrainophobia has affected the entire Russian society. The genocide of Ukrainians is not only the state policy of the Russian federation, but also a mandatory social belief, handed down from above." Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian occupiers were instructed on the location of collective graves. The execution lists were to include teachers of the Ukrainian language, literature, history, ATO veterans, journalists, scientists, writers, priests of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and other denominations who supported Ukraine, public and political figures, heads of state and self-government bodies. Maniacal instructions and guidelines were simultaneously implemented in different regions of Ukraine invaded by the Russian occupiers. The atrocities committed by the Russian Armed Forces showed that these uniform and synchronized actions were based on clear doctrinal provisions of the Russian genocidal policy of the government and military leadership.<sup>19</sup>

This statement of Ukrainian military intelligence we may confirm based on our research and monitoring on the liberated territories of Ukraine and especially based on our experience from Iziium. In some cases, the target of a Russian raid was the old address of these people. However, there were also collaborators who updated the data and supplied information about new persons. In Iziium, in addition to the FSB and the Army, units from the "DPR" and "LPR" also participated in

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<sup>19</sup> RUSSIA WAS PREPARING FOR A NEW GENOCIDE OF UKRAINIANS LONG BEFORE THE FULL-SCALE INVASION, - KYRYLO BUDANOV November 23, 2024: <https://gur.gov.ua/en/content/do-novoho-henotsydu-ukraintsiv-rosiia-hotuvalas-zadovho-do-povnomasshtabnoho-vtorhnennia-kyrylo-budanov>

these raids. Their behavior was said to be particularly repulsive. The Russian Cossacks were also said to be very aggressive.

Other people with whom we spoke the following days confirmed this. Some people were afraid to speak because it was not yet certain that the liberation was final and that they could speak openly about their views on the Russian occupiers. Part of the city's population was also under Russian influence before the war, and their eyes were opened only after the occupation. They are still dealing with the difficult situation. Even before the occupation, Izjum was a very poor, some parts of the the towns and villages around were socially depressed. And there were also family, personal and professional contacts with Russia - Soviet nostalgia reigned here. The personal experience with the Russian army and FSB was shocking for the locals.

The younger man standing in a knot of other locals, next to the improvised store, explained the true nature of the occupying power and emphasized that he himself had been tortured and held captive, then showed a propaganda newspaper which was one of the few sources of "information" during the occupation. According to this man, all the clergy in Izjum collaborated. He said that the Cossacks shot and raped. An elderly woman described that her 33-year-old son was severely beaten by the Russians at the beginning of March after they found UA army underwear and socks on him. First they forced him to take off his clothes, then they dragged him through the streets. He returned home cold and battered.

Another lady described that other RF soldiers shared food. This was especially important in the first month when there were no humanitarian supplies. Some Russian soldiers are also said to have cried when they understood they are not liberators but occupiers.

Another local resident describes that he was detained twice by the Russians because he is ATO veteran. At first, he was somewhere in an abandoned house in the basement, after 5 days they threw him out somewhere and they expected him to die, but people helped him. He was arrested a second time on August 28 with the help of collaborators. One such collaborator accompanied the Russians to his apartment. He was then in prison until the end of the occupation.

Sometime on August 31, they brought an old man (about 70 years old) to prison, allegedly accused him of espionage, when they tortured him he lost consciousness and they broke his arm. They were young soldiers. Sometime on September 9, the Russians escaped, and some civilian man came, to the prison. He opened all the cells and said that there is a cupboard upstairs with our things and documents, "take them quietly and go home". It was said to be a familiar face from the local Ukrainian administration...



Artillery ammunition, sometimes in the original crates.

2S19 Msta-S, self-propelled howitzer (full of ammunition)

Tank T-72

People who died as a result of repression, torture, war hardships were buried in several cemeteries, but people did not have more accurate information. After the 10th of September, just after the liberation of the town, we spoke to local residents who mentioned that there were mass graves nearby. Unfortunately, this was confirmed and burial ground was found in the Pine Forest near the exit of the city on Shakespeare Street. On September 23, most of the exhumations from this burial ground was completed.

In connection with the statement by HUR, where it says that Russians had instructions on how to create mass burial sites, it should be pointed out that the burial site on Shakespeare Street, where we monitored the exhumations and we still speak with relatives of the victims, was built to connect to an existing cemetery. On the other side were Russian military equipment trenches and a military camp. This separated the original and new improvised cemetery from the main road on one side, and the only access road could be very well guarded by the large number of soldiers already present. The locals were afraid to approach the cemetery. The Russians could thus hide these activities better. At the intersection with the main street there was a checkpoint manned by members of the "DPR". The locals preferred not to come here at all unless they had to.

Only the first bodies were buried in the mass grave, later they tried to bury each body separately. Often, however, the coffins and the names of the victims were missing. The improvised cemetery was also connected to the original cemetery by the placement of graves and paths. If the occupation had lasted longer, everything would have looked like one cemetery. Important evidence was found mainly because the Russians held Izjum for only half a year, so many important clues were preserved. In areas that have been under occupation for three years, evidence collection will be much more difficult.

We monitored and documented the entire process of exhumation and initial examination of several dozens of bodies. Some of the bodies bore signs of torture (suffocation on the neck), others had gunshot marks in the skull (indicated by an arrow in the photo). 449 bodies were found in the first burial ground. Most of the bodies belong to civilians, but they also about 20 soldiers, but those are from March are already mostly very decomposed.



Large part of the people perished, as a result of the military operations. This also apply to those people in those graves. They died as a result of aerial bombardment artillery fire and so on. Other people died as a result of starvation or medicine shortages. Witnesses describe that relatives of one old women were not allowed to take care of her, a woman was chained to a wheelchair and she died as a result of insufficient care. The surprising fact illustrating deviant behavior is, that RF soldier had a camp just next to this improvised cemetery. There was camp fire just 5 m from the graves with freshly opened canned meat.



Later we had the opportunity to talk to people who had found relatives there. But up to now, over a hundred bodies have not been identified (October 2024). We talked to the survivors, and we wondered why they didn't leave when there was such danger? They replied that they didn't believe such a thing was possible at all! "It was completely beyond our imagination," says Mr. Mykhailo Yatsenyuk. He showed us a sketch of the house and the place where the cellar was, where they all hid, it was right in the middle of the house. March 9, 2022, early morning the Russian aerial bomb landed right there. Mykhailo lost his whole family, including all his grandchildren. He only survived by chance. His granddaughter asked him to go get tea, and when he came out of the basement a Russian air bomb landed. Coincidentally, he was only

partially hit by the falling walls. With great effort, he managed to get out of the ruins. His three grandchildren 3, 10, and 14 years, his daughter and her husband, his wife, and his mother-in-law were just a few meters away under tons of panels and rubble. There was no longer any rescue system in the city. Even the death bodies of were only extracted after weeks and months. Some have not been found to this day.



Photo by the witness from neighborhood made immediately after the airstrike and our photos from later on monitoring The plan of house by Mr. Mykhailo Yatsenyuk.

The Russian invasion began with air strikes in other cities in Ukraine. The Russian Air Force was preparing the way for Russian ground troops. There was no major Ukrainian military presence in Izjum at the time. Witnesses consistently testify: There were only a few checkpoints and troops numbering in the dozens. The Russian air force was thus attacking purely civilian targets in March 2022. These testimonies are supported by the findings at the burial site. Only a few dozen bodies of Ukrainian soldiers have been found. The vast majority of the bodies belonged to civilians and very often to the elderly. The attack on Izjum is thus a textbook example of a war crime. It was committed by specific units under specific commanders. Some of them were later identified and the evidence against them documented.

### 3.7. IZIUM TESTIMONIES

*"We didn't believe such a thing was possible at all! It was completely beyond our imagination!"*

(From the testimonies of witnesses from Izjum)



**Tatiana Pryvalikina from the town of Izjum** not only gave testimony to the police, but also spoke with members of both chambers of Czech Parliament, and gave several interviews to the Czech media. She spoke about the attack to her town, about the aerial bombing of her house, about the fate of her relatives and neighbours...

The quote at the beginning of this chapter not only brings us back to the words of Mr. Mykhailo Yatsenyuk, who lost his entire family in aerial bombing. But it illustrates the conviction of



the many other inhabitants of the town, before the invasion in February. Many of them stayed in the city. They postponed evacuation, they didn't let themselves be persuaded leave, and then it was too late. Later evacuations were already very risky. Trenches, minefields and Russian checkpoints had already been created between their home town and the rest of Ukraine.

However, few could imagine the scale of the attack at the time. It was clear that the Ukrainians would fight back. The idea that Ukraine would fall in a matter of days was even less likely than Putin giving the order to invade. The question is, why did the thesis of Ukraine's swift defeat get published even by major Western agencies? This was an objectively nonsensical assumption, but it certainly gave the Kremlin confidence! How little the West knew about Ukraine, how little, Ukrainians knew about Russia, and Russians knew about Ukrainians.

I used to pass through Iziium often on my ways to Donbas from 2014. Iziium used to be a rest stop, with good food for some snack. The fact that Iziium would become the site of one of the most extensive war crime did not occur to us either.



The REST STOP on the mountain Kremyanets in Iziium in 2021 and in 2022

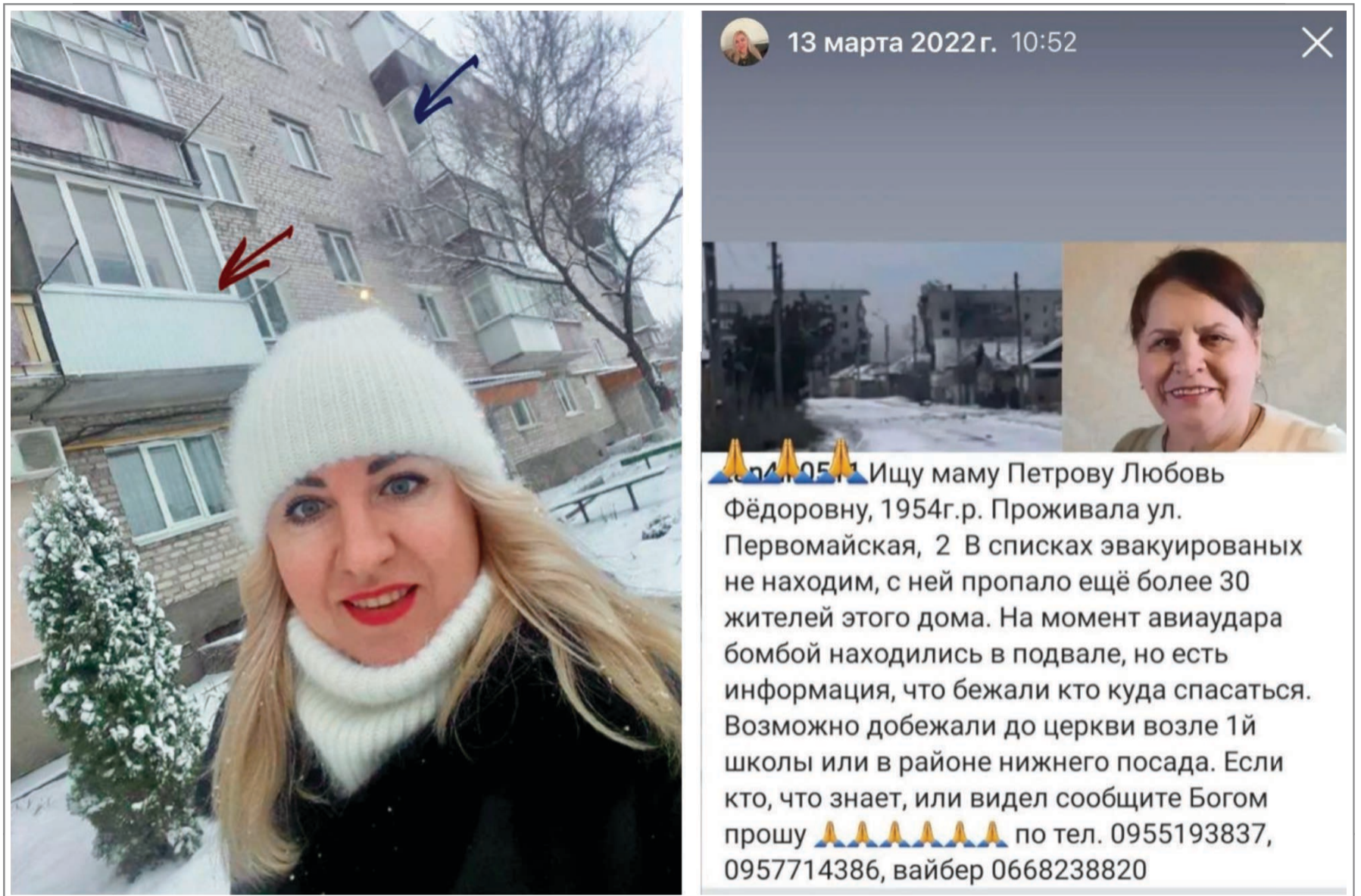
A few months before the invasion, on our way to Donbas, we stopped at a rest stop near Iziium on the mountain Kremyanets. Anyone who drove from Kharkiv to the Donbas knew this place. Reporters, soldiers, volunteers, OSCE monitors... In the years since 2014, I have been here hundreds of times. We passed by this rest stop several times after the liberation of Iziium. But the war changed everything so much that only after a long time we did recognize a familiar place in

the burnt ruins. Here they sold sweets and coffee, here was a grill, here under a red and blue shop with a big TIR sign with supplies for motorists. And now it's just charred ruins. Imagining anything like it has been since February 2022 has been very difficult. That's why the locals need to be understood. So the world lived in a different discourse until 2022. Russian imperialism had shown its true face. It is mass murdering Ukrainians and turning villages into ruins. There is no reason to believe that it should behave differently elsewhere. In this war all free people are enemies for the Kremlin.

According to Tatiana Pryvalikina and her sister Victoria we (met them both in Kharkiv) the situation was only getting worse. So, two days after the invasion began, they decided it was time to find shelter in the basement. They wanted to be protected from the possible attacks they heard all around them. From February 26 to March 4, Tanya, her daughter, her mother and other friends hid in the basement shelter in local brewery. At the beginning of March, Russia heavily bombed Izyum, the soldiers blew up the gas pipeline, leaving the townspeople with an opportunity to prepare food.

Over the days, water and electricity supplies were also interrupted. Temperatures were under zero, and ten degrees below zero being common. "We were squeezing in the basement. We had no way to keep warm. There was our dog with us there, and we slept with him the last night so that we could at least feel some warm," says Tatiana, unable to resist the tears welling up in her eyes. That was a terrible night. We decided to check our car and if it was ok, to run away.

The town of Izyum is divided into two parts by the river: first Russia began to occupy the left bank and then the right. The apartment building where Tatiana lived until February 2022 was located on the latter. "There was chaos in the city, people bought up all the food, there were long lines for shops, gasoline, ATMs. Some wanted to leave immediately, others thought it would be over quickly - that war is not possible in the 21st century," And so her mother didn't want to go with her at any price. "She was deeply religious. There was a church next to our house, she went there every day. And she thought it would protect her".



Tatiana in front of the house before the war. The blue arrow indicates where her apartment was, the red arrow Mykhailo's apartment. After the aerial bombing March 9, 2022, they tried to find their mother also through social networks, hoping that she might have survived. That maybe she wasn't there at the time...

On the other side "At that moment we didn't know if it was safe to leave the town, as it was almost completely surrounded by the Russian army, we didn't know if our decision was right. When we ran there, all the neighbours were still there, no one wanted to leave. On the left bank of the city it was already horrible, but the right side was a bit quieter," she recalls. My mother saw it and said she wouldn't come with us. She didn't want to come with us. She wished she had stayed home," Tanya describes, her voice shaking. She didn't know it then, she could only guess that this might be one of the last moments they would have together.

Izyum was surrounded by Russian tanks, the last free way to get away remained. They originally planned to drive past a village of Petrivs'ke, they know well where they have a cottage in the last moment, however, calls a neighbor that the Russians occupied the local high ground it makes it therefore decided to leave the city direction to the town of Barvinkove. By this way

Tatiana and her daughter fled to Dnipro. They were still in contact by phone with the mother. The last thing Tatiana mother said was that Izjum was under fire. She complained that they couldn't even go out of the basement of their apartment house. They were hiding in there with 50 other people. It was March 6. After that, Tatiana and her mother never spoke each other again.

On March 10, Tatiana came to the Czech Republic. When she was checking in at the Congress Centre, which was a central point for Ukrainian refugees, she started getting photos of destroyed houses from neighbors. Her apartment building was there too.

Tatiana's sister, Victoria stayed in Izjum, and she subsequently told her that her house had been bombed. Victoria went to the city centre, where she found the bodies of dead people in the street. "Bodies were lying chaotically everywhere. She tried to call her mother and neighbours, but no one responded. Everything was destroyed." They hoped that maybe their mother had run out of the basement and was alive. Viktoria ran around the city looking for her.

The survivors of Izium wanted to look for their fellow inhabitants, they wanted to look under the ruins of the house, but they did not have the proper equipment to do so. By April, the smell of dead bodies, which no one had cleared away, was already wafting through the city.

"Our guys were determined to dig up the bodies. When they started to uncover them, they found that the Russians had killed whole families. Some had as many as eight members. They killed even small children. Some families had orphaned children, they were students who were not in Izjum at the time." Sometimes volunteers could only find body parts - hands, feet.

Tatiana her sister Victoria called each other. Victoria had to go out of town to get a mobile signal. During the phone calls, they tried together to identify the neighbours, whose remains were gradually being found. It was difficult because those people often didn't have a face. It was impossible to recognize them. They had a group on Telegram where they sent photos and they tried to piece together which of their neighbors it might be. It helped if a person had a tattoo, but even that wasn't a sure. They also tried the keys they found in the dead people's pockets, and went around the doors of not-quite-destroyed apartments. In this apartment building alone, at least 54 civilians died.

Victoria found a part of a body that looked like her mother's. Shoulder and part of the arm with a jacket and a thick sweater over it. "That's how our mom used to wear it already in basement shelter in brewery." They also found her burnt passport.

People didn't have the option of burying their relatives themselves. If they did bury them in the garden, for example, the occupiers forced them to dig up the body and then moved it to the forest, where mass burial sites were created on Shakespeare street. Some clearly identified ones could also be buried at the graves of relatives in other cemeteries. All this was decided by the occupational administration.

The mother's body parts found were supposed to be buried in the 283rd grave. But it turned out to be someone else. Neither the description of the remains nor the DNA tests matched. It was determined that it was a neighbor from the same house who was in the basement too. We found her on the videos from the basement she made shortly before the attack. Tatiana and Victoria are still waiting for investigators to determine where their mother's body is."

Viktoriya and her husband went to the house every day and tried to identify them, and the bodies were brought out by mid-June. "When the last one was brought out, they decided to try to leave occupied Izjum for the unoccupied part of Ukraine.

They managed to pass the Russian check point. And according to what Victoria describes, the commander of this checkpoint decided their fate himself. Victoria told him that her husband was ill and not subject to conscription. The commander saw her and told them both to go. The men, however, were mostly not let in by the Russians. This is more of an exception showing that there was room for on-the-spot decision making. These were not orders from the Kremlin. Every soldier and commander in the Russian army has a certain amount of freedom. Elsewhere we have confirmed that it was they who sought opportunities to make oppressions, others on the contrary tried to avoid such situations. There was always room for mercy.

It wasn't Putin directly who prepared the intolerable conditions of the occupation in Izjum. It was the local Russian commanders. The bombing was followed by other crimes. "The purges in the city began. The Russians and their collaborators sought out patriots, locked them up in torture

chambers, killed many people, there were cases of rape. Those who stayed in Izium during the occupation heard women screaming and wailing. But there was no way to help them", said Tatiana and Viktoria.

The big problem was with the medication. These were not available, which affected especially the elderly residents. This often proved fatal for them in the end. "Although Russia did not kill them, they died alone. But it happened because they had no medicine, there was no medical help for them, the hospitals were not functioning," The Russians also looted they took furniture, televisions, washing machines, but that's unnecessary to mention in the context.

The situation in Izjum was tragic. Here, not only were our hypotheses confirmed, based on previous experiences in Kharkiv, Kyiv and Sumy oblasts, but Izjum exceeded even our worst expectations....

The case of Izjum most important, which we have been working on for a long time since 2022. Some of the perpetrators, from among the Russian troops, have already been identified.

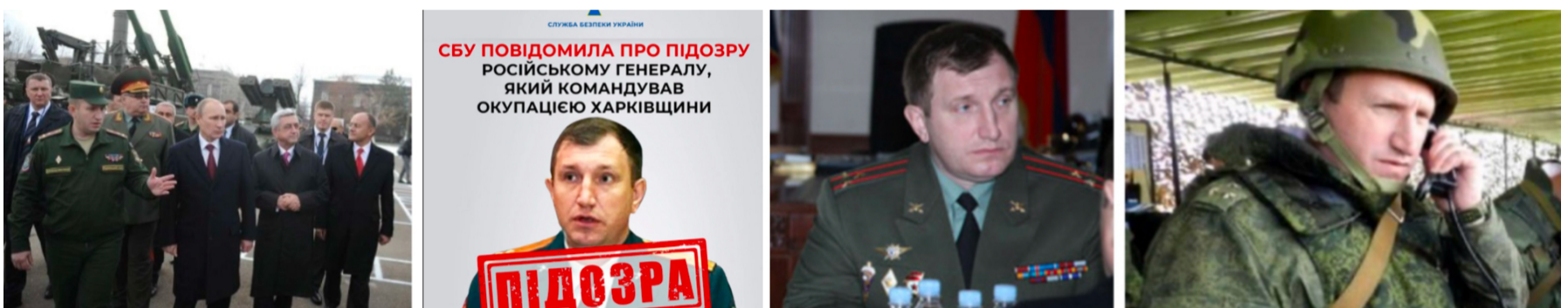
*(We're working on the case and the report will be updated as we go along.)*



Izjum, photo from 17 October 2022. The apartment building where Tatiana Pryvalikina and Mykhailo Yatsenyuk were living and Mykhailo Yatsenyuk gives testimony for a documentary in October 2024. |Photo: Yevhen Tytarenko, MMIC

### 3.8. INVESTIGATION AND OFFENDERS IDENTIFICATION

Our closer cooperation with law enforcement agencies began already during the monitoring process. And it concerns not only documentation, but also facilitating contacts with witnesses. In particular, we are in contact with the Kharkiv office of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Czech Police. In some cases, criminal proceedings were initiated and some of the perpetrators - mostly high-ranking officers of the Russian army - were identified. As a result, several indictments and investigations of several Russian commanders have been launched.



Andrei Ruzinsky in different capacities.

The crimes of these cases concern, for example, Article 437 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, i.e. conducting aggressive war, in the case of general Andrey Ruzinsky, and Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, ecocide, i.e. committing a large-scale ecological disaster. Here, a notice of suspicion was delivered to the commander of the military district, the commanders of the two armies, and the commanders of the artillery and rocket brigade of the Russian Armed Forces.

In this chapter we will focus on case file against General Andrei Ruzinsky. Former commander of the 11th Army Corps of the Baltic Fleet of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces. Units under his command occupied parts of the Kharkiv region. Ruzinsky is thus suspected of waging a war of aggression under part 2 of Article 28, part 2 of Article 437 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, (CCU) i.e. conducting aggressive military actions. Article 437 provides for liability for planning, preparation or waging of an aggressive war or armed conflict, or conspiring for any such purposes.

The Suspicion notice have been issued by Security Service of Ukraine in Kharkiv and a Subpoena was send to Russia citizen Ruzinsky Andrey Yurievich, born in 24 October 1970, registration address: Tula, ul. Tokareva street 81, apartment 14, RF.<sup>20</sup>

Between March and July, 2022, Ruzinsky, Commander of the 11th Army Corps of the Baltic Fleet, served as the Commander of the Russian military unit "Balakliya" and ordered Russian troops under his command to break through Ukraine's sovereign border for the purpose of initiating the full-scale invasion, capture and occupation of the Kharkiv region. Ruzinsky's subordinates conducted military operations on the territory of Kharkiv, Chuguyiv and Izyum, in the Kharkiv region, specifically in the direction of the town of Chuguyiv and the village of Husarivka in the Balakliya territorial community, in order to advance on Kharkiv, Barvinkove and Lozova. Once he captured Balakliya, Ruzinsky commandeered its local military headquarters. Investigation revealed that over 4,000 Russian soldiers under his command shelled, bombed and otherwise attacked Kharkiv, Chuguyiv and surrounding settlements, destroying residential buildings and civilian and critical infrastructure of the Kharkiv Region. Evidence shows that all weapons systems used during the hostilities were directly under Ruzinsky's control and command. In particular, the weapon systems used in these attacks included combat bombers and fighter jets, Mi-8 and Ka-52 attack helicopters, anti-aircraft missile batteries, barrel artillery of all calibre, heavy "Buratino" and "Solntsepyok" flamethrower systems and multiple "Smerch" rocket launchers. The investigation found information on more than 1,000 Russian soldiers who received awards for fighting in the territory of the Kharkiv region as part of the "Balakliya" military group. Andriy Ruzinsky himself was transferred to Russia in July 2022 and received the military rank of Lieutenant general for conducting aggressive hostilities on the territory of the Kharkiv region. This is a first indictment for a war of aggression in the Kharkiv region.

Members of Maidan Monitoring Information Center MMIC, in particular Yevhen Tytarenko, Serhii Petrov and Nataliya Zubar, participated as involved specialists in investigative and procedural actions for the collection of evidence, in analytical work on the processing of materials

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<sup>20</sup> Повідомлення про підозру Рузинському Андрію Юрійовичу, 24.10.1970 р.н. за ч.2 ст.28, ч.2 ст.437 КК України та повістки про виклик на 24.05.2023 о 12:00, 25.05.2023 о 12:00, 26.05.2023 о 12:00 з перекладом: <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-ruzinskomu-andriyu-yuriiovicu-24101970-m-za-c2-st28-c2-st437-kk-ukrayini-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-24052023-o-1200-25052023-o-1200-26052023-o-1200-z-perekladom> Commander of the 11th Army Corps of the Baltic Fleet of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces. Commander of the 11th Army Corps of the Baltic Fleet of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces.



that formed the evidence base of this criminal case, which is being investigated by investigators of the Ukrainian Security Service of Ukraine in Kharkiv region.

T4U, together with MMIC in particular Yevhen Tytarenko collected the evidences in liberated Iziium as described in the previous chapters and later also in Balakliya in the in the building where the Russian headquarters was located. Many important Russian documents were found there. Adam Sybera later worked systematically in both Iziium and Balakliya.

Our team was involved in the search, processing and analysis of open source information. Behind these words stands a huge amount of work done, which lasted for more than half a year and in which members of our team participated. Andrei Ruzinsky Materials from our monitoring is being used in investigation. Andrei Ruzinsky had ordered attacks using heavy weapons on populated areas, and he had given orders to the military commandant in the town of Balakliia, where there were multiple cases of civilians being detained and tortured. He also required air support and Russian planes bombed civilian targets.

We often emphasise that the war crimes investigation takes a very long time. Collection and processing of the evidence base which made it possible to file an indictment against Lieutenant General of the Russian Federation Andrii Ruzinsky lasted from March 2022 until May 2023. This long and scrupulous work requires proper documentation of evidence, its processing, conducting examinations and many other investigative and procedural actions.<sup>21</sup>

Andrii Ruzinsky is an example of a career war criminal. As a colonel Ruzinsky was serving as a commander of the 2nd separate motorized rifle brigade of the 2nd Army Corps in so called "Luhansk peoples Republic" according HUR - Defence Intelligence of Ukraine Ruzinsky was using also name Nefiodov. Previously, Colonel Ruzynsky served in the RF forces on the territory of Armenia. Where he was a commander of the 102nd military base of the Russian Armed Forces in Gyumri. Ruzinsky provoked the escalation of Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, claimed about the

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<sup>21</sup> Russian general who had been occupying the Kharkiv region is indicted for war of aggression, <https://maidan.org.ua/en/2023/05/oholosheno-pidozru-rosiyskomu-heneralu-iaakyy-zdiysniuvav-okupatsiiu-kharkivskoi-oblasti/>, 20.5.2023

necessity of military solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and, in particular, was personally involved in the shooting of an Armenian family by a soldier of his unit.<sup>22</sup>

*(We're working on the case and the report will be updated as we go along.)*



Adam Sybera and Petr Pojman in Balakliya with some with the last documents found at Russian headquarters.

### **3.9. GROM-E1, THE DEATH OF OUR FRIEND IN KUPYANSK**

As mentioned in the introduction. Some of our closest friends and colleagues have been wounded, and some have paid the highest price. Sergey Shalgin from the NGO Petyachatky-BAM accompanied us several times during our monitoring north of Kharkiv. The NGO Petyachatky-BAM is also dedicated to evacuation. On September 19, 2023, while driving one of the vehicles (VW Van) that took people across the Oskil River in the town of Kupyansk Sergei Shalgin with the group was hit by an aerial bomb. We later visited the crime scene and spoke to several witnesses.

Russian aircraft attacked the pontoon bridge over Oskil on town of Kupyansk with the new Grom-E1 missile-bomb, a hybrid missile-slash-gliding bomb based on the Kh-38 surface-to-air missile, with a maximum range of up to 120 km. This is the first documented use of such missiles by the Russians. Previously, it was reported that the Russians dropped a guided aerial bomb on the city. The rescue team recovered the bodies from the river near the explosion site and from the

<sup>22</sup> «В армянское общество забросили информационную бомбу» – политолог о причастности Андрея Рузинского к убийству семьи Аветисянов, <https://ru.aravot.am/2015/12/17/195967/> © 1998 - 2025 Аравот - Новости Армении <https://ru.aravot.am/2015/12/17/195967/>, 17.12.2015.  
-WAR CRIMINAL, COLONEL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION RUZYNSKYI ANDRII YURIYOVYCH (UNDERCOVER NAME – NEFIODOV), <https://gur.gov.ua/en/content/shchodo-vstanovlennia-komandyra-2-okremoi-motostrilets-koi-bryhady-2-ak-luhansk.html>

destroyed vehicles. The shelling took place in broad daylight, around 1:00 p.m., reported Serhiy Bolvinov, the investigative department head of the National Police in Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>23</sup>



Unknown LADA wreck

The remains of the VW Van

Destroyed pontoon bridge

When the emergency rescue operations at the site of the explosion have been completed it was found, that the total number of casualties is 9. 6 men and 2 women, including our friend Sergey Shalgin who were leading the evacuation of civilians in VW Van. And another 1 victim was a pedestrian. According to the local witnesses there are always some Russian drones flying over the Kupyansk. It was the same when the pontoon across the river - was targeted. The Russians ignored the movement of civilians in the vicinity or wanted to hit them too. The rocket hit just after the VW Van. The car was severely damaged and thrown several meters onto the shore. A Russian drone was said to be hanging over the bridge at the time. The place is regularly shelled. More distant explosions are heard here, practically every minute. A few meters away we found the wreckage of another car (Lada).

<sup>23</sup> Death toll rises to eight in deadly Russian strike on Kupyansk with new Grom-E1 missile, 20.09. 2023, <https://english.nv.ua/nation/russian-new-grom-e1-missile-killed-eight-in-kupyansk-50354884.html>

### 3.10. HROZA, GENOCIDE CAUSED BY ONE ROCKET



The Russians fired an Iskander-M missile at a cafe-shop in the village of the only one in village of Hroza.

The Russians fired an Iskander-M missile at a cafe-shop in the village of Hroza , Kharkiv region, on October 5 around 13.15. At that time, local residents gathered there for a memorial dinner after the reburial of fellow villager Andrii Kozyr, who died in March 2022. An Iskander M rocket killed 59 people. Before the war, 150 people lived in Hroza. About 300 were registered here, but they lived and worked in other places. About a third of the population of hamlet died during the attack. There are 2 collaborators who allegedly helped. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the attack "a completely deliberate act of terrorism" and accused Russia of "genocidal aggression."

Hroza was captured by Russian forces early in the invasion, and liberated by Ukraine during the Kharkiv counteroffensive, in September 2022. Security service of Ukraine announced that it established the identities of two men who provided the exact timing of memorial service in Hroza

to the Russians. These were Vladimir and Dmitry Mamon, who began collaborating with Russians during the region's occupation and on liberation fled to Russia, but continued be in some local social networks in the village. They also secretly or under the guise of friendly conversations used their relatives, neighbors and acquaintances from the de-occupied towns and villages of Kharkiv region to learn from them about events in the region, measures and positions of the military. According to the investigation, the Mamons began collecting information about Hroza in early October. They knew that there would be a memorial service for a fallen soldier in a local cafe-shop. At the same time, they understood that civilians – their acquaintances from the village of Hroza, including those who provided them with information – would surely die from the attack. They did realize there this gathering may be interesting target for Russia. They hoped the deceased soldier's comrades would be also present.<sup>24</sup>

During the occupation Dmitro Volodymyr Mamon went over to the side of the Russian occupants as “policemen” now they are in Russia their nowadays fate is unknown. However, according to recent reports, the commander responsible for the attack itself has been eliminated.

This was reported by Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate HUR: On January 3, 2025 in the town of city of Shuya in Ivanovo oblast, Russia , a Russian war criminal involved in the murder of civilians in the village of Hroza in the Kharkiv region was critically injured in an explosion. The injured is Captain Kostiantin Nagaiko, commander of a battery in the division of the 112th Missile Brigade of the 1st Tank Army of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces. K. Nagaiko was on duty at his military unit. According to Ukrainian intelligence, Nagaiko sustained multiple shrapnel injuries to nearly all of his organs, including his brain. A craniotomy was performed. K. Nagaiko was born in 1995 in the city of Svobodny, Amur region, Russia. He graduated from the St. Petersburg State University of Aerospace Instrumentation and the Mikhailovskaya Military Artillery Academy. He directly participated in the full-scale war against Ukraine and was involved in ballistic missile strikes with 'Iskander' systems on civilian and military

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<sup>24</sup> - SBU exposed two men who adjusted the Russian “Iskander” to the village of Hroza, 11.10. 2024, <https://babel.ua/en/news/99424-sbu-exposed-two-men-who-adjusted-the-russian-iskander-to-the-village-of-hroza>

- Na místě nejhoršího útoku: „Raketu navedli kolaboranti. Pozor, co sdílíte“, 18. 10. 2023, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-na-miste-nejhorsiho-utoku-raketu-navedli-kolaboranti-pozor-co-sdilite-238555>

- Sešli se, aby pohřbili padlého vojáka. Teď v Hroze kopou další hroby. SBU už obvinila dva kolaboranty, 11.10.2025, <https://denikn.cz/1254214/sesli-se-aby-pohrbili-padleho-vojaka-ted-v-hroze-kopou-dalsi-hroby-sbu-uz-obvinila-dva-kolaboranty/>

targets in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions," the intelligence noted. Specifically, on October 5, 2023, Nagaiko's unit launched a missile strike on a cafe-shop in the village of Hroza.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4. DAMAGE TO CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HERITAGE**

Due to ongoing war, reconstructions of the damaged building is very limited, rather it is about their preservation. Schools in Kharkiv, for example, have been moved to the subway stations. Some schools are damaged by Russian attacks the rest is in constant danger.

In the Kharkiv oblast and in the north of the Kyiv oblast, such attacks have been recorded since March 2022. As mentioned and documented in the photos above - schools, kindergartens and objects of culture are regular targets of Russian attacks. It was a change in Russian tactics, or rather a revenge for the fact that Ukrainians do not welcome the Russian occupiers.

Similar it is with environmental damages caused by the attack to critical infrastructure including, threatening nuclear facilities or mining of agricultural areas etc.

At the beginning of the monitoring, it was not clear what the extent of the war would be, how long it would continue. The extent of the damage as we see it today was also difficult to imagine. It was hardly expectable we would be able to monitor the situation in the liberated territories in details, or to obtain witnesses and we certainly could not have imagined that we would be able to identify some of the perpetrators. Our assumptions about the scale of war crimes, but also about our potential achievement, were much more modest.

The envirometal damage to date is practically incalculable. In Kharkiv and Donetsk, land mining is a huge problem. One of our witnesses in Dovhenke village (Izium district) described that out of fifty hectares previously cultivated, only two is arable today. Based on these findings, we immediately started looking for a solution to the problem and together with partners T4U has

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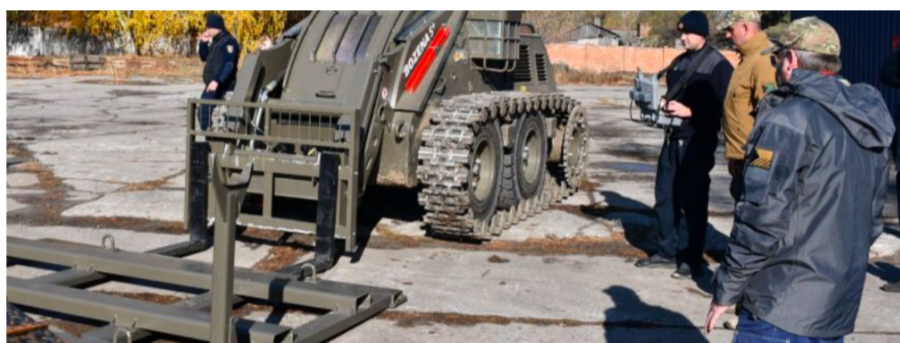
<sup>25</sup> Russian officer involved in Hroza civilian massacre critically injured in explosion, 4. 1. 2025, <https://global.espreso.tv/russia-ukraine-war-russian-officer-involved-in-hroza-killings-critically-injured-in-explosion>

been involved in a long-term solution to this problem by the installation of “Božena 5” demining system in the Kharkiv oblast. This installation was also one of the best follow-ups of this project.

A somewhat underestimated topic at first, but one that needs to be addressed more broadly, is the role of the Russian The Moscow Patriarchate (MP) of Russian Orthodox Church.

This situation led to the need for a longer, more systematic report summarizing all relevant findings in one comprehensive paper. This way makes the text also more attractive to a wider audience.

Because new findings are coming every day, and therefore the text is to be update regularly.



Pomoc v celkové hodnotě přes šestnáct milionů korun doručili v minulých dnech koncovým příjemcům na Ukrajině dobrovolníci z Team 4 Ukraine. Přes patnáct milionů z toho činila dodávka odminovacího stroje Božena 5 a dalšího vybavení hasičům z Charkovské oblasti. Složili se na ní dárci z Čech a Slovenska, přispěl i Tchaj-wan.



A Bozena 5 demining machine and other equipment worth more than €650,000 was delivered to the Kharkiv oblast to firefighters in October 2024. The main contributors were donors from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and Taiwan.

- <https://www.team4ukraine.eu/cervenakalina/zprava-z-cesty-rijen-2024>

- <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/svet/odminovaci-system-bozena-pomuze-na-ukrajine-354953>, 2. 11. 2024 | Zdroj: ČT24

#### **4.1. AVDIIVKA AND SCHOOL NO. 7 JUST BEFORE THE OCCUPATION BY PETR POJMAN**

*“The town of Avdiivka has a special significance for us. We were here with our last Visegrad project in 2021. In October 2021, in the School No. 7, we delivered cyber security courses to students. It was the last project before the Russian invasion. The school was destroyed by Russian aerial bombing on 6-7 November 2023.”*



T4U, Cyber security courses to students in Avdiivka in the School no 7. October 2021, Supported by Visegrad found.

Special T4U team under Jan Hermanek command visited Avdiivka in November 2023. The situation on the spot was tragic, the city was largely destroyed by aerial bombing and other weapons. There were practically no people. Our estimations were 1600 or even less. Residents left others are hiding in the basements, nobody was on the streets.

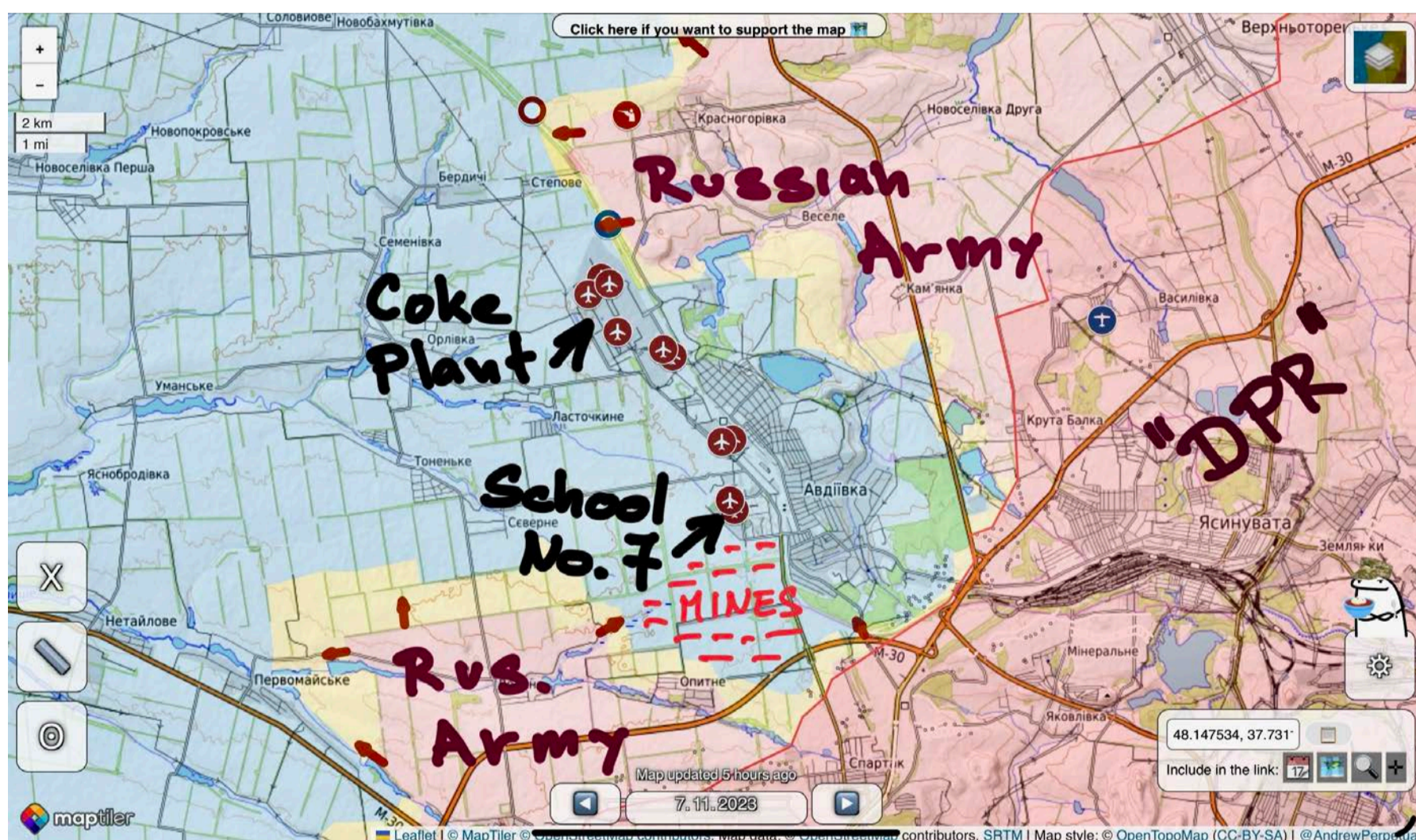
There were Ukrainian soldiers around, holding defence against russian attacks. The humanitarian situation in Avdiivka was catastrophic, locals were practically dependent only on humanitarian aid, including electricity (generators), food, medicine, water etc. However, the houses, with a few exceptions, did not show any signs of fortification, yet they were attacked, that is, attacks on civilian dwellings without a military reason.

**Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant** (see the map) was the largest coke producer in Ukraine. This factory operated throughout the war 2014 - with smaller ones interrupted November 2022. The Plant also had its own improvised, power station, and there were times it was working without external source of energy like self-operating unit! We learned from one of the engineers who worked in the Plant. The Plant was partly damaged and there were no employees present to operate the factory. According the local sources last of them was evacuated in November 7, 2023.



In November 2023, nothing was working in and around the town. The Avdiivka Coke Plant was the key and only industrial object whole agglomeration. Most of the city's inhabitants worked in the factory and the whole city was economically dependent on the factory.

According <https://map.ukrdailyupdate.com> in, November 7, 2023 there was heavy aerial bombardment. Apart of the Coke Plant, **School No 7 on (Komunalna Street)** was targeted too. We were in the school with one of our project about Cyber security was implemented in October 2021. We spoke with several military source and we were told, there were no students and teachers. They have been evacuated already earlier.



Map.ukrdailyupdate from November 7, 2023,  
<https://map.ukrdailyupdate.com/?lat=48.147534&lng=37.731171&z=12&d=19668&c=1&l=4>

Due to the fact that the city is so close to the front line, the Russia was able to use aerial bombardment here. Avdiivka was always the frontline city, it was located practically on the line of minefields - which are marked on the map by the dashed red line. However, the city lived in a normal way, there were restaurants, shops, and the factory where many people worked. The local



The last photos in Avdiivka were made by T4U member in November **5, 2024**.

people in the city were used to such a life. And with just a little more risk, they continued to do so for many months after the Russian invasion in February 2022.

I visited Avdiivka on the beginning of February 2022 as a OSCE monitor. In that time we had to withdraw due to heavy mortar fire. But it was not yet the beginning of a full-fledged invasion. Something like that was still hard to believe. In November 2023 Avdiivka was basically destroyed and in little later on February 17, 2024, captured by Russian forces. The Ukrainian forces fled to avoid encirclement. The last photos in Avdiivka were made by T4U member in November 5, 2024.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/valka-na-ukrajine-avdiivka-donbas-humanitari-pomoc\\_2311081202\\_ara](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/valka-na-ukrajine-avdiivka-donbas-humanitari-pomoc_2311081202_ara)

## **4.2. ATTACKS TO UKRAINIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND COLLABORATION OF MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE, BY MATĚJ PASTÍR**

According to updated data from the Institute for Religious Freedom, presented as part of its report on the impact of the war on Ukrainian religious communities during the Summit on International Religious Freedom on February 1, 2023, at least 494 religious buildings, theological institutions, and sacred sites were wholly destroyed, damaged, or looted as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The majority of the destruction occurred in the eastern occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. However, the Kharkiv region also experienced significant damage, with more than 50 churches and religious sites partially or fully destroyed. The report indicates that 48% of all fully or partially destroyed religious sites in Ukraine belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (formerly of the Moscow Patriarchate), followed by Jehovah's Witnesses and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>

Similar findings were reported by monitoring conducted by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience in collaboration with the Workshop for the Academic Study of Religion. According to their data, 307 religious sites were destroyed or damaged in the first 11 months of the invasion, with nearly 48% of the affected sites belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UAC). The Kharkiv region alone accounted for 38 buildings fully or partially destroyed.<sup>28</sup> UNESCO reported a lower figure of 143 verified damaged religious sites as of October 16, 2024, with 20 of these located in the Kharkiv region. However, the UNESCO list of damaged cultural sites in the Kharkiv region does not include religious sites belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses. Another potential reason for the discrepancy in the reported numbers is the challenges associated with conducting such research amidst the ongoing war and the fact that the results of UNESCO damage assessment for cultural properties are preliminary.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/500-churches-and-religious-sites-destroyed-in-ukraine-during-the-war>

<sup>28</sup> <https://dessa.gov.ua/ussia-ruined-at-least-307-religious-sites-eng/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco>

This widespread destruction, however, did not begin with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. As early as 2014, Russian aggression against Ukraine included not only the destruction of religious sites but also targeted attacks on individuals, involving abductions, torture, and extrajudicial executions. According to the 2022 report by the Institute for Religious Freedom on Russian attacks on religious freedom in Ukraine, Russian forces primarily targeted clergy and believers from various Ukrainian religious communities. These included groups closely tied to Ukrainian nationhood, such as the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, as well as churches perceived by the Russian state as being Western-sponsored, including various Evangelical Protestant churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>30</sup>

Russian occupation authorities also imposed illegal regulations on religious life in occupied territories, requiring all religious organizations except the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (formerly of the Moscow Patriarchate) to register with Russian state authorities and undergo evaluations—procedures most organizations found difficult to comply with. For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses are outright banned in the occupied territories, while other churches, such as the Greek Catholic Church, face harassment, including targeted attacks on their followers, such as deportations.<sup>31</sup>

These targeted attacks and campaigns of harassment, particularly against organizations tied to Ukrainian nationhood, constitute a deliberate effort by Russia to eliminate all religious life in Ukraine that does not align with the interests of the Russian state. This strategy should be understood as part of a broader attempt to erase Ukrainians as a distinct and independent nation. Consequently, the religious persecution in occupied territories can be viewed as part of a cultural genocide against Ukrainians, ongoing since 2014. The full-scale invasion in 2022 has significantly expanded this campaign, both in terms of the territory affected and the scale of destruction and violence.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2022.09-IRF-Ukraine-report-ENG.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/russia-occupied-territories-of-ukraine/>

Moreover, according to the Institute for Religious Freedom, Russia is enforcing compliance in occupied territories by requiring local religious institutions to justify the invasion and submit to the authority of Russian religious centers, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>32</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church actively provides religious justification for the invasion, framing the aggression against Ukraine as part of a broader spiritual battle against Satan, embodied by the so-called "collective West."<sup>33</sup> The Russian Patriarch Kirill framed the invasion as a "Holy War", claiming that the invasion is "a new stage of the national liberation struggle of the Russian people against the criminal Kyiv regime and the collective West behind it, which has been waged on the lands of South-West Rus' since 2014," and demanding that "the entire territory of modern Ukraine must enter the zone of exclusive influence of Russia."<sup>34</sup>

**Essentially demanding an end to Ukrainian independence and supporting the Russian neo-imperial doctrine of "Russkiy mir".**

Russian Orthodox priests are integrated into military units, offering blessings not only to soldiers but also to military equipment, including weapons used against civilians.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in Russia, the Church plays a significant role in state propaganda, notably by promoting the cult of the Russian military. This is exemplified by the construction and consecration of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka, Moscow Oblast.<sup>36</sup>

In Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church exerted its influence primarily through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (formerly of the Moscow Patriarchate), which was established in 1990 to replace the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. While the church was set up as self-governing, it remained under the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. Although it enjoyed some support from Ukrainian politicians and businesses, it retained ties to Russia, which became particularly evident in 2014. In response to Russia's illegal

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<sup>32</sup> <https://irf.in.ua/p/92>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.voxpot.cz/svadime-na-ukrajine-boj-se-satanem-hlasa-ruska-pravoslavna-cirkev/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.voxpot.cz/umri-za-boha-i-rusko-jak-pravoslavni-knezi-zvysuji-na-fronte-bojoveho-ducha/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://theconversation.com/holy-wars-how-a-cathedral-of-guns-and-glory-symbolizes-putins-russia-176786>

annexation of Crimea and its aggression in eastern Ukraine, the church adopted a neutral stance.<sup>37</sup>

After the full-scale invasion, on May 27, the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church adopted a resolution condemning the invasion as a violation of God's commandment "Thou shalt not kill!" The resolution also stated that "the Council adopted relevant additions and changes to the Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which testify to the complete autonomy and independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church."<sup>38</sup> However, it did not submit an official request for autocephaly.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the head of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv, while appealing to Putin to stop the invasion, referred to it as a "fratricidal war" and, in his condemnation, stated that "Ukrainian and Russian peoples came out of the Dnieper baptismal font," aligning with Russian national propaganda claims that Ukrainians and Russians are one people.<sup>40</sup> Leaving claims of independence from the Russian Church dubious.

In addition, several members, including high-ranking ones,<sup>41</sup> openly collaborated with the Russian occupying forces, provided justification for the invasion, or fled to Russia at the onset of the invasion. Some members even served as informants for Russian secret services.<sup>42</sup> In Kharkiv region<sup>43</sup> the most prominent example is the former Metropolitan of of Izium and Kupyansk Ivanov Oleg Aleksandrovich (Elisey).<sup>44</sup> In addition to refusing to condemn the invasion and continuing to mention Patriarch Kirill during religious services, he also blessed the Russian occupying forces and even consecrated their columns of military equipment in the Kupyansk district.<sup>45</sup> He fled with the retreating Russian forces to Russia and is currently sanctioned by the National Security Council of Ukraine.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/04/holy-war-the-fight-for-ukraines-churches-and-monasteries?lang=en>

<sup>38</sup> <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/27/postanova-soboru-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi-vid-27-travnja-2022-roku/#2024-11-15>

<sup>39</sup> <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/01/can-the-ukrainian-orthodox-church-survive-the-war-with-russia?lang=en>

<sup>40</sup> <https://news.church.ua/2022/02/24/zvernennya-blazhennishogo-mitropolita-kijivskogo-vsijeji-ukrajini-onufriya-virmix-ta-gromadyan-ukrajini/#2024-11-15>

<sup>41</sup> <https://kyivindependent.com/sbu-moscow-patriarchate-priest-in-cherkasy-guilty-of-justifying-russian-aggression/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/12/12/7432708/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://molfar.com/en/upc-mp>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.chesno.org/traitor/1527/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/synod-zvilnyv-mytropolita-izyumskoho-yakyy-spivpratsyuvav-z-okupantamy>

<sup>46</sup> <https://ssu.gov.ua/novyny/sbu-opublikovala-perelik-osib-yaki-potrapyly-u-tserkovnyi-spysok-sanktsii-rnbo>

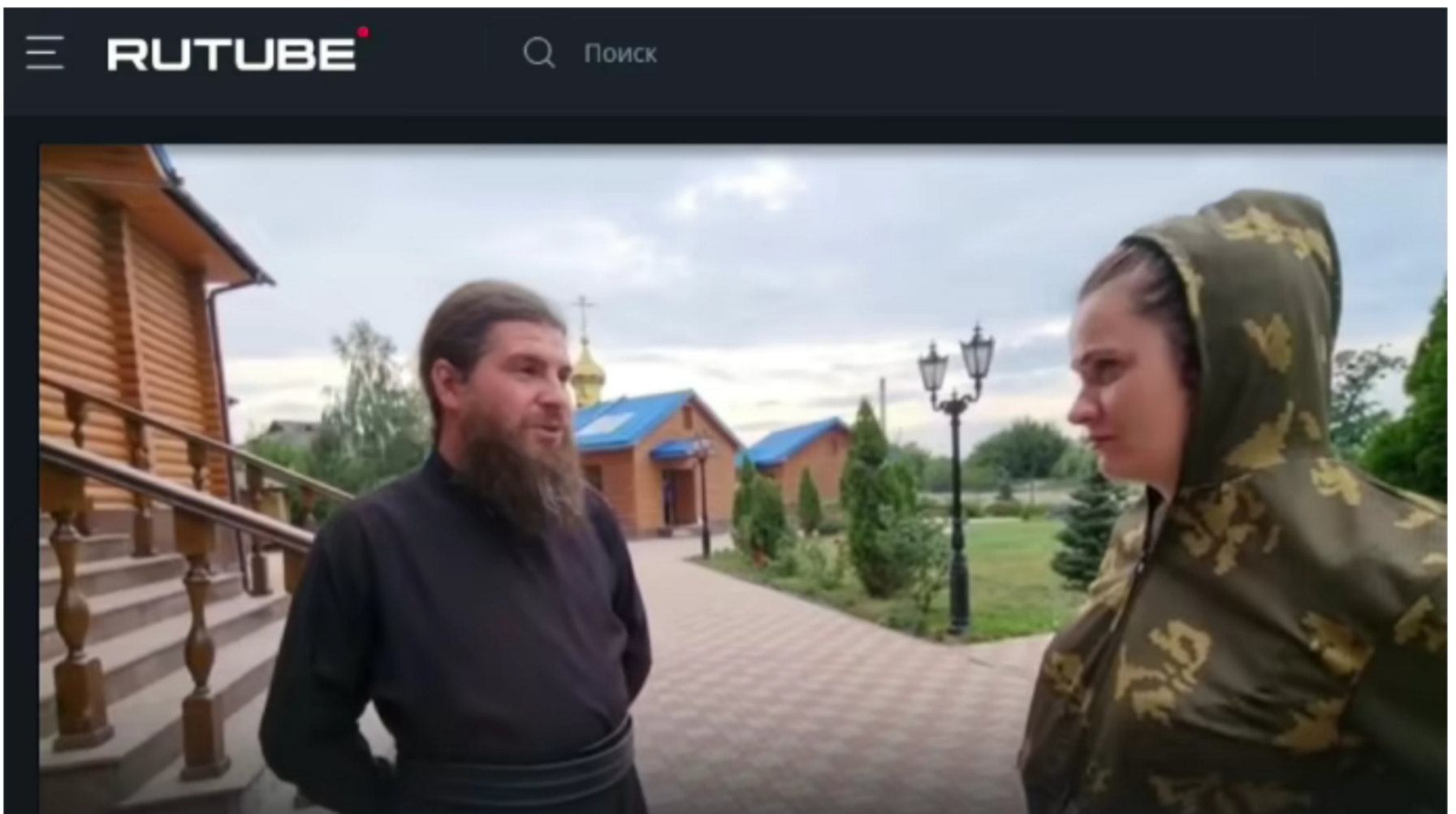


Ivanov Oleg Aleksandrovich (Elisey) spotted in Russia. He visited the eleventh Orthodox exhibition in the Belgorod oblast on 14 September (Just days after Izyum liberation) <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/izyumskoho-mytopolyta-upts-znayshly-v-rosiyi>, September 18, 2022. <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/izyumskoho-mytopolyta-upts-znayshly-v-rosiyi>, September 18, 2022.

Another prominent collaborator is Mykhailo Pimashyn, abbot of a monastery in Izyum, who gave interviews to Russian propaganda channels, blessed Russian troops, and called on other residents to support the Russian occupiers. He also wrote a letter to an associate of Moscow Patriarch Kirill, requesting humanitarian aid to be sent to Izyum and the distribution of supplies provided by the Russians to the local population in order to secure their loyalty to the occupiers.<sup>47</sup>

Assessing the damage or destruction of religious sites in Ukraine is challenging, as it is often difficult to determine whether the destruction was deliberate and, if so, the rationale behind targeting specific sites. Several factors contribute to these challenges, including difficulties in monitoring and assessing the destruction, due to for example the partial repair of sites, discrepancies in local testimonies over time, and the absence of clear indicators proving the attacks were targeted.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/05/18/7402780/>



Clergyman Mykhailo Pimashyn (Matvii) <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/05/18/7402780/>

Moreover, the widespread destruction caused by the Russian invasion often involves indiscriminate attacks on populated areas, which partially explains the high proportion of damaged or destroyed churches associated with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (formerly of the Moscow Patriarchate). However, this does not rule out the possibility of targeted destruction of these churches.

Religious sites are not only significant for their religious and cultural value but also serve as key social hubs for local communities. Their destruction may also be part of Russia's broader strategy of using widespread devastation of populated areas and civilian infrastructure to demoralize the population or force residents to flee. Such actions exacerbate Ukraine's challenges in managing large numbers of internally displaced persons and increase migration pressures on EU countries as refugees are unable to return to their destroyed towns or villages.



### **4.3. MUSEUMS, HISTORICAL MONUMENTS, PLACES OF MEMORY AND CULTURAL SITES, BY ŠTEFAN IŽÁK**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine affects every aspect of its people's lives. With constant bombing, the Russians are destroying practically entire Ukrainian cities, towns and villages. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we can read daily about destroyed hospitals, schools, power plants, offices, residential buildings, etc. Russia is trying to terrorize the population of Ukraine and break its resistance.

**Cultural sites and monuments, places of memory, museums and, in general, the cultural heritage of Ukraine are also regular targets of Russian attacks. There are so many attacks on cultural sites that it is clear that this is a systematic attempt by Russia to destroy valuable artifacts of material and spiritual culture that refer to Ukrainian identity and history, from which the Ukrainian nation derives its legitimacy to this day.**

As of 16 October 2024, UNESCO has verified damage to 457 cultural sites since 24 February 2022 - including 143 religious sites, 231 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 32 museums, 33 monuments, 17 libraries, 1 archive.<sup>48</sup> Russia has damaged many more cultural sites, UNESCO only gradually verifies the damage and cannot verify the condition of cultural heritage in the currently occupied territories.

However, we must look at this Russian effort to erase Ukrainian culture from the face of the earth in a broader historical context, because it is not an isolated phenomenon in Ukrainian and Russian history. Czarist Russia already tried to destroy the cultural heritage of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, from which the Ukrainian nation was gradually formed. In the 19th century, the Russian Empire banned publishing in the Ukrainian language. It perceived Ukrainians only as a branch of the great Russian nation and the Ukrainian language as a dialect of Russian. However, denying Ukrainian existence did not erase it. Repression against Ukrainian activists, politicians, artists and

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco>

the Russification of Ukraine continued even after the end of the tsarist regime and the transformation into the USSR.

With the exception of a short period in the 1920s and the friendly minority policy in the USSR, assimilation of minorities, their Russification and, in the case of Ukrainians, methods such as the famine (the Holodomor) and mass repression against the nationally conscious elite are typical for the ethnopolitics of the USSR. The current Russian policy is just a continuation of the effort to destroy the Ukrainian national identity, culture and everything that represents it (including cultural heritage).

However, in the case of the Russian army, the methods of destroying heritage are not limited to the bombing of these objects. We have news from the occupied territories that Russians are looting local museums and then transporting valuable exhibits to Russia. For example, during the withdrawal from Kherson, Russians completely looted Kherson Fine Art Museum with more than 14,000 items in its collection.<sup>49</sup> Ukrainian Culture Minister Rostyslav Karandziej estimates that approximately 1.5 million museum artifacts remain in Russian-occupied territories.<sup>50</sup>

Again, it is not a new Russian strategy. Ukrainian investigative journalists revealed that only two Russian institutions - the Hermitage and the State Historical Museum of Russia - have more than 110,000 artifacts from Ukraine in their collections. These artifacts had been exported to Russia during different historical periods, most of them before Ukraine became independent.<sup>51</sup> UNESCO registers 73 damaged cultural sites in the Kharkiv region alone. During our mission, we tried to document these places. In the following part of the report, we write about some of them.

**Museum in Verkhny Saltiv:** The village of Verkhny Saltiv is located north-east of Kharkiv, approximately 30 km from the Russian border. The Russians tried to get closer to Kharkiv also from the direction of this village, which they occupied from the first days of their invasion. However, Ukrainian troops expelled them from the village in May 2022, since then Verkhny Saltiv faced systematic bombing from the Russian side.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://kyivindependent.com/empty-kherson-art-museum-in-despair-after-entire-collection-stolen-by-russia/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://kyivindependent.com/up-to-1-5-million-museum-artifacts-under-russian-occupation-ukraines-culture-minister-says/>

<sup>51</sup> [https://texty.org.ua/d/2023/stolen\\_heritage/en/](https://texty.org.ua/d/2023/stolen_heritage/en/)

One of the rockets also hit the Historical-Archaeological Museum of Verkhny Saltiv, which was an important cultural-educational institution in the region. Before the Russian invasion, the museum had three sections – archaeological, historical and ethnographic. Within these sections, the museum had exhibitions of rare objects from the Neolithic, the so-called Saltovo-Mayaki culture, the Cossack period and the Second World War.<sup>52</sup>

The Saltovo-Mayaki culture was one of the medieval cultures on the territory of today's Ukraine during the 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the existence of this culture, this territory formed the west of the Khazar Khaganate, which was inhabited by Alans. They were later defeated by the nomadic Pechenegs.

The surroundings of Verkhny Saltiv became an important archaeological site, where archaeologists found important objects of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Objects from this culture are also exhibited in museums in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, Sofia, and St. Petersburg. Until now, Verkhny Saltiv has been an important archaeological site of an all-Ukrainian dimension.

The museum building and its surroundings were attacked by the Russians several times during the summer of 2022. The building is now destroyed. Some of the artifacts that survived the Russian attacks were taken out of the museum, some of the artifacts are destroyed and another has disappeared.<sup>53</sup> Among the museum's valuable exhibits were e.g. earthenware, iron and wooden utensils, fishing hooks, looms, fragments of fabrics, containers for storing crops, weapons, jewelry made of bronze, silver, gold, coins, etc.

The surroundings of Verkhny Saltiv were deprived of its valuable monuments and cultural heritage by the Russians in the past as well. 2973 artifacts were stolen from this region to the Hermitage and the State Historical Museum in Moscow alone.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> <https://vsaltiv.at.ua/>

<sup>53</sup> [https://lb.ua/culture/2023/11/28/586238\\_golij\\_dah\\_i\\_vidchineni\\_dveri\\_yak.html](https://lb.ua/culture/2023/11/28/586238_golij_dah_i_vidchineni_dveri_yak.html)

<sup>54</sup> [https://texty.org.ua/d/2023/stolen\\_heritage/?fbclid=IwAR0JfmLBOz7JdGW9u4Q-JAjPdMvXkxOFFk4PEhJoI3XugFVLtjnI49DJu4](https://texty.org.ua/d/2023/stolen_heritage/?fbclid=IwAR0JfmLBOz7JdGW9u4Q-JAjPdMvXkxOFFk4PEhJoI3XugFVLtjnI49DJu4)



Entrance to Historical-Archaeological Museum of Verkhny Saltiv



Inside the museum

**Skovoroda Museum in Skovorodynivka:** Hrihory Savych Skovoroda (1722-1794) was a well-known and influential Ukrainian philosopher. He is regarded as one of the greatest Ukrainian philosophers of all time and as a symbol of Ukrainian Philosophy. His work contributed to the formation of modern-day Ukrainian national and cultural identity and is considered as one of the most prominent figures in the national pantheon of Ukrainians. He is even depicted on a 500-hryvnia banknote.

Last years of his life, Skovoroda lived in the village of Pan-Ivanivka, today called in his honour Skovorodynivka. It is located north-west of Kharkiv, 30 km from the Russian border. In 1972, the National Literature-Memorial Museum was established in the building from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where Skovoroda lived. Two rooms were devoted to his life and production (literature), the third was paying tribute to Skovoroda. Visitors could visit the memorial room where Skovoroda lived and died.<sup>55</sup>

**Building of the Museum was almost completely destroyed by Russian artillery on the night of 6-7 May 2022.<sup>56</sup>**

The most valuable artifacts were relocated from the museum before the Russian full-scale invasion. During the preparation for Skovoroda's 300th birthday (1722 - 2022) celebration in

<sup>55</sup> <https://ui.org.ua/postcard/muzej-grygoriya-skovorody>

<sup>56</sup> Link to Maidan Monitoring video from Skovorodynivka day after the museum was shelled: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2loiTIy4sc&t=1s&ab\\_channel=%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2loiTIy4sc&t=1s&ab_channel=%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3)

Ukraine, the museum was renovated.<sup>57</sup> People who are interested in the museum's exhibitions can watch them in virtual exhibitions.<sup>58</sup>

**The cases of Verkhny Saltiv and Skorodynivka's museums shows that Russia targets institutions with significant artifacts of Ukrainian history on purpose. The aim is to destroy Ukrainian cultural heritage related to statehood and national identity of Ukraine and its people. Ruining Ukrainian material culture is part of Russia's effort to erase Ukrainian history and legitimize Russian claims for Ukrainian territory.**



Museum in Skovorodynivka after attack



Inside the museum

**Victims of Totalitarianism Memorial Site in Kharkiv:** On the initiative of the Polish and Ukrainian presidents, the Victims of Totalitarianism Memorial Site was built in the forest north of Kharkiv in 2000. This place is dedicated to Polish and Ukrainian victims of Soviet terror in 1937-1940.

In 1937-1938, Stalin's regime murdered 2,746 Soviet citizens (mostly of Ukrainian nationality) in the surrounding forest and buried them in 60 mass graves on and around the current memorial site. In 1940, the Soviet NKVD secret service murdered 3,809 Polish prisoners of

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-61362020>

<sup>58</sup> <https://lyuk.media/news/website-of-the-skovoroda-museum/>



The mass execution of Polish prisoners of war was part of the so-called Katyn Massacre which took place in various places of the Soviet Union. More than 22,000 Polish prisoners of war were executed during the spring of 1940.

Whole massacre was taboo during the Soviet period. Open discussion about this crime started after the Soviet Union fell apart and independent Ukraine occurred. KGB documents from the 1960s show that around 13,000 people can be buried in this territory at the edge of Kharkiv.<sup>61</sup>

On 23 March 2022, this memorial also became the target of a Russian attack. The Russians damaged several plaques with the names of Polish victims of Stalin's terror, and one rocket landed on the site of a symbolic grave with a cross.<sup>62</sup> Memorial site is still mined and entrance for the public is forbidden.

Thus, Russia has no respect even for the resting place of the victims of Bolshevik totalitarianism. By attacking this place, contemporary Russia makes it clear that the victims of totalitarianism mean nothing to it and is willing to destroy monuments that refer to the worst crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remind people today of how far hatred can lead.

**Glory Memorial in Kharkiv:** Russia often compares its invasion of Ukraine with the USSR's fight against Nazism in 1941-1945 (the USSR was an ally of Nazi Germany in 1939-1941). Implicitly, Russia claims that it must defend itself against Nazism, which comes from the West and thereby automatically turns Ukrainians into Nazis.

In reality, Nazism resembles Russia's actions in Ukraine. The real actions of the Russian army completely contradict the Russian rhetoric about the defence of its territory against the Nazi threat.

An example of Russian hypocrisy and the discrepancy between rhetoric and actions is the shelling of the Glory Memorial in the north of Kharkiv. This Memorial Site is dedicated to all defenders and people who died during the Second World War.

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2019/11/1/156465/>

<sup>62</sup> Link to Maidan Monitoring video from memorial site 23.3.2022: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbEBnaKyXsc&ab\\_channel=%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbEBnaKyXsc&ab_channel=%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3)



Damaged wall in Kharkiv Glory Memorial Site

Damaged Mother of Motherland statue

Although Russian political leaders say that they respect all the heroes of the Second World War who defeated Nazism and the victims of Nazi ideology, in reality, the Russian army destroys the monuments dedicated to the memory of these heroes and victims.

The Glory Memorial was built in 1977, and Russia has been shelling it since 24 March 2022. Traces of cluster munitions are still visible on the memorial's objects. The walls, inscriptions, places



with the names of those who died during the liberation of Kharkiv from the Nazis, as well as the statue of Mother of Motherland, are damaged.

The city management decided not to repair the memorial site, but to leave traces of shelling in memory of Russian crimes.<sup>63</sup>

**Drobytsky Yar memorial in Kharkiv:** One of the proclaimed aims of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the so-called "denazification" of Ukraine. Russian propaganda falsely claims that since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukraine is governed by Nazis who commit genocide against the Russian-speaking population and therefore Russia must protect this population.

The narrative of Ukrainian fascism is supposed to lend legitimacy to the Russian war. However, in reality, these are only purposeful claims. Symbolic proof of how Russians value the victims of real fascists can be seen on the southeastern edge of Kharkiv.

There is a ravine called Drobytsky Yar, in which in 1941-1942 the German Nazis murdered and buried 16,000 to 19,000 Kharkov Jews and Roma in mass graves.<sup>64</sup>

Nazis occupied Kharkiv from 24th October 1941. On 14th December same year they started removing Jews and Roma people to ghetto and on 27th January 1942 they started ethnic cleansing of the ghetto.<sup>65</sup>

Since 2002, a memorial site has stood at the site of this tragedy, which commemorates it and warns that similar atrocities will not be repeated.

The Russian army expressed its true opinion about the victims of the German Nazis on March 26, 2022. Monument staying in the entrance to the complex in the shape of a menorah was seriously damaged.<sup>66</sup> Drobytsky Yar is still closed to the public, around 80% of its territory is mined.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3476163-u-harkovi-virisili-ne-cipati-rani-vid-rosijskih-gradiv-na-memoriali-slavi.html>

<sup>64</sup> <https://ui.org.ua/postcard/drobytsky-yar/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/11155-harkivske-getto-u-harkovi-vsanovuut-pamat-zertv-golokostu/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russian-forces-damage-holocaust-memorial-site-ukraine-says-rcna21676>

<sup>67</sup> <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/435354-zaminovano-80-teritorii-ak-na-harkivsini-vidnovluut-drobickij-ar/>

However, this is not the only case when the Russians did not shy away from shelling and destroying memorials to the victims of the Holocaust. The Russian army also shelled the territory of Babyn Yar near Kyiv, which is also a Holocaust memorial site. Only on days 29 - 30. In September 1941, the Nazis murdered 34,000 Jews, Roma, Ukrainians and Soviet prisoners of war there. During the Nazi occupation, a total of around 100,000 people were murdered there.<sup>68</sup>

**Chosen objects in Kharkiv (Mall, Labour Palace, Slovo house, Art Museum, Firefighter Station from 19th century):** The city of Kharkiv has been the target of systematic bombing since the beginning of the Russian invasion. From the beginning, the Russian army tried to occupy it, but it failed. From May to September, the Ukrainian army managed to push the Russian positions from the immediate vicinity of the city behind the state border. It is 30 km from Kharkiv, which still gives the Russians the opportunity to systematically shell the city. The Russians are bombing all parts of the city, including its historic centre, which is full of cultural, religious and architectural monuments.

According to UNESCO, the Russians damaged 44 cultural sites in Kharkiv alone. The report does not offer us the space to describe the damage to all of them.

Before the full-scale Russian invasion, the **Kharkiv Art Museum** was one of the largest museums of its kind in Ukraine. Visitors to the museum could walk through 25 halls, the museum owned 25,000 valuable art objects. The museum owned paintings, drawings, sculptures and other exhibits from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century from Ukraine, Russia and Western European countries.

Museum staff had to evacuate the art collections or risk their destruction as Russian shelling damaged the museum's facades and windows. Moreover, at the beginning of the invasion, Russia tried to conquer Kharkiv, which could mean great danger for the museum.

The last time the museum experienced a similar danger was during the Second World War, when Kharkiv was occupied by the Nazis. Before the war, the museum owned more than 75,000 exhibits. During their retreat from the city in 1943, the Nazis destroyed or exported a large part. The Russians are doing the same in the occupied territories of Ukraine today.

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<sup>68</sup> <https://suspilne.media/212722-zelenskij-ta-kuleba-vidreaguvali-na-obstril-televezi-ta-babinogo-aruv-kyevi/>



Damaged "Slovo" Building

The **Palace of Labor** building is in the heart of Kharkiv on Constitution Square and is an architectural monument. The palace was built in 1916 in a modernist and neoclassical style. After the arrival of the Bolsheviks, the palace became state property, where the National Labor Commissariat was located, from which its current name is derived. It was damaged by a Russian air raid on 2 March 2022, which hit the building's facade and windows the most.

At the same time, other architectural monuments on Constitution Square were also affected, such as the **department store** from 1894 and the building of the **Kharkiv City Council** built in 1885. It was the period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that marked Kharkiv's rapid economic development, which was the impulse for new buildings that still stand around Constitution Square today.

The Russian shelling of Kharkiv on 7 March 2022 also damaged the **"Slovo" building**, which in the past had great importance for the development of Ukrainian culture in the 1920s and 1930s. Today, it is a symbol of one generation of Ukrainian artists who were killed by the Soviet regime.



Damaged firefighter station in Kharkiv. This station was monitored by our team first time in march 2022 see chapter 3.2.Damages repairs in long term perspective

The residential building "Slovo" was built in 1927. It has five floors and 66 apartments, where during the decade (1927-1937) the Ukrainian literary and artistic elite lived. Writers such as Mykola Khvylovy, Ostap Vyshnia, Pavlo Tychyna, Mykhaylo Ialovy, playwright Mykola Kulish, director Les Kurbas and others lived in "Slovo". We classify all of them in the generation of the Ukrainian cultural renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s.

However, this generation was destroyed by the Soviet regime, which murdered most of the representatives of the Ukrainian cultural and artistic elite of that period in the second half of the 1930s. In total, around 30,000 members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia died during the "Great Purge". Today, we know this generation under the term "executed renaissance" and the "Slovo" is the symbol of its story. The story of Ukrainian culture and the Soviet approach to it.

Another symbol of Kharkiv and Ukrainian history damaged by Russia is **the Firefighter station from 1887**. One of the oldest in Ukraine. Russia damaged the facade, windows and roof of this monument of architecture on 27 March 2022.

**Mount Kremenets in Iziium:** Mount Kremenets is in the south of the city of Iziium, which was occupied by Russian troops from March to September 2022, when they were driven out by the Ukrainian army and a large part of the previously occupied Kharkiv region was liberated.

During the Russian retreat from the city, Mount Kremenets became the target of Russian shelling. There are several monuments and artifacts on the mountain that refer to different periods and events of Ukrainian history.

There is a statue of Mother of God with the cross, which is a symbol of Christian identity, but at the same time it was built there as a reminder of more than three million victims of the famine that broke out in the territory of today's central, eastern and southern Ukraine in 1932-1933. The famine was worsened by the direct orders of the Soviet political leadership led by Stalin, who ordered the confiscation of all grain from areas that did not meet the unrealistically set quotas from Moscow. Bans on travel from famine-stricken areas and the punishment of anyone who hid any grain at home or stole it from fields condemned millions to death with the full knowledge of the state.

The USSR tried to keep the scale of the famine and the number of victims a secret. Through its propagandists as well as Western communist intellectuals tried to convince the public that reports of a catastrophic famine were fabricated. The true dimensions of the famine were taboo in the USSR until its collapse.

On the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (1985), a monument to Soviet soldiers who fought against the Nazis was erected on Mount Kremenets. However, during the retreat, the Russians damaged it with shelling.

Today, the Ukrainian flag flies in the hole after the Russian missile. There is a spray-painted inscription in support of the former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi and the inscription Glory to Ukraine - symbols of the Ukrainian struggle for independence against Russian aggression.

During their retreat in September 2022, the Russians also completely destroyed the rare stone statue of Polovtsian (Cuman) Woman. Eight more such statues from the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries are also located on Mount Kremenets. These statues come from the vicinity of Iziium, which was



Damaged WWII. monument on Mount Kremenets.  
 "Glory to Ukraine" in WWII. monument on Mount Kremenets

Statues of Polovtsian stone women in wooden boxes  
 Statues of Polovtsian stone women

inhabited by the nomadic Polovtsy tribe at that time.<sup>69</sup> The remaining eight statues were preserved by the Ukrainians in wooden protective boxes, which should protect these precious statues.<sup>70</sup>

A common strategy for protecting historical artifacts is to evacuate them to safer locations. This was the case with nine stone statues of women from the Donetsk region to the Dnipro in the summer of 2024. However, it is not always possible to find capacity and financial resources for such an event. Thus, many artifacts remain in dangerous combat zones and face the risk of destruction by the Russian army.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> <https://gwamedia.com/en/polovtsian-stone-women-destroyed-near-izium/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://pragmatika.media/en/news/v-iziumi-zakonservuvaly-bahatovikovykh-polovetskykh-kam-ianykh-bab/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-stone-statues-evacuated/33007046.html>



Cultural house in Derhachi



Cultural house in Izium



Inside Cultural house in Izium

**Cultural houses:** Local cultural houses are another common target for the Russian army. In small towns or villages are cultural houses often the only places where cultural events are organized. By destroying these objects, Russians are robbing the local population of spaces for culture - concerts, exhibitions, discussions, literature reading, etc.

It is hard to organize any cultural event without the right place. Renovation of these objects are usually not the first priority for local governments with limited budgets, therefore, they stay empty for years.



Cultural house in Chuhuiv



Cultural house in Lozova



During our mission we visited and documented several destroyed cultural houses in Chuhuiv, Iziurm, Lozova, Derhachi and Prudyanka. Buildings in Lozova, Derhachi, Prudyanka and Chuhuiv were completely destroyed, the cultural house in Iziurm was damaged, but the building still stays, and we managed to get inside.

#### **4.4. FIRST CRIMINAL CASE OF ECOCIDE IN UKRAINE BY SERGEY PETROV**

In addition to the aforementioned case of General Andrei Ruzynsky, we also participated in the collection of evidence and analysis of materials for the preparation of an investigative file concerning Russian military commanders suspected of war crimes under Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, who committed acts that may cause an ecological catastrophe in a previous conspiracy of a group of persons - ecocide.

This is the first criminal case into the fact of ecocide in Ukraine or the possibility of its occurrence, which has reached the stage of declaring suspicions against Russian officers for the shelling of the nuclear subcritical installation "Neutron Source", located on the territory of the National Scientific Center "Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology" of the NAS of Ukraine, which is located in the Pyatikhatka district in the north of Kharkiv. From here to the state border with Russia is 22 km.

On February 13, 2024, 5 officers of the Russian army, who commanded military units and formations of the Russian Armed Forces from February 24 to early September 2022, were reported suspected of shelling the territory of the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, which was systematically attacked by Russian troops from March 6 to early September 2022.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Андрій Костін: Українські прокурори вперше повідомили про підозру у скоєнні злочину екоциду російському генерал-полковнику та чотирьом його підлеглим <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/andrii-kostin-ukrayinski-prokurori-vperse-povidomili-pro-pidozru-u-skojenni-zlocinu-ekocidu-rosiiskomu-general-polkovniku-ta-cotiryom-iogo-pidleghim>, 14.2.2024

## **The suspicions have been announced to:**

- Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation;
- Lieutenant General Vladislav Ershov, Commander of the 6th Combined Arms Army of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation;
- Lieutenant General (as of 2022 – Major General) Oleg Makovetsky, Commander of the 6th Army of the Air Force and Air Defense of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation;
- Colonel Yevgeny Gerashchenko, Commander of the 79th Rocket Artillery Brigade of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation;
- Colonel Pavel Pilyukov, commander of the 45th Heavy Artillery Brigade of the Russian Armed Forces.

The 6th Combined Arms Army, the 6th Air Force and Air Defense Army are part of the Western Military District of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. The 45th Heavy Artillery Brigade and the 79th Rocket Artillery Brigade are separate brigades of the district subordination of the Western Military District of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. These formations and formations of the Russian troops, as well as their subordinate units, conducted combat operations in the territory of the Kharkiv district of the Kharkiv region with the aim of occupying the Kharkiv region and carried out shelling of the territory of the city of Kharkiv and the Kharkiv district of the Kharkiv oblast, including protected facilities on the territory of the National Science Center Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology (KIPT).

The investigation established that the 79th Rocket Artillery Brigade shelled the territory of the KIPT with 9K58 Smerch MLRS in early March 2022 from positions located in the Belgorod district of the Belgorod region of the Russian Federation near the state border of Ukraine, and from self-propelled artillery installations 2S7 Pion from the territory of the Kharkiv district of the Kharkiv oblast, 203 mm shells struck the object of the nuclear subcritical installation Neutron Source of the KIPT.

For air strikes on the territory of the KIPT combat aircraft Su-30SM and Su-34 of the 14th Fighter Aviation Regiment (Khalino a.k.a. Vostochny airfield, Kursk) and Su-35 of the 47th Bomber Aviation Regiment (Baltimore airfield, Voronezh) of the 105th Mixed Aviation Division of the 6th Air Force and Air Defense Army of the Western Military District of the Russian Federation

were used. Pilots of these units carried out air strikes on Kharkiv and the Kharkiv oblast from March to April 2022.

SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) investigators in the Kharkiv region, with the participation and procedural guidance of the Prosecutor General's Office and prosecutors of the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office, have initiated and are implementing legal standards for documenting the results and impact of war on the environment. From the historical point of view its an important step as these are the first suspicions of Russian military commanders for war crimes in Ukraine under Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine "ecocide" - "committing actions that may cause an ecological disaster, in prior conspiracy by a group of persons."

KIPT is a research center for the civil nuclear industry and nuclear power industry of Ukraine. On the territory of KPTI, civil nuclear facilities are located on a total area of over 50 hectares, including the nuclear subcritical facility Neutron Source and a nuclear materials storage facility.

"Neutron Source" is a research nuclear facility, it is an accelerator-controlled subcritical reactor. It is a civil, scientific and research facility. It produces medical radionuclides, trains specialists in the nuclear field, researches materials and conducts scientific experiments. The nuclear facility was built in accordance with the agreements of the Presidents of Ukraine and the United States during the Washington Nuclear Security Summit in April 2010, financed by the United States as compensation for the export of 234 kg of highly enriched uranium from the territory of Ukraine to Russia.

Nuclear facilities of civilian critical infrastructure on the territory of the KIPT are not protected from the explosive and dynamic effects of artillery and aviation ammunition and are not designed for operation in combat conditions and it increased danger.

From March to early September 2022, more than 70 artillery and air strikes were launched on the territory of the KIPT, which led to damage to buildings and structures located on its territory. Artillery strikes were launched on the territory of the KIPT using 203 mm caliber shells from the 2S7 "Pion" self-propelled artillery mount , 152 mm caliber shells from the 2S19 "Mista-S" and 2S3 "Akatsiya" self-propelled howitzers, 300 mm caliber shells from the 9K58 "Smerch"

MLRS, 122 mm caliber shells from the BM-21 "Grad" MLRS, 120 mm caliber mortars, as well as air strikes with "FAB-500" aerial bombs using Su-30SM, Su-35, Su-34 combat aircrafts.

According to the State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine, from March 6 to June 2022, at least 5 incidents of shelling of the subcritical nuclear facility "Neutron Source" were carried out. In November 2022, an IAEA inspection mission visited the KIPT and recorded extensive damage to the "Neutron Source" nuclear facility and other facilities on the territory of the KIPT.



A crater from an air bomb on the territory of the KIPT.

The shelling of the nuclear subcritical facility "Neutron Source" and other facilities of the KIPT could have caused an ecological disaster and caused serious damage to the environment, affecting human health, flora, fauna, subsoil, atmospheric air, water and other natural resources.

There is a huge almost 2 year of work of investigators, prosecutors, experts and engaged specialists, behind the announcement of suspicions against 5 Russian senior officers in this case.

Our team members Natalia Zubar, Sergey Petrov and other colleagues participated in analytical work to collect, record and monitor in March-April 2022 the damage to the buildings of the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology along its outer perimeter in the conditions of constant artillery shelling of Kharkiv by Russian troops. We monitored open sources of information and coverage of the specified facts of the shelling in the so-called "mass media" of the Russian Federation. In fact, the analysis of this very context became one of the elements that was later used to prove the presence of criminal intent.

Later, Natalia Zubar helped draw attention to the attacks on the subcritical nuclear facility "Neutron Source" at the international level in the media of EU countries. Serhiy Petrov was mainly engaged in searching, collecting, processing and analyzing information posted in open sources on the Internet in accordance with international standards, so that it became an evidentiary basis for criminal proceedings.

During the shelling of the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, the aforementioned Russian generals and colonels violated a number of international documents, including:

- Rules 7 and 45 of Customary International Humanitarian Law on the Protection of the Environment in Armed Conflict, according to which, during a military conflict, the parties to it must not attack civilian objects, and it is also prohibited to use any means that may cause large-scale, long-term and serious damage to the natural environment, and the destruction of the natural environment cannot be used as a weapon.
- Part 1, Article 1 of the 1977 Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Effects, according to which parties to a military conflict are obliged not to resort to environmental effects that have widespread, long-term or serious consequences.
- p. 3 art. 35, p. 1 art. 55, art. 48, p. 1 art. 51, p. 1 art. 52 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts of June 8, 1977, according to which it is prohibited to use methods or means of warfare which are intended to cause or have the expectation of causing widespread, long-term and serious damage to the natural environment, health or survival of the population, and also determine that civilian objects are all non-military objects that should not be the object of attack.

According to the text of the suspicions published on the website of the Prosecutor General's Office, Colonel General Oleksandr Zhuravlev, Lieutenant General Vladyslav Yershov, and Lieutenant General (as of 2022 - Major General) and Oleh Makovetsky were suspected of

intentional actions committed with the aim of changing the boundaries of the territory and state border of Ukraine, by prior conspiracy by a group of persons, which led to grave consequences (Part 3 of Article 110 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine), waging an aggressive war, committed by prior conspiracy by a group of persons (Part 2 of Article 28, Part 1 of Article 437 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine), violation of the laws and customs of war, committed by prior conspiracy by a group of persons (Part 2 of Article 28, Part 1 of Article 438), as well as committing actions that may cause an environmental disaster, by prior conspiracy by a group of persons (Part 2 of Article 28, Art. 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine). Thus, these three generals of the Russian army are suspected of committing several serious crimes.

Colonels Yevhen Gerashchenko and Pavlo Pilyukov, who commanded artillery brigades of district subordination, are suspected of violating the laws and customs of war, committed by prior conspiracy by a group of persons (Part 2 of Article 28, Part 1 of Article 438), as well as committing actions that may cause an ecological disaster, by prior conspiracy by a group of persons (Part 2 of Article 28, Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine).<sup>73</sup>

The full text of the suspicions in Ukrainian language can be found on the website of the Prosecutor General's Office at the following links:

**Colonel General Oleksandr Zhuravlev:** <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-zuravlyovu-oo-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-16022024-17022024-19022024-z-perekladom>

**Lieutenant General Vladyslav Yershov:** <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-jersovu-vm-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-16022024-17022024-19022024-z-perekladom>

**Lieutenant General Oleg Makovetsky:** <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-makoveckomu-ov-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-16022024-17022024-19022024-z-perekladom>

**Colonel Yevhen Gerashchenko:** <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-gerashhenko-jeyu-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-16022024-17022024-19022024-z-perekladom>

**Colonel Pavlo Pilyukov:** <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennya-pro-pidozru-pilyukovu-pg-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-na-16022024-17022024-19022024-z-perekladom>

Short description of the case in english you may find on the web of our partner organization MMIC: <https://maidan.org.ua/en/2024/05/pershyy-akt-iadernoho-teroru-v-istorii-liudstva-stavsia-v-kharkovi/>

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<sup>73</sup> 5 російським офіцерам повідомлено про підозри за обстріли ядерної установки у Харкові, <https://maidan.org.ua/2024/02/5-rosiyskym-ofitseram-povidomlenu-pro-pidozry-za-obstrily-iadernoi-ustanovky-u-kharkovi/>, 14.2.2024

The investigation of this criminal proceedings will continue in the future with the aim of finding additional evidence regarding the actions of Generals Zhuravlev, Ershov, Makovetsky and Colonels Gerashchenko and Pilyukov and further sending the materials to the court.

One of the goals of our team is not only to document war crimes in an appropriate manner, but also to use these materials in criminal proceedings, which will initially lead to suspicions and later to sentences by courts.

*(We're working on the cases and the report will be updated as we go along.)*

## **CONCLUSION**

### **PROSPECTS FOR ENDING THE WAR**

A serial killer will keep killing until he's arrested. The fascist regime of the Russian Federation also cannot be stopped except by defeating it. Any negotiations with Russia for peace, surrender and reparations must be linked to Ukrainian military successes. Regime change in Russia can perhaps only be envisaged at the moment of an apparent military defeat in Ukraine. All sources and forces should now be invested precisely in pushing the Russian occupation forces out of the entire territory of Ukraine.

This uncompromising attitude towards the Russian Federation is very often understood only by those who have themselves been its victims. But it is better to learn from the fate of others and avoid the repression and torture that comes with every Russian occupation. Russia's attack on Ukraine is an immediate threat to the EU, and by helping Ukraine we are helping ourselves first and foremost. Those politicians who are calling for compromises with Russia should realise that they are not only sanctioning the occupation of territories, but that the several million people who are in those territories will be condemned to long-term suffering.

The evidence of how the Russians behave in conquered territories is clear and confirms not only by our previous historical experience, but also by this research, the most important results of which are summarized in this report. Deportations, rapes, filtration camps, oppression... This is confirmed by the refugees we have spoken with and also by witnesses and survivors from the occupied territories.

As always, compromise with the aggressor will bring defeat and shame. The Russian regime has repeatedly confirmed that it always sees compromise as a sign of weakness, and this encourages it to further aggression. This is one of the few things that can be relied upon with certainty in relation to Russia. The degeneration of the Russian regime and of Putin's psychological profile is accelerating. In 2014, Putin was not psychologically prepared for open war, and the chances of success were incomparably higher. In 2022, Putin was ready to give the order for open conventional war. At the next stage, he may be ready for an unconventional one – a nuclear attack. That is why we must stop him now.

Depressed communities, localities, and violent, deviant subcultures should be monitored even after the defeat of Russia. Their transformation should be the goal of the international community.

We have focused more closely on the further development of the Russian regime, which continues to degenerate over the course of the war. Deviation has definitely become the norm. Deviant subcultures and propaganda have already permeated the entire Russian society.

People with criminal experience, murderers, rapists and even people convicted of cannibalism are involved in combat operation in war against Ukraine. Some of them are released after serving in the so-called "Special military operation" in Ukraine . As we saw on the case of general Andrei Ruzynsky, persons with a damaged psychological profile are often in command positions in some cases they can be described as career rapists or war criminals.

If this regime is not fundamentally changed after the war, it will pose an extreme threat. Criminological and sociological analysis of the current situation shows very warning signs of



deviant behaviour of individuals and society. War is the norm. The fear of losing the war drives society (people in the Russian Federation mostly do not realize that the defeat of Putin is also in their interests), and especially the political leadership of the Russian Federation, to extreme positions. Putin is indifferent to the loss of life. The social classes forced to live in poverty and influenced by propaganda and affected by deviant subcultures are for now a sufficient reservoir for mobilization. In this respect, Putin prepared well for the war. In Russian society, faith in the possible victory of freedom had already been broken, and it also affected their elite parts and intellectuals.

The risk of a global war with the Russian Federation can only be reduced by a total transformation of Russia. However, such a transformation is difficult to implement in the given context. Another possible scenario is the disintegration of the Russian Federation into several states. All this depends on the results of the Russia-Ukraine war. If Ukraine is forced to make peace without liberating its territory, then it will only be a temporary truce and Russia will be preparing for another attack. The greatest threat is a centralized Russia with persistent imperial ambitions. A transformed Russian Republic or other successor states no longer pose such threats and the risk of war is reduced.

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