

Lt. Col. Endre Szénási:

## FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN UKRAINE

ABSTRACT: According to international law, Western official positions etc. there is an amazing variety of existing interpretations regarding who should be considered a foreign fighter in Ukraine on Kiev's or Moscow's side. Whatever interpretation we might agree with, the account of "definitions" and their analysis contribute to understanding the complexity of the crisis in Ukraine. It leads us to the bizarre conclusion that if strictly referring to official opinions of the parties involved in the conflict virtually anyone could be considered a foreign fighter in Ukraine with the exception of truly local separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine.

KEYWORDS: intervention, political correctness, extremism, foreign fighters, hybrid warfare, terrorism, NATO, Russia, Ukraine, US, West

### WHO ARE FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN UKRAINE?

It is wrong to think that the determination of who might be foreign fighters is relatively simple. Not at all. Very much depends on the interpretation. In the next chapters we will investigate who could be considered foreign fighters in Ukraine. Such analysis is *not* based on *speculation*: references will be made to official positions of parties involved in the Ukraine crisis. We will come to the bizarre conclusion that *virtually anyone could be considered a foreign fighter in Ukraine with the exception of truly local separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine, strictly referring to the official opinions* of the parties involved in the conflict.

There are two core parts of the analysis: (I) accounts of foreign fighters on Kiev's side, and (II) those of the pro-Russian side. Within both core parts there are variations of who could be considered foreign fighters in Ukraine in one way or another.

### FOREIGN FIGHTERS ON THE SIDE OF KIEV AND THE WESTERN WORLD

#### All the Armed Forces of Ukraine

The assumption to label the entire Ukrainian Armed Forces as foreign fighters in Ukraine sounds *absurd*, while it is not that absurd if we refer to their role the Russian way: the Ukrainian Armed Forces serve foreign interests against *real* national interests of both Ukraine and Russia. Russian president Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin called the Ukrainian Armed Forces (both regular and voluntary nationalist formations) fighting pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine – ultimately Russia – a "*Foreign Legion*." "*Putin had said those fighting against pro-Russia separatists in Eastern Ukraine were a mixture of Ukraine's army and "voluntary nationalist battalions."* ... "*In essence, this is not an army; this is a foreign legion - in this particular case NATO's foreign legion, which of course does not pursue the objective of serving Ukraine's national interests. There are completely different goals there,*" Putin said, saying

they aimed to achieve "Russia's geopolitical containment." ... "NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg ... swiftly dismissed allegations made by Russian President."<sup>1</sup>

Putin's statement phrases that there is a geopolitical game going on where the real purpose is not to serve Ukrainian interests but to contain Russia. We need to be clear: the Ukrainian Armed Forces – as a whole – are not *literally* foreigners in Ukraine, but since they serve foreign interests (as Putin says), they can be referred to as a "Foreign Legion". In Stoltenberg's statement on the other hand there is a powerful example of "political correctness". It is "politically correct" from Western – especially NATO – point of view, according to which:

- the Alliance has no spheres of influence,
- Russia follows outdated imperial policies when it takes into account spheres of influence,
- democratic nations, such as Ukraine, freely choose their partners and allies,
- no third parties could influence NATO enlargement,
- there are no geopolitical games, where an entire country could become a "tool" of a democratic alliance, such as NATO,
- even though the top leadership in Kiev is pro-Western, Ukraine is fighting her war against pro-Russian separatists and regular Russian Armed Forces for herself, to repel a Russian aggression, and serving foreign interests is not a part of the "game",
- there is no such thing as encirclement and containment of Russia by NATO etc.

Interestingly, even if containment of Russia is not an official Western policy that is implemented *regardless* of Russian actions in Ukraine, Western threats to *isolate* Russia and Western *economic sanctions* against Russia are entirely official. "*Russia should be clear that the deliberate escalation of this crisis will bring serious political and economic consequences.*" NATO has also stepped up its rhetoric against Russia. Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told a press conference ...: "*If Russia were to intervene further in Ukraine it would be a historic mistake. It would have grave consequences for our relationship with Russia and would further isolate Russia internationally.*"<sup>2</sup> Economic sanctions and threats of isolation together are already *synonymous with containment*.

No matter whether we agree with certain points of the "politically correct" view, history books suggest that wars might not entirely serve "politically correct" aims throughout the entire history of mankind. Such "political correctness" could be an official policy but it is also a kind of an ideology in vacuum, making it difficult or even impossible to keep "political correctness" and meanwhile analyse *true* (unacknowledged) motivations behind conflicts from a scientific point of view.

At the beginning of the Ukraine crisis I consulted an unnamed senior Hungarian MoD<sup>3</sup> official who confirmed, referring to the Ukraine crisis, that "*the West should not allow Russia to become too powerful.*" Such revelations *behind closed doors* make it clear that no

<sup>1</sup> "Putin says 'foreign legion' in Ukraine, NATO says 'nonsense'". *Deutsche Welle*, 26 January 2015. <http://www.dw.com/en/putin-says-foreign-legion-in-ukraine-nato-says-nonsense/a-18215899> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>2</sup> Bloom, D. "Kremlin accuses U.S. security firm with links to Blackwater of sending 'private army' to Ukraine disguised as local forces in latest escalation of anti-American rhetoric". *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2599700/Kremlin-accuses-U-S-security-firm-links-Blackwater-sending-private-army-Ukraine-disguised-local-forces-latest-escalation-anti-American-rhetoric.html> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Defence (MoD)

matter whether someone is pro-US, pro-Ukraine or pro-Russia, there are *unstated policies* on all sides and *geopolitical realities* that are beyond official “political correctness”. Though scientists might be more-less free of the “*mental handcuffs*” of “*political correctness*”, government officials are not. “Political correctness” does indeed limit government officials when analysing conflicts, often resulting in the production of classified documents that still tend to remain “politically correct”, though the whole idea of classification can be lost if the opportunity to tell the truth in classified documents is still limited by “political correctness”.

Accusations about operating “Foreign Legions” are quite symmetrical since Putin’s Russia is also accused of more-less the same thing.<sup>4</sup> The difference in this case is that *not all* the Russian Armed Forces are accused of being a sort of a “Foreign Legion” against Ukraine.

## Foreign combatants fighting on the side of Kiev

Foreign combatants fighting on the side of Kiev come from several countries. Their motivation could be political. They might think that contemporary Russia is an enemy that deserves to be repelled from Ukraine and punished. They feel sympathy towards Kiev since Ukraine attempts to break out of Russian dominance. They might also think that Russia as an aggressor threatens entire Europe. As a minimum, Russia might threaten Eastern NATO members, especially the Baltic States, which were part of the former Soviet Union.

Foreign combatants might also be motivated financially. They might not have any other motivation at all, besides escaping unemployment. Private security companies are a perfect example of that. For them politics might be totally irrelevant.

This makes them very dangerous, since they would injure or kill whoever they are ordered to without feeling that they are killing their own people in a civil war in Ukraine. They are also dangerous because they are more difficult to be brought to justice when prosecuting war crimes. Clear legal requirements apply to militaries and civil citizens of states. Private security companies find themselves in a “grey zone” in terms of international law, which they are fully aware of. They often sign contracts hidden from the public of the state where they operate and get immunities from the state in case “something goes wrong”. Since they serve states or powerful interest groups, in most cases their immunities are powerful: they allow them to keep anonymity and escape punishment when they commit war crimes.

*“...on the night of 2-3 (March 2014 – the auth.), the flight landed at the airport Borispol and Zhuliany, Ukraine carrying many men in civilian clothes but carrying large bags (similar to type bag that the U.S. military used to store equipment). All these people were identified as employees of private security companies Greystone Limited... Currently, the number of employees of this company in Ukraine is said to be up to 300 people.”*<sup>5</sup>

There are other private security companies employed in Ukraine on Kiev’s side, such as a successor of the notorious Blackwater<sup>6</sup> that proved to be scandalously aggressive and

<sup>4</sup> Lazaredes, N. "Russia's foreign legion: Hundreds of fighters join pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine". *ABC News*, 22 September 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-22/foreign-fighters-join-pro-russian-rebels-in-eastern-ukraine/6792696> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>5</sup> "Greystone Limited mercenaries operating in Ukraine". *The Phantom Report*, 4 March 2014. <http://www.phantomreport.com/greystone-limited-mercenaries-operating-in-ukraine> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>6</sup> Ukman, J. "Ex-Blackwater firm gets a name change, again". *The Washington Post*, 12 December 2011. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/ex-blackwater-firm-gets-a-name-change-again/2011/12/12/gIQAxf4YpO\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/ex-blackwater-firm-gets-a-name-change-again/2011/12/12/gIQAxf4YpO_blog.html) (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

murderous against civilians in Iraq: the Academi<sup>7</sup> (Annex 1). „*About 400 elite mercenaries from the notorious US private security firm Academi (formerly Blackwater) are taking part in the Ukrainian military operation against anti-government protesters in south-eastern regions of the country, German media reports...The American security company Blackwater gained worldwide notoriety for the substantial role it played in the Iraq war as a contractor for the US government. In recent years it has changed its name twice – in 2009 it was renamed Xe Services and in 2011 it got its current name, Academi. The firm became infamous for the alleged September 16, 2007 killing of 17 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad. The attack, which saw 20 others wounded, was allegedly without justification and in violation of deadly-force rules that pertained to American security contractors in Iraq at the time. Between 2005 and September 2007, Blackwater security guards were involved in at least 195 shooting incidents in Iraq and fired first in 163 of those cases, a Congressional report said at the time.*”<sup>8</sup>



Annex 1. Gunmen of a private security company in action

Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/158212-academi-blackwater-ukraine-military/> (Accessed on 03. 01. 2016)

Similarly to what Russia does when denying the involvement of Russian soldiers in the war in Eastern Ukraine, Western private security companies routinely deny their presence in combat zones in Ukraine as well.<sup>9</sup>

According to Russian sources members of Western private security companies suffered heavy casualties in Eastern Ukraine when the war escalated. Their weaponry was sufficient when violence broke out, but proved *inadequate* when the Ukrainian Air Force and Army became extensively involved in the conflict. I would argue that their role shrunk significantly in Ukraine since news about civil security companies almost entirely vanished both from Western and Russian media.

It can be debated whether *secret service operatives* should be considered foreign fighters in Ukraine or not. Sometimes they are armed and operate in a combat zone. I would argue that members of secret services could indeed be classified as foreign fighters, when they are directly involved in military operations in a warzone. Their masters – governments – do not want to admit their possible failures, especially when it is widely published. Such practices

<sup>7</sup> Gayle, D. "Has Blackwater been deployed to Ukraine? Notorious U.S. mercenaries 'seen on the streets of flashpoint city' as Russia claims 300 hired guns have arrived in country". *The Daily Mail*, 8 March 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2576490/Are-Blackwater-active-Ukraine-Videos-spark-talk-U-S-mercenary-outfit-deployed-Donetsk.html> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>8</sup> "400 US mercenaries 'deployed on ground' in Ukraine military op". *Russia Today*, 11 May 2014. <https://www.rt.com/news/158212-academi-blackwater-ukraine-military/> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>9</sup> Alpert, L. I. "Security Firm Denies Involvement in Ukraine". *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/emergingeuropa/2014/04/08/security-firm-denies-involvement-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

might not even allow a decent funeral of the secret service agents on the soil of the sending state, following the wishes of the deceased and their relatives.<sup>10</sup> *“A stunning Ministry of Defence (MoD) report circulating in the Kremlin today states that the United States has refused to repatriate the bodies of 13 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) military operatives killed when their helicopters were shot down by pro-federalist forces on the outskirts of Slavyansk, eastern Ukraine this past Friday. According to this report, on 2 May the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion of the 25th Separate Dnipropetrovsk Airborne Brigade of the Ukrainian Army, which had defected to the side of the pro-federalists in April (2014 – the auth.), fired upon and downed two Russian made Mil Mi-17 transport helicopters belonging to the Ukrainian Air Force that had been attempting to land CIA military “command and control” operatives into the battle zone of Slavyansk.”*<sup>11</sup>

There are also internationally organised criminals who see looting and smuggling opportunities in the war: such motivations also boil down to financial gains.

## FOREIGN FIGHTERS ON THE SIDE OF MOSCOW AND THE PRO-RUSSIAN POPULATION OF SOUTH-EASTERN UKRAINE

### “Polite People”<sup>12</sup> in Crimea

The expression “Polite People” was first used during the Ukraine crisis when mostly Russian Special Forces “facilitated” the self-determination of Crimea by surrounding and later occupying *all* Ukrainian military bases of the peninsula (Annex 2). The Russian intervention in Crimea took place under conditions when Russian soldiers wore no badges, had no licence plates or other numbers or symbols allowing the identification of individuals or military units. Since it led to Russian victory without a single shot, it could be considered extremely effective. Russia must have had operations plans for such an intervention for years before the conflict, but since such plans are secret it is quite difficult to prove that such plans had existed in advance. Russia executed the already existing operation plans taking a historical opportunity to reclaim Crimea that is considered Russian by official Kremlin opinion.



Annex 2. *Youngsters watch pro-Russian soldiers as they block the entry of a Ukrainian forward military base in Balaklava, a small city near Sebastopol*

Source: <http://okok1111111111.blogspot.hu/2014/03/troop-pro-russian-protester-ukraine.html> (Accessed on 03. 01. 2016)

<sup>10</sup> "CIA denies its agents were killed in eastern Ukraine". *Sputnik News*, 18 May 2014. [http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014\\_05\\_18/CIA-denies-its-agents-killed-in-eastern-Ukraine-2156/](http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_05_18/CIA-denies-its-agents-killed-in-eastern-Ukraine-2156/) (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>11</sup> Faal, S. "US Refuses To Take Back 13 Dead CIA Spies Killed In Ukraine". *What Does It Mean*, 4 May 2014. <http://www.whatdoesitmean.com/index1767.htm> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>12</sup> «Вежливые люди» в Крыму: как это было". *Novaya Gazeta*, 17 April 2014. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/63246.html> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)



We might think that the expression “Polite People” is an issue of the past since this method is no longer used in Crimea that is part of Russia according to the Russian Constitution. However, this expression is increasingly becoming a type of a symbol of the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>13</sup>

## All Russian Armed Forces in Crimea

Russian troops used to station in Crimea (as Soviet troops) before Ukraine gained independence. When Ukraine got independent, Russian military presence remained in Crimea founded on interstate agreements. Both countries benefited from such agreements since Russia could use the naval base in Sebastopol that has exceptionally good conditions for stationing a fleet, even in hard winter conditions. Ukraine also benefited from the Russian military presence since Russia paid for it, also offering discounts on gas prices.

Today, according to international law, Crimea is still *de jure* part of Ukraine, not Russia. This coincides with Ukrainian law. According to the Russian Constitution, Crimea is *de jure* part of Russia. Needless to say that now, no matter whether we like it or not, Crimea is *de facto* definitely part of Russia. In such a situation a conclusion that Russia annexed Crimea illegally and all Russian Forces are occupation forces would be logical. Russia argues that Crimean people decided their own fate when voting to belong to Russia. If someone considers Russian Forces in Crimea as illegal occupation forces, it is evident to talk about foreign troops in Ukraine in case of Crimea. Russian troops could therefore be viewed as illegal foreign fighters.

## „Non-existent” Russian combatants or regular Russian military in Eastern Ukraine

According to the official opinion of Kiev the main reasons of the war in Eastern Ukraine are Russian incitement to separatism and Russian aggression against Ukraine. The separatists claim that the reasons of the war are (a) the forceful shift of power in February 2014, (b) the strengthened nationalism financed by Ukrainian oligarchs and (c) the fact that the central power in Kiev is unwilling to take into account the interests of South-Eastern Ukraine. According to the official position of Moscow Russia is not part of the conflict in Ukraine: all responsibility lies exclusively on the shoulders of the opposing parties.

Russian president Vladimir Putin stated several times that Russia is not fighting a war in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> However, the reality is that the *de facto* state sovereignty of the breakaway republics in Eastern Ukraine could not have been realised without Russian political, economic and military interference. The deliberately planned and executed wide range Russian intervention has so far created a stalemate when Ukraine’s Western integration is effectively blocked by Russia. When Russia supports the pro-Russia separatists in Eastern Ukraine she also generates a latent (deniable, not clearly evident) territorial dispute between Russia and

<sup>13</sup> “«Вежливые люди» как новый образ Российской армии”. *Ria Novosti*, 16 May 2014. [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20140516/1007988002.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140516/1007988002.html) (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)

<sup>14</sup> Demirjian, K. "Putin denies Russian troops are in Ukraine, decrees certain deaths secret". *The Washington Post*, 28 May 2015. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d_story.html) (Accessed: 25 December 2015)

Ukraine. Even though the official position of Moscow denies that Russia is fighting a war in Ukraine, in reality Russia fights a proxy war against Ukraine, led by the current, nationalist and pro-Western, anti-Russian central power in Kiev.

- Russian military involvement in Eastern-Ukraine is managed in a much more covert and hidden way than in case of Crimea:
- The presence of Russian soldiers is based on *secret, voluntary contracts* with the Russian state (the Russian Military). Russian soldiers sign up for full secrecy and breaking that is heavily sanctioned by the Russian state in various ways (demotion, loss of compensation, etc.).
- The numbers of Russian *peacetime casualties are reclassified as a state secret*. Compensations for the families of “contract fighters” who got severely injured and declared invalids or have been killed in Eastern Ukraine had been accidentally leaked. “*Putin decreed in May (2015 – the auth.) this year that all military deaths are to remain state secrets. In the past, only deaths in wartime were classified. At the time, Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied the decision was connected to fighting in Ukraine, simply stating that the law change was part of “the improvement of the state secret law.” But this leaked information, subsequently translated by Forbes, reveals that families have been receiving three million rubles (£27,500) in compensation for an individual dying in military action, whilst those who are injured would be awarded one and a half million (£13,700). “A payment of 1,800 rubles is envisioned for contract “fighters” for every day of their presence in the conflict zone,” Paul Roderick Gregory continues in his translation, “as of 1 February 2015, monetary compensation had been paid to more than 2,000 families of fallen soldiers and to 3,200 military personnel suffering heavy wounds and recognized as invalids.”*<sup>15</sup>
- Participation of Russian soldiers in the war in Eastern Ukraine is an integral part of the Russian *military career model*, including the promotion system etc. Experience gained in a real war is valuable and accounts very positively in the evaluation of a professional or a contract soldier. This might apply to a smaller extent to those who do not choose to serve as professionals or contractors, or those retired from the Russian military, when continuation of their military career cannot be realistically expected.
- Russian soldiers undergo *thorough military training in Russia* before being involved in operations in Eastern Ukraine. Because of this fact, their levels of training exceed the average Ukrainian levels by far.
- Russian soldiers use *weapons or weapon systems* that are *also used by Ukrainians*. However, they are renewed and re-equipped in accordance with Russian standards that are significantly higher than the Ukrainian ones.
- The war in Eastern Ukraine is a *perfect testing ground for the newest conventional Russian weaponry* that has not yet been thoroughly tested in combat. The war in Syria is another perfect testing ground, even for the Russian Air Force that cannot be tested in war conditions in Ukraine. The reason is simple. If the Russian Air Force was deployed in Ukraine, it would be very difficult for Moscow to deny direct Russian military involvement in the war. New Russian weaponry is tested in Ukraine

<sup>15</sup> Segalov, M. "Russia 'accidentally reveals' number of its soldiers killed in eastern Ukraine. 2,000 are said to have died with over 3,200 Russian forces injured". *The Independent*, 26 August 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-number-of-russian-troops-killed-or-injured-fighting-in-ukraine-seems-to-have-been-accidentally-10472603.html> (Accessed: 6 January 2016)

*in strict secrecy*, since the Ukrainian side does not possess cutting-edge Russian military technology that would otherwise become a proof of direct Russian military involvement in Eastern Ukraine.

- Russian soldiers sometimes wear *Ukrainian uniforms* that are either trophies, or reconstructed to look identical. The reconstruction is most probably done in Russia, since it is easier to keep the production – as a project of the Russian Military – secret. On the other hand, private businesses do similar work with no cover at all: “*Moscow maintains that it is not directly involved in the separatist conflict in Ukraine, but a steady flow of so-called volunteers from Russia are signing up to fight – and some businesses are also contributing to the war effort. In Yekaterinburg, a businessman has turned his clothing factory over to producing uniforms for Ukrainian separatists and their Russian allies.*”<sup>16</sup> Russian soldiers might also wear parts of Russian military uniforms (Annex 3).<sup>17</sup> They might also wear uniforms purchased from military shops open for civilians (not exclusively for the military) or hunter shops open for all buyers (as long as they do not purchase weapons, because in that case licences are required). When such uniforms are mixed by individual soldiers and at unit levels, the Russian soldiers cannot be easily identified as Russians any more.
- Russian soldiers have *false ID cards* that are produced at state level in order to suggest that their owners are local residents in Eastern Ukrainian breakaway regions. It implies the involvement of Russian secret services, border guards etc.



Annex 3. “*Hundreds of foreign volunteers have reportedly joined the rebel ranks in a new fighting unit known as the Novo Russian Foreign Legion.*”

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-22/foreign-fighters-join-pro-russian-rebels-in-eastern-ukraine/6792696> (Accessed on 03. 01. 2016)

- Russia takes care of *shifting* her soldiers after their having served the pre-determined time in Ukraine. This is a probable reason of some unexpected disappearances of pro-Russian leaders, when they leave their positions. (It is not visible for the public when individual Russian soldiers of low ranks leave Ukraine.) Pro-Russian leaders do not admit publicly the real reason behind leaving their positions since they are obliged not to admit that their service in Eastern Ukraine has expired. Such an admission would be equal to saying that “yes, Russia is a warring party in a proxy-war in Ukraine” that Moscow officially denies and attempts to hide as carefully as possible.

<sup>16</sup> “Russian-Made Uniforms Aid Separatists In Ukraine”. *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, 11 June 2015. <http://www.rferl.org/media/video/russia-ukraine-separatists-donbas/27066665.html> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>17</sup> Lazaredes, N. “Russia’s foreign legion: Hundreds of fighters join pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine”. *ABC*, 22 September 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-22/foreign-fighters-join-pro-russian-rebels-in-eastern-ukraine/6792696> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)



- Pro-Russian separatists – whoever they are – make sure that there are *cover stories regarding the origin of their weapon systems*. Such weapon systems can be trophies. Weapon systems are often captured from the Ukrainian military units that abandon their weapons when they retreat or when they are encircled and defeated.<sup>18</sup> Abandoning weapons or weapon systems is often a pre-requisite determined by the pro-Russian separatists that allows Ukrainian soldiers to avoid a lengthy status of POW<sup>19</sup> and freely return to their relatives or military units, respectively. (Once Ukrainian soldiers return to their units, they are often tried as traitors because of having left behind their weaponry to the “terrorists” without destroying it.)
- At the beginning of the civil war in Eastern Ukraine, another cover story was widely published to explain how the pro-Russian separatists got virtually “endless” amounts of weaponry. It is the well documented capturing of a great Ukrainian repair base, with hundreds of armoured vehicles, including tanks, infantry vehicles, field artillery guns and even air defence weapons.<sup>20, 21, 22, 23</sup> All captured weaponry was degraded and unfit for service, many of them far-beyond cost-effective repair (Annex 4-6).<sup>24</sup> It is by no mistake that they were stored at a military repairing base. However, vast amounts of weaponry were renewed very quickly, in a professional way to make them



Annex 4. *Ukrainian military repair base captured by separatists supplied a quasi “infinite” amount of armour as a cover story* (Military Unit No. A2730, Artemovsk, Donetsk region)

Source: <http://zagopod.com/blog/43370163167/Tayna-artemovskoy-tankovoy-bazyi.-Otkuda-u-opolchentsev-tyazhelo>  
Accessed on 03. 01. 2016

<sup>18</sup> Peleschuk, D. "Ukraine is still at war — and its bloodiest battle isn't over". *The Week*, 2 September 2015. <http://theweek.com/articles/574972/ukraine-still-war--bloodiest-battle-isnt-over> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>19</sup> Prisoners of War (POW)

<sup>20</sup> Воронцов, А. "Тайна артемовской танковой базы. Кто наживается на гражданской войне в Новороссии?" *Свободная Пресса*, 30 June 2014. <http://svpressa.ru/society/article/93980/> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>21</sup> Qena, N. and Scislowka, M. "Ukraine Separatists Seize Government Bases, Several Killed". *The Huffington Post*, 6 April 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/ukraine-unrest\\_n\\_5444330.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/ukraine-unrest_n_5444330.html) (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>22</sup> "Ополченцы ДНР захватили танковую базу под Славянском". *Взгляд*, 20 June 2014. <http://www.vz.ru/news/2014/6/20/692063.html> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>23</sup> Мусин, М. "Срочно: ночью ополченцы взяли танковую базу в Артемовске с сотнями танков, БМП и БТР". *Anna News*, 20 June 2014. <http://anna-news.info/node/17334> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>24</sup> Петров, И. "Тайна артемовской танковой базы. Откуда у ополченцев тяжелое вооружение". *Zagorod*, 31 July 2014. <http://zagopod.com/blog/43370163167/Tayna-artemovskoy-tankovoy-bazyi.-Otkuda-u-opolchentsev-tyazhelo> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)



Annex 5. Tanks stored in open at the Ukrainian military repair base captured by separatists (Military Unit No. A2730, Artemovsk, Donetsk region)

Source: <http://zagopod.com/blog/43370163167/Tayna-artemovskoy-tankovoy-bazyi.-Otkuda-u-opolchentsev-tyazhelo> (Accessed on 04. 01. 2016)



Annex 6. Aerial view of the Ukrainian military repair base captured by separatists (Military Unit No. A2730, Artemovsk, Donetsk region)

Source: <http://zagopod.com/blog/43370163167/Tayna-artemovskoy-tankovoy-bazyi.-Otkuda-u-opolchentsev-tyazhelo> (Accessed on 05. 01. 2016)

fit for service. Even though the separatist-controlled regions in Eastern Ukraine have military armoured vehicle repairing factory capabilities, it can safely be assumed that without a decent help of either Moscow, or Kiev(!) they would have rapidly run out of spare parts. Since corruption in Ukraine is truly horrendous, it cannot be ruled out that through illegal channels the separatists get supplies not only from Russia but from Ukraine as well. The war in Eastern Ukraine is of strange and unusual nature indeed, since Donetsk, which fights Kiev, meanwhile supplies Kiev with coal,<sup>25</sup> expects Kiev to pay pensions,<sup>26</sup> and operate banking systems, etc. on separatist controlled territories (!).

- The other possibility is that vast amounts of trophy Ukrainian weapon systems are repaired and re-equipped by pro-Russian separatists and more importantly, Russian war factories *only if that is technically and financially viable*. Otherwise, weaponry is most likely to be taken to Russia in secrecy and later scrapped for metals. In some cases, Ukrainian weapons can also be “cannibalised” for spare parts, if they are in good shape.
- Pro-Russian rebels even made a very credible attempt to prove that they were about to lose the entire war in Eastern Ukraine when they abandoned Slavyansk and their situation further deteriorated. The separatists lost territories on a daily basis *fooling Kiev to get stuck in a war Ukraine cannot win*. The separatists retreated regularly to look weak; making the “tale of people’s uprising” credible. It made the Ukrainian

<sup>25</sup> Arnoldski, J. (transl.). "Donetsk resumes coal trade with Ukraine". *Fort Russ*, 9 December 2015. <http://fortruss.blogspot.hu/2015/12/donetsk-resumes-coal-trade-with-ukraine.html?view=classic> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

<sup>26</sup> "Donbass leaders to Germany, France: Make Kiev pay pensions approved by Minsk deal". *Russia Today*, 6 April 2015. <https://www.rt.com/news/247165-ukraine-pensions-minsk-merkel/> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

leadership believe that victory was close, luring them to advance. Later on Kiev learned the hard way that *the entire Ukraine(!) cannot win a war against the separatists backed by Moscow*. The war turned out to be *disastrous for Kiev*. An unnamed senior Hungarian MoD official told me when the separatists abandoned Sloviansk that “*you would see that Russia would betray Russians*”. I was told so behind closed doors of, course. I personally did not expect such a betrayal to happen, especially within the post-Soviet space under Putin’s power. The lack of proper understanding of Russian mentality often leads to similarly false conclusions. I still see no signs of Russia betraying Russians in Eastern Ukraine. I could be right at this point, since I have never heard the same or similar statements concerning Russian betrayal again.

There are military experts who think that Russia followed *exactly the same strategy* in the case of Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine. The only difference is that the Russian strategy worked in case of Crimea and did not succeed in case of Eastern Ukraine. Such an evaluation is based on *significant misunderstandings*.

In strict technical terms, Russia could declare Donetsk and Lugansk parts of the Russian Federation at any time. Russia could also do so regarding only the separatist-controlled parts of the two regions in Eastern Ukraine, but it would make less sense since in such a case the Russian actions are more difficult to justify. The reason is that *Russia must come up with some credible explanation that could most likely be defending the population with Russian identity*. It would be difficult to prove that the territory where the population with Russian identity lives *exactly matches* the territory controlled by separatist. Even if such Russian official explanation might occur, it would not be true at all. Donetsk and Lugansk are overwhelmed by population with Russian identity. Most people are well aware of that in Russia and in Ukraine as well, not to mention the local populations of the two breakaway regions in Eastern Ukraine. Therefore, such a scenario is highly unlikely. If Russia decides to take the two breakaway regions, she will have to take *their entire territory* to keep Russian ideology credible.

It is *not difficult* for Russia to defend territories officially belonging to Russia against Ukraine, since *the Russian Armed Forces would be officially obliged to do so*. That would allow Russia to fight *openly and effectively*, including the deployment of the most modern weaponry. Finally yet importantly, it would allow the free deployment of the Russian Aerospace Forces, as a whole. Russian satellite reconnaissance systems that constitute a part of the Russian Aerospace Forces are most likely to be already actively involved in the war in Eastern Ukraine. The opposite would be *irrational* and would require a powerful justification never seen. We have the knowledge to be sure: Russian spy satellite images were shown when Moscow explained the circumstances of the downing of the Malaysian aircraft in Eastern Ukraine. That is a *definite proof* of Russian Aerospace Forces involvement, even though Russia could argue, that they used civilian satellite information etc. However, the Russian Air Force is not involved in the current war in Eastern Ukraine because of its visibility and the need of official denial of Russian involvement.

The problem with such a course of events when Russia claims ever more Ukrainian territories would not serve Russian interests at all. On the contrary: it would go against Russian strategic interests. Russia wants *entire* Ukraine to return to her sphere of interests and thereby is not interested in further escalation of the war when Moscow would be clearly regarded as an aggressor and an invader. Russia is interested in maintaining a low-level conflict to weaken Kiev and keep deniability and ambiguity. If we agree that such Russian

policies are being implemented, we have to realise that such policies are *entirely different* to what happened in Crimea that was firmly and rapidly annexed by the Russian Federation.

If Russia had had the same strategy in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, it would have been easy to find justification for an open war between Russia and Ukraine because of Donetsk and Lugansk. The amount of casualties amongst the pro-Russian civilians could have served as a powerful pretext of such a war under the banner of “defending population with Russian identity”. The Russian State Duma authorised president Putin to deploy Russian Military in Ukraine if necessary,<sup>27</sup> that was later withdrawn, on the basis of the request of the Russian president himself.<sup>28</sup>

We come to the conclusion that the Russian policies in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine are significantly different. Therefore we cannot talk about the success of the same policy in Crimea and its failure in Eastern Ukraine.

Russian policies in Eastern Ukraine could indeed include making the *entire* separatist regions part of Russia, but that would require a forced policy change on the Russian side. It could happen in case it becomes evident that Russia has *no chance at all* in medium and long term to bring *entire* Ukraine back to Russian orbit, and Ukraine’s NATO accession becomes imminent. Then Russia could take *all* those territories where the majority of the population supports Moscow, leaving behind those who do not. In this case, Ukraine would face *an ever more severe territorial conflict with Russia* that would most likely *derail* Ukraine’s NATO integration.

## CONCLUSIONS

- There is a great variety of interpretations concerning the classification of foreign fighters in Ukraine that are all based on official points of view, not speculation.
- The analysis of who and based on what official views can be classified as foreign fighters in Ukraine helps us to understand the complexity of the crisis.
- We come to the bizarre conclusion that virtually anyone could be considered a foreign fighter in Ukraine with the exception of truly local separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine, strictly referring to official opinions of the parties involved in the conflict.
- Civil security companies are in a legal “grey zone”, unlike soldiers or civilians of states where the armed conflicts occur.
- The weaponry of civil security companies proves to be inadequate when war escalates.
- The employment of civil security companies with a notorious background would most likely result in series or war crimes in conditions of civil war. Combined with undisclosed immunities from states or powerful interest groups such a legal status encourages aggression and war crimes, even against civilians.

<sup>27</sup> Neumann, S. "Russia's Parliament Approves Putin's Call For Troops In Ukraine". *NPR*, 1 March 2014. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/03/01/284345466/russias-parliament-prepared-to-authorize-crimea-intervention> (Accessed: 25 December 2015)

<sup>28</sup> Oliphant, R. "Vladimir Putin revokes Russia's mandate for use of military force in Ukraine, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko welcomes move to scrap controversial law authorising Russian use of force in country as a 'first step' towards peace". *The Telegraph*, 24 June 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10922531/Vladimir-Putin-revokes-Russias-mandate-for-use-of-military-force-in-Ukraine.html> (Accessed: 25 December 2015)

- Russian deployment of “Polite People” in Crimea and “non-existing” regular soldiers in Eastern Ukraine are tools of sophisticated policies.
- Russian policies in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have been significantly different since the very beginning of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. Therefore it is a grave misunderstanding to equal them and label the Crimean outcome successful and the Eastern Ukrainian outcome unsuccessful.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alpert, L. I. "Security Firm Denies Involvement in Ukraine". *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/emergingurope/2014/04/08/security-firm-denies-involvement-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Arnoldski, J. (transl.) "Donetsk resumes coal trade with Ukraine". *Fort Russ*, 9 December 2015. <http://fortruss.blogspot.hu/2015/12/donetsk-resumes-coal-trade-with-ukraine.html?view=classic> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)
- Bloom, D. "Kremlin accuses U.S. security firm with links to Blackwater of sending 'private army' to Ukraine disguised as local forces in latest escalation of anti-American rhetoric". *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2599700/Kremlin-accuses-U-S-security-firm-links-Blackwater-sending-private-army-Ukraine-disguised-local-forces-latest-escalation-anti-American-rhetoric.html> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Demirjian, K. "Putin denies Russian troops are in Ukraine, decrees certain deaths secret". *The Washington Post*, 28 May 2015. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d_story.html) (Accessed: 25 December 2015.)
- Faal, S. "US Refuses To Take Back 13 Dead CIA Spies Killed In Ukraine". *What Does It Mean*, 4 May 2014. <http://www.whatdoesitmean.com/index1767.htm> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Gayle, D. "Has Blackwater been deployed to Ukraine? Notorious U.S. mercenaries 'seen on the streets of flashpoint city' as Russia claims 300 hired guns have arrived in country". *The Daily Mail*, 8 March 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2576490/Are-Blackwater-active-Ukraine-Videos-spark-talk-U-S-mercenary-outfit-deployed-Donetsk.html> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Lazaredes, N. "Russia's foreign legion: Hundreds of fighters join pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine". *ABC News*, 22 September 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-22/foreign-fighters-join-pro-russian-rebels-in-eastern-ukraine/6792696> (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Neumann, S. "Russia's Parliament Approves Putin's Call For Troops In Ukraine". *NPR*, 1 March 2014. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/03/01/284345466/russias-parliament-prepared-to-authorize-crimea-intervention> (Accessed: 25 December 2015)
- Oliphant, R. "Vladimir Putin revokes Russia's mandate for use of military force in Ukraine Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko welcomes move to scrap controversial law authorising Russian use of force in country as a 'first step' towards peace". *The Telegraph*, 24 June 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10922531/Vladimir-Putin-revokes-Russias-mandate-for-use-of-military-force-in-Ukraine.html> (Accessed: 25 December 2015)
- Peleschuk, D. "Ukraine is still at war — and its bloodiest battle isn't over". *The Week*, 2 September 2015. <http://theweek.com/articles/574972/ukraine-still-war-bloodiest-battle-isnt-over> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)
- Qena, N. and Scisłowska, M. "Ukraine Separatists Seize Government Bases, Several Killed". *The Huffington Post*, 6 April 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/ukraine-unrest\\_n\\_5444330.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/ukraine-unrest_n_5444330.html) (Accessed: 5 January 2016)



- Segalov, M. "Russia 'accidentally reveals' number of its soldiers killed in eastern Ukraine. 2,000 are said to have died with over 3,200 Russian forces injured". *The Independent*, 26 August 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-number-of-russian-troops-killed-or-injured-fighting-in-ukraine-seems-to-have-been-accidentally-10472603.html> (Accessed: 6 January 2016)
- Ukman, J. "Ex-Blackwater firm gets a name change, again". *The Washington Post*, 12 December 2011. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/ex-blackwater-firm-gets-a-name-change-again/2011/12/12/gIQAXf4YpO\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/ex-blackwater-firm-gets-a-name-change-again/2011/12/12/gIQAXf4YpO_blog.html) (Accessed: 3 January 2016.)
- Воронцов, А. "Тайна артемовской танковой базы. Кто наживается на гражданской войне в Новороссии?". *Свободная Пресса*, 30 July 2014. <http://svpressa.ru/society/article/93980/> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)
- Мусин, М. "Срочно: ночью ополченцы взяли танковую базу в Артемовске с сотнями танков, БМП и БТР". *Anna News*, 20 June 2014, <http://anna-news.info/node/17334> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)
- Петров, И. "Тайна артемовской танковой базы. Откуда у ополченцев тяжелое вооружение". *Zagorod*, 31 July 2014. <http://zagorod.com/blog/43370163167/Тауна-артемовскоу-танковой-базуи.-Otkuda-u-opolchentsev-tyazhelo> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)