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Forced Conversion and Terror

Russia's occupation regime in Ukraine

Russia is transforming the Ukrainian territories it has occupied and annexed into integral parts of its own political, military, economic and ideological regime. To Russify the population, the occupation authorities resort to Soviet practices. The character of Russian rule under Putin is reflected in the occupation practice. On the one hand, people are adapting to the occupation regime. On the other hand, some continue to resist. This shows that there are still opportunities for insubordination.

Russia's war against Ukraine often appears in the media only as an imperial tango that US President Donald Trump dances with Putin. Other aspects of the war have largely been lost sight of. Even before, only a few observers have dealt in detail with the practices of Russian occupation policy.¹ Moscow's aim in Crimea, as well as in the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, is to make them integral parts of its political, military, economic and ideological order through forced Russification. Russification means the liquidation of Ukrainian self-government, the octroi of Russian state structures, the replacement of pro-Ukrainian personnel, the militarization of public space and the conversion to Russian as the only official language. Russification includes Kremlin-controlled media, the mandatory introduction of Russian curricula in schools, the renaming of cities and streets,

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¹ Nikolay Petrov: Russia in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine. Policies, Strategies and Their Implementation, SWP Comment 2024/C 38, 5.9.2024. – Maryna Venneri: Russia's Occupation Strategy – the Biggest Long-term Threat to Ukraine's Stability. Middle East Institute, 23.3.2023. – Mykola Homanyuk: Under Occupation. A Chronicle from Kherson, in: OSTEUROPA, 1–3/2023, pp. 69–96. – Tatiana Zhurzhenko: Terror, Collaboration and Resistance. Russia's Rule in the Newly Occupied Territories of Ukraine, in: OE, 6–8/2022, pp. 179–200.

the targeted settlement of Russians as well as the persecution and expulsion of pro-Ukrainian citizens. The people in the occupied territories are to be turned into subservient citizens of Russia. The incorporation of the occupied territories is Russia's largest infrastructure project.²

Russification is based on Soviet practices after the annexation of the Baltic States in 1940 and after the reconquest in 1944: the mass deportation of the locals, the installation of quisling regents and the simultaneous settlement of Russians.³ Russia is obliged under international law of war and international humanitarian law to protect civilians and non-combatants, to uphold property rights and not to forcibly displace people.⁴ In fact, Russia violates these obligations under international law on a daily basis.

On 21 February 2022, three days before the start of the war, the Russian State Duma passed a law recognizing the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics in eastern Ukraine as independent states – a pretext for annexation. In doing so, Russia no longer pretended to be impartial in the alleged "internal war" in Ukraine. On 30 September 2022, Russia then declared the annexation of four Ukrainian regions (oblast) – Donetsk, Kherson, Luhans'k and Zaporizhzhia – without, however, controlling these areas militarily, let alone politically. After three years of war, the Luhans'k region is the only one that Russia fully occupies, while in the late summer of 2024 it controlled about 58 percent of the Kherson region, 72 percent of the Zaporizhzhia region and 61 percent of the Donetsk region.⁵ At the beginning, Russia did not plan a long-term occupation with its own military and civilian structures, but the repetition of the annexation of Crimea with the participation of local collaborators – the failure of this strategy explains the initial chaos.⁶

In December 2022, the International Organization for Migration counted about 2.9 million people who had left the occupied territories after the full-scale invasion began. According to Nikolai Petrov, the total population of the territories occupied by Russia is estimated at about 3.47 million people. In addition to the war wounded and dead, the victims of Russia's war and occupation policy are both those who were forced to flee and the remaining Ukrainians.

The incorporation of the occupied territories means smashing the existing social fabric. Incorporation means more than mere absorption. Russia exports and imports forms of rule from the occupied territories at the same time, comparable to the former "Chechenization" of Russia.⁷ Similarly, Russia's war and occupation of parts of Ukraine shape the image of Russia in general. The Russian regime crystallizes in the rule of the occupation, it finds its form, its *modus operandi* and its imprint there. The crew to

² Petrov, *Russia in the Occupied Territories* (footnote 1).

³ Romuald J. Misiunas, *Rein Taagepera: The Baltic States. Years of Dependence, 1940–1990*, Oakland/CA 1993.

⁴ Jeff A. Bovarnick, Brian J. Bill: *Law of War Handbook*. Charlottesville/VA, 2010.

⁵ Petrov, *Russia in the Occupied Territories* (footnote 1).

⁶ Homanyuk, *Under Occupation* (footnote 1), pp. 95f.

⁷ Robert Bruce Ware: *Chechenization: Ironies and Intricacies*, in: *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 2/2009, pp. 157–169.

To study is to understand the essence of Russian politics. The practices reveal the intentions in action.

In the occupied territories, data collection is based on personal contacts, on individual communication via "Signal" or "Telegram"; the interlocutors are increasingly afraid to talk openly via telephone lines, Skype or Zoom. There are no reliable statistics. Research collects fragments in order to assemble them into a more or less reliable mosaic. Findings are partly derived from anecdotal evidence. Triangulation is almost impossible, but the alternative would be not to deal with the occupation's practices at all. Under the conditions of autocratic rule, data can only be collected using "guerrilla methods", whereby the security of informants outweighs any academic transparency standard. For the present study, interviews were conducted over the course of 2024 via Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp, Zoom or Skype with people who currently live in the territories controlled by Russia and/or act there in resistance to the occupation. These are mainly professionals from the health, education and business sectors, human rights activists or people who have temporarily lived under Russian control and have either been liberated or fled the Russian-controlled areas. In addition, the report is based on "Open Source Intelligence" (OSINT), (social) media reports and secondary literature. Systematic intelligence gathering is hampered by the lack of physical access to Russian-controlled territories – an information policy that is an integral part of the Russian war effort. Despite the legal affiliation of the Donetsk People's Republics (DNR) and Lugansk (LNR) as well as Crimea to Ukraine, we will limit ourselves in the following analysis to the newly occupied parts of the Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions.

Who are the occupiers?

Initially, the Russian invaders had expected a lightning-fast capture of the entire Ukrainian territory, including Kyiv. The Kremlin had previously prepared a kind of Gauleiter among the regional collaborators and ethnic Russians. According to Russia's plan, the territories were to be taken without significant resistance. The entire regional administrations were to be transferred to the side of Russia, only the management personnel were to be newly appointed. But due to the resistance of the Ukrainians, the Kremlin had to create its own occupation organs.

The branches of government in the occupied territories were formed according to a unified plan and with the same methods and human resources. In Russia, the deputy. Head of the Presidential Administration, Sergej Kirienko, and the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. Prime Minister Marat Chusnullin was entrusted with the integration of the occupied territories into the Russian system of government. Further responsibilities lie with the Minister of Construction, Irek Fajzullin, and another deputy mayor. Prime Minister, Dmitrij Černyšenko, who is responsible for the digital economy, science and education.⁸ Kirienko supervises the elections

⁸ Petrov, Russia in the Occupied Territories (footnote 1).

in the occupied territories, cooperation with political parties, public organizations and youth policy. Kirienko reports to the Directorate of Domestic Policy and the Directorate of Public Projects of the Kremlin. He organized the pseudo-referendums and elections in the occupied territories in September 2022.⁹ The control and administration of the occupation authorities of the regions is carried out by employees of the Kremlin administration, who nominally hold positions in the regional or local parliaments. The Kremlin has thus created a vertical of power similar to that in other regions of the Russian Federation.

In May 2022, Sergei Kirienko stated that Russian regions would take over the patronage of the regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics.¹⁰ That patronage was then extended to the Russian-occupied parts of the Zaporizhia and Kherson regions. It includes funds for construction and rehabilitation work, the provision of materials, equipment and skilled workers, as well as financial contributions to national defence and the secondment of middle and lower level leaders. Administrators (curators) from Russian regions are regularly assigned to a specific occupied region. Thus, the Krasnodar region is responsible for the occupied part of the Zaporizhia region. The Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Krasnodar Region has taken over the patronage of parts of the Zaporizhia and Kherson regions. The Kremlin is shifting some of the economic burden of the occupation onto the regions. As Nikolai Petrov notes, "tens of thousands of citizens from almost all regions of Russia, as well as guest workers, are directly involved in the restoration and construction of transport and utility infrastructure, housing construction and enterprises."¹¹

Russia had selected the personnel for the occupation before the full invasion of Ukraine and prepared them accordingly. From the beginning of March 2022 to the end of April 2022, however, the formation of an executive for the crew initially sank into organizational chaos. The local Ukrainian administrations were either evacuated from the conquered territories or were only able to perform their previous tasks to a limited extent due to the blockade of roads and communication routes by the Russian armed forces. From May 2022 onwards, mixed

"military-civilian administrations" for Kherson, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv and Mykolajiv, in which repressive and administrative tasks were combined. As of November 2022, the Ukrainian regional administrations were dissolved, while the district, city and settlement administrations were essentially retained. The administrative structures and the executive at the regional level followed Russian standards.

⁹ Occupied regions of Ukraine vote to join Russia in stages referendums. Npr.org, 27.9.2022, <www.npr.org/2022/09/27/1125322026/russia-ukraine-referendums>.

¹⁰ On this and the following, see Petrov, *Russia in the Occupied Territories* (footnote 1).

¹¹ Ibid.

Personnel

Since the plan to subjugate Ukraine with a lightning victory failed, the Kremlin was forced to use collaborators to form lower-level executive bodies, not all of whom had experience in public administration. This led to administrative chaos in the occupied territories and the collapse of the civil service. The supply of food and medicines was temporarily interrupted. The Russian occupiers used personnel prepared by a "Russia-wide program for the selection and training of managers" and initiated by Kirienko. The winners of this competition "Leaders of Russia", as well as graduates of advanced training courses in public administration at the Russian Academy of National Economy, received key positions in the executive and representative bodies of the occupation authorities. These persons were selected by the Russian presidential administration and instructed to control the occupation authorities.

Even before Russia's full invasion, leading quislings such as Vladimir Sal'do (Kherson region) and Yevhen Balyc'kyj (Zaporizhia region) were prepared by the Kremlin administration for their roles as leaders of the occupied regions, and they were in regular contact with their Russian curators.¹² The rapid formation of the occupation authorities, the holding of rigged referendums and elections, and the adoption of laws show that the Kremlin was in a great hurry to integrate the conquered territories. The structure of executive bodies in the occupied territories has similarities. Only a few Ukrainian politicians continued their careers in the occupation administrations controlled by Russia. In addition, local personnel were usually selected only to demonstrate that the desire for secession from Ukraine comes from the local population. Some of the local collaborators come from a criminal background, while the actual management and financial decisions are always made by curators sent from Moscow.

In the occupied territories, aspiring Russian administrative officials can advance their careers. One example is DNR Prime Minister Vitaliy Khotsenko. At the age of 36, he was appointed to the head of the DNR in June 2022 without any connection to the Donbass. In March 2023, he was already at the head of the Omsk region in the Russian Federation. Ukrainian middle-level officials, i.e. specialists from the fields of transport, education, medicine and local government, were usually retained. The already Russified officers of the LNR/DNR formed a personnel reserve to fill posts in the police, the tax service, the state security service (MGB) and the ministries in the newly occupied Zaporizhia and Kherson regions. Russia's leadership instructed the educational institutions in the "old" occupied territories of the Donetsk People's Republics (DNR) and Lugansk (LNR) to prepare personnel for the police and the state security service MGB in the newly occupied territories. At all universities of the LNR/DNR,

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Saldo>, – <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yevgeny_Balitsky>.

the entrance examinations were abolished. Anyone with a secondary school diploma was accepted and even received a scholarship to fill the staffing gap. The Academy of the Ministry of the Interior of the DNR, the Military Lyceum and the Military Infantry School offered food, a uniform and a scholarship, which was a weighty incentive for collaborators.

The regional center of the Kherson region was captured by Russian troops between March 1 and 3, 2022. In the first two weeks, disorder reigned in the region. The collaborators on whom the Russian invading forces relied and whom they already knew mostly had a past as pro-Russian activists or local politicians who hoped to maintain or improve their status. The most prominent collaborator in the Kherson region was Vladimir Sal'do, who was officially appointed head of the military-civilian administration of Kherson by the Russian military on April 26, 2022.

On March 16, 2022, a "Committee to Save the Kherson Region" was established. Its members included Kirill Stremousov, who headed the Kherson regional branch of the Socialist Party of Ukraine in 2017–2019 and joined the pro-Russian *Deržava* (State) party in 2021; Igor' Semenčev and Sergei Čerevko, both of whom stood in the 2019 elections to the Ukrainian parliament; Tat'jana Kuzmič, member of the Russian nationalist union *Rusič*; Dmitry Savlučenko, founder of the pro-Russian organization *Novaya Rus'* (New Rus) and Georgy Kalenov, who appeared as an anti-Maidan activist in 2013/14.¹³ These collaborators had publicly expressed pro-Russian views and had probably been recruited by the Russian security services before 2014.

If you look at the staff of the Kherson Regional Duma and the Legislative Assembly of the Zaporizhia region, you can divide the deputies into different categories and determine their motivation. Both Russians and collaborators were elected to the representative bodies. In the Kherson Regional Duma, the ratio between Russians and collaborators was 35 percent to 65 percent, in the Legislative Assembly of the Zaporizhia region it was 27 percent to 73 percent. Russia relied mainly on collaborators, but a quarter to a third were Russian officials, thus questioning the rhetoric of national self-determination.

The collaborators among the regional parliamentarians can be divided into several categories. First, there are those who belonged to pro-Russian parties such as the *Communist Party of Ukraine*, the *Party of Regions*, the opposition *Naš Kraj* bloc or the *Volodymyr Sal'do bloc*. A second category is those who had already violated the law in Ukraine and worked in public administration or business. Their motive for working together was or is to avoid prosecution. A third group are those who had publicly expressed pro-Russian views in Ukraine and were associated with pro-Russian non-governmental organizations. The fourth category includes "proven collaborators" who have already gained experience in business and public administration in Crimea since 2014.

¹³ "Komitet spasinnja" z kolaborantiv Sal'do, Stremousova ta Semenčeva. Vgoru.org, 16.3.2022.

A large group of deputy staff are those who were already members of parliament before the invasion. A significant number of them were associated with pro-Russian parties and movements and expressed pro-Russian views before the full-scale invasion. The next category is collaborators who belonged to the public service and agreed to cooperate with the occupiers after the invasion. Another category of collaborators are scientists who hoped for career advancement. The main motivation of most people from different backgrounds is career hopes and a common worldview with the occupiers. The collaborators' motives were also efforts to preserve their own company and social upgrading.

Repressive organs

The security organs for the occupation of the Kherson and Zaporizhia regions were created in three stages between February 2022 and January 2023. Before the start of the military invasion on February 24, 2022, the Federal Security Service (FSB), through infiltrated agents in the government and administrations of Ukraine, conducted a preparatory operation to identify two categories of people: potential collaborators and opponents of the occupation. They focused on public and political figures, journalists, former participants in the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) and members of the Ukrainian security forces who wanted to isolate or liquidate the occupiers. Russia's leadership had lists drawn up with Ukrainian politicians and other prominent personalities who were to be arrested or killed after the attack on Ukraine.¹⁴ The Kremlin's plan did not provide for the creation of separate punitive units. The main tasks of the FSB officers, who entered Ukrainian territory with the Russian troops as part of the so-called temporary task forces, were to ensure the safety of their own troops and to interrogate Ukrainian prisoners of war. All measures to suppress the resistance should be carried out by newly established local security services, the successors of the Ukrainian secret service SBU in the regions under the supervision of an FSB representative from Russia.

The failure of the Kremlin's strategy to conquer Kyiv and the initial massive resistance of the civilian population led to a change in approach: members of the FSB were directly deployed for surveillance. From mid-March 2022, the FSB assessed the rather chaotic situation and suppressed the mass protests.¹⁵ From about April

¹⁴ Rossiya sostavila spiski tech, kogo nužno arestovat' ili ubit' v Ukraine pri vtorženii – SMI. Pravda, 19.2.2022.

¹⁵ Na Chersonščyni rosijany zatrymali ponad 400 ukrajinciv čerez protesty. Zachid.net, 9.3.2022. – Chersonci znovu vyjšly na skciju protestu – rosijany vidkryly vagon'. Ukrinform, 24.3.2025. – U Chersoni vstanovyly okupativ, jaki braly učast' u sylovych rozgonach učasnykiv myrnych protestiv. Intent.press, 20.9.2023. – Chvylja akvij protestu proty okupaciji prokotylasja Chersonščynoju, Golos.com.ua, 6.3.2022. – "By tut ne nužny": u Chersoni ne vsčuchajut' protesty proty okupaciji (video). Glavkom.ua, 14.3.2022. – Kherson znovu nyjšov na bagatotysjačnyj myrnyj protest proty rosijs'kych okupativ. Youtube, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAyCN9jadyo>. – Chersoncy znovu vyjšly na akciju protestu – rosijany vidkryly vagon'. Ukrinform, 24.3.2025.

In 2022, the Kremlin decided to establish "state security services" in the occupied territories to systematize their work. These services were nominally staffed by collaborators, but were completely subordinate to Russian FSB officers. After the annexation of the territories in October 2022, Russia began to build full-fledged FSB units, which now systematically took care of the identification and subjugation of the pro-Ukrainian population on the ground. The repertoire included extrajudicial repression, torture, physical and moral pressure, as well as the denial of food, water and medical care.

The main task of the temporary task forces was to ensure the security of the occupying forces and the new occupation authorities until the moment of the change of power in Kiev and Ukraine. The tasks of these groups included counterintelligence for the troops, the screening of Ukrainian prisoners of war, so-called filtration and the fight against resistance cells.

Since the plan to install a Moscow-subservient government in Kiev in a coup d'état had failed, and the occupying forces were confronted with numerous protests in the cities of Kherson, Heničes'k, Novaya Kachovka and the village of Kalančak, the FSB officials were forced to switch to combating mass protests. In the first ten days of March 2022 alone, they arrested around 400 demonstrators.¹⁶ However, the demonstrators were not deterred and took to the streets in similar numbers the following week. Protest instead of jubilation, chaos instead of order, the FSB officials were not prepared for this.¹⁷ However, the number of demonstrators subsequently fell as a result of the systematic arrest and kidnapping of the organisers of these protests.

In the second phase, a separate security service was set up for occupation purposes; in April/May 2022, according to the Ukrainian prosecutor's office, Russia created the so-called State Security Service of the Kherson region. It consists of the Head of the Service, the "M" Department, the Counterintelligence Department, the Constitutional System Protection and Counterterrorism Department, the Operational Investigations Department, the Information Security Department, the Economic Security Department, the Investigations Department, the Special Purpose Department ("Alpha"), the Internal Security Department, the Technical Assistance Department, and the Finance and Defense Department Economy. About 70 people were involved in the establishment of this so-called State Security Service.¹⁸ This service entrusted management tasks to several employees who had previously been Ukrainian employees of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and who had already betrayed Ukraine between 2014 and 2022.¹⁹

The employees of the State Security Service of the Kherson region usually participated in the search and arrest of Ukrainian citizens, including pro-Ukrainian activists, opponents of the occupation authorities, Ukrainian servicemen or saboteurs. Repression took place without a court order, the State Security Service

¹⁶ Na Chersonščyni rosijany zatrymaly ponad 400 ukrajinciv čerez protesty. Zachid.net, 9.3.2022.

¹⁷ Christina Martynko: Žiteli Chersona protestujut pod obstrelami rosijskich okkupantov: My ne boimsja! Kherson – eto Ukraina!. Korotko pro, 5.3.2022.

¹⁸ Its main location was the building of the Kherson Economic Court, Teatral'na, 18.

¹⁹ V Hersonskoy oblasti "načal'nykom FSB" mogut naznačyt' ěks-glavu SBU vremen Janukovyča Jakymenko. 24tv.ua, 21.6.2022.

forced confessions and self-incrimination or false statements about family members, such as that they belonged to sabotage and reconnaissance groups or supported the Ukrainian armed forces.²⁰ Identified employees of the Kherson Region State Security Service participated with several collaborators in the abduction of Ukrainian citizens, inflicting bodily injuries on them, using electric shocks, depriving them of food and water, and denying them the necessary medical care.²¹

Ukrainian law enforcement authorities identified several FSB employees responsible for illegal arrests, physical violence, mock shootings, theft and forced collaboration, including Yuri Beljackij (*6.4.1980) and Sergei Sinicyn (*14.10.1975).²² Sinicyn coordinated punitive actions against Ukrainian citizens, intelligence operations and subversive actions in the region. He also contributed to the introduction of the ruble zone in the occupied territories and the transfer of the Russian tax system to the occupied territory. The final stage of the Russification of the security organs began in January 2023 and included the establishment of a full-fledged FSB Directory of the Russian Federation in the Kherson region.

On the instructions of Moscow, law enforcement agencies were created in all occupied territories. Violent actions against Ukrainian citizens were carried out even before the official establishment of these bodies. The stages of building security agencies in the Zaporizhia region are similar to those in the Kherson region. The State Security Service of the Zaporizhžja Region was only formally established at the end of June 2022. As in the Kherson region, it was headed by a former high-ranking official of the Security Service of Ukraine, Sergei Ganža. Management positions were mainly filled by people from the FSB.

Police

The build-up of the Russian police in the occupied territories went through three phases, the first of which lasted from February to March 2022. Public security was initially entrusted primarily to the Russian National Guard, whose task was to violently suppress Ukrainian protests. Phase two lasted from April to December 2022.²³ Now a police authority was created that acted pseudo-independently of the Russian police. The final phase began in January 2023 with the establishment of a full-fledged regional security agency in accordance with

²⁰ Povidomlennja pro pidozru ta povistky pro vyklyk Sal'do V.V., Bjelosedova O.M., Lamtyugova S.V., Marčuka A.O., Noskova K.Ju. (ukrayins'koju i rosijs'koju), Prosjanoka V.O., Suprunenka O.L. na 11.10.2023, 12.10.2023, 13.10.2023, <www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/povidomlennja-pro-pidozru-ta-povistki-pro-viklik-saldo-vv-bjelosedova-om-lamtyugova-sv-marcuka-ao-noskova-kyu-prosyanoka-vosuprunenka-ol-na-11102023-12102023-13102023-ukrayinskoyu-i-rosiiskoyu>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Služba bezpeky Ukrajiny: Povidolennja pro zminu raniše povidomlenoji pidozry ta povidomlennja pro novu pidozru, 5.5.2023, <www.gp.gov.ua/storage/files/9/05052023/укр/підозри/Підозра%20Ліпандін%20В.В.%20-%20керівник%20ОЗ.pdf>.

²³ On the National Guard in general: Margarete Klein: Russia's New National Guard. Strengthening the Power Vertical of the Putin Regime, in: OSTEUROPA, 5/2016, pp. 19–32.

the organisational and personnel structure of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation (MVD).

In contrast to the more or less uniform establishment of FSB units in the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, the formation of police units of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia was outwardly similar, but also different. Until the end of 2023, a police duumvirate ruled in the newly occupied regions. In addition to the official Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, the so-called "temporary departments" of the Ministry of the Interior. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, about 400 former Ukrainian police officers have been working for Russia's law enforcement agencies in the occupied territories since October 2023. Another 400 police officers were investigated for possible cooperation with the occupying forces.²⁴ According to a convicted collaborator who had worked in the main department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Kherson region from July to September 2022, of the 6500 officially approved positions, about 1000 had actually been filled.²⁵ The police personnel consisted largely of collaborators, i.e. former employees of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, employees of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and newly recruited members of the local population.²⁶

The offenses and crimes committed by the occupation police include the kidnapping of Ukrainian citizens, extradition to torture prisons, participation in torture, illegal searches of private premises, looting of property and theft, appropriation of weapons, theft in enterprises, requisition of enterprises for "official" purposes, control of electoral commissions, and organizational involvement in the falsified referendums.²⁷ Initially, units of the National Guard of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardiya) entered Ukraine as a vanguard together with the columns of the Russian Armed Forces. From the beginning of March 2022, the National Guard, under the leadership of Major General M. Kalupin, commander of the 50th Infantry Division, suppressed the Major General M. Pešakov, who commanded a tactical group of the National Guard in Grozny, Chechnya, and Colonel A. Naumenko, Deputy Commander of the National Guard. Head of the National Guard Department for the Rostov region, local protests.²⁸ They were the main perpetrators of the repression of public assemblies, kidnappings, illegal detentions, the use of physical force and torture. Naumenko's activities began on March 9, 2022

²⁴ Polices'kych, jaki zalyšylysja v okupaciji ta perejšly na bik voroga, menše niž piv vidsotka, vsim jim povidomleno pro pidozru – golova Nacpolicii. Interfax. 10.10.2023.

²⁵ Kollaboracija v okupirovannom Chersone: "Kak porjadočnaja doč", ja pošla narušat' zakon". Justiceinfo.net, 20.6.2023.

²⁶ Valentyna Romanenko: Prosecutors expose ex-intelligence officer while studying Russia's trail in crimes against Maidan protesters. Ukrainska Pravda.com.ua, 13.10.2023.

²⁷ Čelovek-pauk. Kto i kak sozdaval set' pytočnych v okkupirovannoj Chersonskoj oblasti. Liga.net, <<https://projects.liga.net/torture-chambers-r/>>.

²⁸ SBU povidomyła pro pidozru dvom generalam rf, jaki komanduvaly prydušennjam myrnykh protestiv pid čas okupaciji Chersona. SSU.gov.ua, 20.7.2023, <<https://ssu.gov.ua/novyny/sbu-povidomyła-pro-pidozru-dvom-heneralam-rf-yaki-komanduvaly-prydušennjam-myrnykh-protestiv-pid-chas-okupatsii-khersona>>.

with the seizure of a prison and the arrest of pro-Ukrainian activists. From March to October 2022, Naumenko's subordinates were involved in the violent detention of at least 145 Ukrainian citizens. Over time, Rosgvardija's units also provided auxiliary services to the FSB and the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Rosgvardija's tasks included not only the suppression of mass protests, but also the protection of strategic facilities, including nuclear power plants. Thus, in the first days of the war, the 22nd and 102nd Operational Brigades of the National Guard (from the Volgograd region and Dagestan, respectively), as well as two regiments from the Nižny Novgorod and Krasnoyarsk regions, took over the Zaporizhia nuclear power plant (Enerhodar NPP) and dispersed local protests. Hauptmann K. Judin vom 376.Operational battalion of the National Guard from Dagestan led the violent dispersal of a peaceful rally in March 2022 and ordered the use of force against residents of the city of Enerhodar.²⁹

In general, Rosgvardija in the Zaporizhia region was assigned a "zone of responsibility" that stretched from Enerhodar to Kachovka in the Kherson region, a distance of 150 km.³⁰ local residents reported that the Chechen regiment Akhmat named after Akhmat Kadyrov, the OMON battalion *Akhmat-1* and the *southern battalion* of Rosgvardija from Grozny were conducting "filtration operations". Rosgvardija also carried out punitive actions in other regions. In the Berdjans'k district in the Zaporizhia region, Chechen Rosgvardiya troops under the leadership of battalion commander A. Eldarov searched for Ukrainian patriots and detained them under inhumane conditions, beat them, staged mock executions and tortured with electricity, among other things. Their goal was to force locals to cooperate and extort information about pro-Ukrainian activists.

Two curators from the Russian Federation, Sergei Sinicyn of the FSB and Aleksandr Toptygin of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, gave instructions on the establishment of the regional occupation police. The so-called Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Kherson region was established by Sinicyn and Toptygin with the support of three (former) Ukrainian citizens (V. Lipandin, V. Bobryšev and N. Savina) no later than April 29, 2022. Until February 2014, the collaborator Lipandin had been the head of a department of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Čerkasy region. During the Maidan protests, Lipandin was then responsible for the suppression of local demonstrations. On 24 February 2014, Lipandin was dismissed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs and subsequently moved to occupied Crimea, where he took Russian citizenship. He founded a private security company (Drakar) in the city of Evpatorija. An arrest warrant was issued in Ukraine on 24 June 2014, proceedings were opened against him on 9 August 2014 and an international arrest warrant was issued against him on 12 November 2014. On May 1, 2022, Lipandin was finally officially declared a collaborator.³¹

²⁹ Vstanovlení imena rosiijan, jaki čynjat' vijs'kovi zločyny v okupovanomu misti Zaporyz'koji oblasti. Zprz.city, 9.7.2022.

³⁰ "Kadyrivci" na okupovanomu pivdni Ukrajinu: vykradennja, šantaž, vbybstva. Ukrajina Kryminal'na, 19.12.2022.

³¹ Dos'je Lipandin Volodymyr Vitalijovyč. Most.ks.ua, <<https://file.most.ks.ua/d/lipandin-volodymyr-vitalijovyč/>>.

The further appointments to the "Main Department" show that the goal of the Russian curators was to fill the police administration with personnel loyal to the Kremlin as quickly as possible. The heads of police departments appointed from Moscow sometimes transferred leading positions in the new police administration to personal acquaintances. Formally, the construction of the police apparatus was completed with the registration of the Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation in the Kherson region on January 11, 2023. Lipandin was appointed head of the department, while his four deputies were from Russia.

The establishment of the occupation police in the Zaporizhia region followed a similar pattern to that in the Kherson region. The final takeover of the police by the Russians began in January 2023, when the Zaporizhia Regional Administration was transformed into a unified organizational and personnel structure of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The main department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation in the Zaporizhia region and that of the Kherson region were officially registered in Russia on January 11, 2023.

Forms of oppression

The Russian authorities used "carrots and sticks" in the occupied territories to consolidate their control. A small group of collaborators accepts the carrot. The majority of the population, however, was and is aware of the extensive pressure from the Russian occupiers. The main tasks of the repressive regime are to break the Ukrainian resistance, to prevent the activities of pro-Ukrainian citizens and to identify the part of the population that does not accept the occupation authorities but also does not actively participate in the resistance. A special task is to prevent the activities of the Ukrainian special forces. The occupiers were and are not able to track down all of Putin's enemies, even if they rely on prepared lists of loyal Ukrainians and data obtained through "filtration".

Countless people were subjected to so-called "preventive punitive measures". The "preventive measures" used by Russian *siloviki* include the "cleaning" of settlements, raids, restriction of movement, filtration, mass arrests, torture, executions, deportation to Russia, and expulsion with subsequent confiscation of property. The long-standing indoctrination of the *siloviki* in Russia has nurtured deep hatred among them against everything Ukrainian, even against people who are not connected to the resistance movement.

Filtration

The filtration camps are centers where the occupying forces register, interrogate and detain Ukrainian citizens.³² Initially, the filtration camps were mainly used to transport large parts of the population in the newly occupied

³² Russia: "Filtration" of Ukrainian Civilians a "Shocking Violation" of People Forced to Flee War, September 2022.

areas. However, after the permanent occupation administration began its activities, its focus shifted to fighting the resistance movement in the occupied territories. The main purpose of filtration is to search for and identify opponents, be they activists, military personnel, ex-ATO participants, people with an explicitly pro-Ukrainian stance and Ukrainian military personnel. Filtration is also used to collect personal data, to create a database for subsequent naturalization (passport issuance; Russian: paspor-tizacija) and to identify those who have evaded this registration, as well as to ward off pro-Ukrainian espionage. Those who refuse to accept a Russian passport face restrictions on their freedom of movement and access to health care and education. Ukrainians without a Russian passport who are in the occupied territories are classified as foreign nationals. At the beginning of March 2025, Russia's Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokolcev reported that 3.5 million passports had been issued in the occupied territories.³³

Filtration is mandatory for the entire population of the occupied territories; no one can move through the occupied territories without prior filtration. Anyone who has gone through the filtration process receives a stamp from the occupation administration in their passport. A person who has not undergone filtration in the allotted time and is discovered while traveling in the occupied territories will be immediately arrested and taken to a filtration camp or a remand prison of the police, FSB or National Guard. If a person registered in the occupied territories has not undergone filtration in the first weeks of the war and has returned to Ukraine via the Russian Federation or EU countries, the filtration process will be carried out on the border with the Baltic States or the border between Finland and Russia. After the occupation of Ukrainian territories, the Russian military administration set up a wide network of checkpoints, arrest points and filtration camps.

The checkpoints could be set up every 500 to 1000 meters on main roads. This density can also be explained by the operators' desire to receive bribes for the passage. By the summer of 2022, there were 20 filtration camps in the occupied territories. At the end of 2022, according to the human rights commissioner of the Ukrainian parliament, Dmytro Lubinec, filtration camps existed in all cities.³⁴ The occupying troops carried out mass filtration in the first months of the war after a large number of inhabitants had to flee and wanted to leave for the unoccupied territories or for Russia.

Filtration was carried out according to a standard method developed by the FSB. Men and women were separated, children were held together with women, and all were fingerprinted. The detainees had to strip naked because the occupiers were looking for weapons, hidden valuables or documents such as military ID, ATO participant ID cards or pro-Ukrainian tattoos

³³ Russia Finishes Issuing Passports in Occupied Ukrainian Regions, Putin Says. *Moscow Times*, 5.3.2025.

³⁴ "Je oznaky henocydu". *Fil'tracija na okupovanyh terytorijach posyljuet'sja?* Radio Svoboda, 28.2.2025.

or to identify traces of weapon use.³⁵ cars and personal belongings were searched. When parents were arrested, the children were separated from them. Mobile phones were read and examined for Ukrainian symbols, anti-Russian statements and links to the Ukrainian military.³⁶

The interrogators had to fill out a questionnaire or undergo a lengthy interrogation in which interrogators asked provocative questions and exerted pressure. Their goal was to obtain information about the whereabouts of Ukrainian troops, attitudes towards Putin, Russia and the so-called special military operation. Witnesses reported that they were beaten during these interrogations. Even underwear in a camouflage pattern, which resembles the uniforms of Ukrainian soldiers, can be a reason for arrest. By 2023, an estimated 1.6 million people have undergone filtration.

The filtration warehouses can accommodate a large number of people. The well-known camps have a capacity of 400 to 600 people. Residents of the occupied territories refer to the camps as concentration camps. As a rule, those who have not passed the controls are still imprisoned in the camps. They are either held in dungeons or prisons of the occupiers or executed. The Ukrainian police identified an FSB agent, the son of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovyč's head of security, who ran a filtration camp in the Zaporizhia region and who was responsible for the illegal detention of Ukrainians, the search of their property, violent interrogations, violence and simulated executions.³⁷ Although the Occupied Territories are formally annexed and incorporated into the Russian Federation, the border between the Occupied Territories and Russia visibly remains. There is a filtration camp in Taganrog to which all persons who are screened out by the FSB during checks at the border crossings with the Russian Federation are taken. The detainees are housed in barracks under strict security precautions and await their interrogations and the lie detector test, hoping to be released afterwards.

The occupiers' practices include cleaning up settlements, raiding villages and gatherings in cities, such as markets, supermarkets or recreational areas. It happens that a village is surrounded by troops of the Russian National Guard, the inhabitants are checked and interrogated, all houses are searched and the phones are checked to find those with Ukrainian SIM cards. Searches also take place after the population has been temporarily evicted. For example, in the town of Rubižne in the Luhans'k region, more than 300 people were displaced under the pretext of demining and the occupying forces then searched the houses in the absence of the residents.³⁸

³⁵ Operacija "fil'tracija". Čerez ščo prochodjat' ukrajinci, jaki opynylsja pid rosijs'koju okupacijeu. Mipl.org.ua, 23.5.2022.

³⁶ V okupovanyh Oleškach rosijsany zdijsnjujut' fil'tracijni zachody. Kherson.rayon.in.ua, 22.12.2023.

³⁷ Sudytymut' agenta FSB – syna načal'nyka ochorony Viktora Janukovyča, jakyj kuruvav fil'tracijnyj tabir Zaporiz'kij oblasti. Nacional'na policija ukraijiny. 2.4.2024, <www.npu.gov.ua/news/sudytymut-ahenta-fsb-syna-nachalnyka-okhorony-viktora-ianukovy-cha-iakyi-kuruvav-filtratsiinyi-tabir-v-zaporizkii-oblasti>.

³⁸ U Rubižnomu vorog proviv fil'traciju meškanciv pislja bombarduvannja RF-Centr nacsprotyvu. Ukrinform.ua, 25.3.2025.

Russia is recruiting men in the occupied territories for the war effort. Raids also serve to identify men who want to evade this forced mobilization for the Russian army. This forced mobilization has been taking place since at least autumn 2023. Some Ukrainians, who were originally created for Russia's invasion and were among the first to obtain Russian citizenship, are now desperate about mobilizing their sons for Russia's army. Ukrainian law enforcement agencies have identified 67 places of detention of Ukrainians, including filtration camps, pre-trial detention centers and penal colonies for Ukrainians, 42 of which are located on the territory of the Russian Federation.³⁹ As of 6 February 2024, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee's Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) had identified 1505 Ukrainian civilians detained in 51 locations in the occupied territories of Ukraine and 39 locations in the Russian Federation. The MIHR experts suspect that the actual number of detainees is four to five times higher.⁴⁰

Torture

The systematic use of torture against Ukrainian prisoners of war and detained civilians is widespread. A former Ukrainian prisoner reported that he had heard from the head of one of the prison camps: "You can do what you want with the *Khochly*! They are Nazis!"⁴¹ Victims are often tortured before they are executed. Beatings, torture and rape take place not only in detention centres, but also in the homes of Ukrainians. Employees of Russian authorities have carried out torture on Ukrainians in seven regions of Ukraine and Russia. They involved members of the armed forces, the Federal Security Service, the National Guard and employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN). A UN commission of inquiry confirmed this.⁴²

The torture methods vary, but always cause severe pain and suffering to the victims and lead to long-term physical and psychological suffering.⁴³ Ukrainian prisoners of war, for example, reported difficulty breathing, sleeping and walking, broken bones and teeth, as well as bleeding, swelling and infections or gangrene on various parts of the body. They also suffered from visual disturbances and injuries to the internal organs. In an April 13 report,

³⁹ Valentina Pustiva: Ob"javleno podozrenye kuratory fyl'tracyonnogo lagerja na Zaporož'e. Korrespondent.net, 24.1.2024.

⁴⁰ Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR Ukraine), Hans Thoolen on Human Rights Defenders and their Awards. Humanrightsdefenders.blog, 1.7.2024.

⁴¹ <www.youtube.com/shorts/WsEeFr_I79w>. *Khochly* is a derogatory term used by Russians for Ukrainians.

⁴² UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine finds Additional Evidence of Common Patterns of Torture by Russian Authorities, United Nations in Ukraine. Ukraine.un.org, 23.9.2024, <<https://ukraine.un.org/en/279437-un-commission-inquiry-ukraine-finds-additional-evidence-com-mon-patterns-torture-russian>>.

⁴³ In addition, the impressive field report by Stanislav Aseyev: Heller Weg, Donetsk. Report from a torture prison. Frankfurt/Main 2023.

In 2023, *Human Rights Watch* documented cases of torture of individuals detained at the pre-trial detention center at 3 Teploenergetikiv Street in occupied Kherson. One of the victims recalled:

There were five men. [. . .] They were all beaten. One was shot in the leg. Another had a broken rib. We heard screams all day and all night. People were screaming at three o'clock in the morning and at night. [. . .] Medical care [. . .] was not granted to anyone.⁴⁴

The electric shocks had different effects depending on the condition of the victim's body. What matters is whether the body is dry or wet – in some cases, prisoners of war were taken straight out of the shower. The strength of the current, the length of the part of the body through which the current was conducted (between the fingers of one hand or through the whole body), and the source of the current (stun gun, battery, dynamo) are decisive factors for the effect of the torture. Of all the forms of electric shock, the one used on the genitals is the most torturous. Beatings and electric shocks are used as torture methods on all prisoners of war and detained civilians in Ukraine and in the facilities of the Federal Penitentiary Service.⁴⁵

According to former Ukrainian detainees, FSB officers ordered the guards (military personnel or FSIN employees) to "work" with the detainee before interrogation. As a rule, these are beatings and electric shocks, symbols (especially the letter "Z") were carved into the prisoners' bodies with nails or other sharp objects (as in colony No. 1 in the Tula region), body parts (fingers) were cut off, teeth were ground down with carpenter's tools or body parts were clamped with pliers. Dogs were let loose on the prisoners, as happened for example in the pre-trial detention centre in Voronež. The simulation of executions is also part of the torture repertoire. Often a person is placed against a wall or has to kneel down, whereupon the guards then aim at the person's head at close range and fire or shoot blanks from a distance.⁴⁶ prisoners are being held under inhumane conditions. In Russia, 23 Ukrainian prisoners were locked in a six-bed cell and 14 to 16 prisoners in a four-bed cell. In occupied Olenovka, the prisoners were housed in three-by-four-metre cells without beds, only with a metal table and chairs.⁴⁷ Medical care was denied or inadequate. The food was miserable, the portions small, and in some places it was only allowed to eat for two to seven minutes. Victims report that they suffered from extreme hunger, which led to severe weight loss, and that they fed on worms, soap, paper and dog food scraps. In some facilities, access to showers and toilets was restricted, or a hole in the floor was used as a toilet.

⁴⁴ Ukraine: Russian Torture Center in Kherson. Unlawful Detention, Torture of Civilians During 8-Month Occupation. Hrw.org, 13.4.2023.

⁴⁵ V rosijs'komu poloni: ščo vidbuvajet'sja z ukrayins'kymy vijs'kovymy za stinamy rosijs'kich tjurem. Mipl.org.ua, 23.6.2023.

⁴⁶ Ukraine, Russian Torture (footnote 45).

⁴⁷ Kolonija v Olenivci: misce, ščo stalo peklom. Suspil'ne Donbas, 9.8.2022.

Rape and sexual violence were the order of the day. Some employees of Federal Penitentiary Service facilities raped men with rubber truncheons.

Population exchange

According to Article 49 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, it is prohibited under all circumstances to transfer or deport protected persons, individually or en masse, from the occupied territory to the territory of the occupying Power or to the territory of another State, whether occupied or not.⁴⁸ In addition, the occupying Power may not transfer or deport any part of its civilian population to the territory it occupies. Although the agreement gives the occupying power the right to carry out a general or partial evacuation from a given territory if necessary to ensure the safety of the population, Russia is de facto carrying out mass deportations of the Ukrainian population from all occupied territories, including those deep in the hinterland. Russia's policy is aimed at deporting a significant number of the adult population and Ukrainian children to Russia.⁴⁹ Child abduction is a criterion for the offence of genocide. Russia forcibly expulses Ukrainian citizens from their permanent residence to the territories controlled by Ukraine (and subsequently confiscates their property) and in turn relocates Russians from Russia to the occupied territories.⁵⁰

It is difficult to give exact figures on the deportees. On 5 December 2022, the Human Rights Commissioner of the Ukrainian Parliament, Dmytro Lubinec, noted that since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, about 2.8 million Ukrainians have been forced to leave the country or forcibly transferred to Russia.⁵¹ Two weeks later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi said that about two million Ukrainian citizens had been deported, confirming that it was difficult to establish exact figures.⁵² According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 2.5 million Ukrainian citizens have been deported to Russia (with the caveat that this figure may be inaccurate).⁵³ Regardless of the exact number of Ukrainian people who have been displaced, detained or deported, demographic change is noticeable in everyday life – there is a massive shortage of skilled workers, including doctors.

⁴⁸ Article 49 – Deportations, transfers, evacuations. ICRC, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49>>.

⁴⁹ Andreas Umland: Russia's Child Abduction. Ukrainian victims, international reactions, in: OSTEUROPA, 6–7/2024, pp. 35–49.

⁵⁰ Elina Beketova: Behind the Lines: Russia Strips Ukrainians of Their Homes. CEPA.org, 19.7.2024.

⁵¹ Stalo vidomo, skil'ky ukrajinciv pid čas vijny bulo deportovano do RF. Glavkom.ua, 5.12.2022.

⁵² Prezydent: rosija deportovala blyz'ko dvoch mil'joniv ukrajinciv, sered nych bagato ditej. Ukrinform.ua, 25.3.2025.

⁵³ Za danymy OON, kil'kist' deportovanyh do Rosiji ukrajinciv stanovyt' ponad 2,5 mil'jony, ale ci dani možut' buty netočnymy. Zmina.info, 19.11.2022.

In May 2023, Russia's State Duma amended the law "On Martial Law", thus de facto legalizing the deportation of the Ukrainian population.⁵⁴ Article 7, entitled 'Measures in areas where martial law has been imposed', was supplemented in order to legalise the practice in point 12.2: 'Forced and controlled movement of citizens from the area where martial law has been imposed to areas where martial law has not been imposed'. With Decree No. 756 of October 19, 2022, Putin imposed martial law on the territory of the DNR, LNR, Zaporizhia and Kherson.⁵⁵

Preparations for the "reception of refugees" in Russia began at least a week before the start of the military invasion. On February 18, 2022, Putin ordered the Minister of Emergency Situations to travel to the Rostov region to receive refugees from Donbass.⁵⁶ On the same day, the Governor of the Rostov Region ordered the introduction of a high alert level, namely:

in connection with the risk of an emergency situation associated with the expected increase in the arrival of citizens from the areas bordering the Rostov region and the need to ensure their livelihoods in temporary shelters and food centres.

The next day, the same governor declared a state of emergency in the region – "in connection with a significant increase in the arrival of citizens from the areas adjacent to the Rostov region".⁵⁷ On 21 February 2022, the governors of the Moscow and Penza regions, which do not border Ukraine, issued similar orders to admit Ukrainian citizens.

On March 12, 2022, Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Mišustin signed Resolution No. 349:

On the distribution of citizens of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic and stateless persons permanently residing in the territories of Ukraine, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic who were forced to leave the territories of Ukraine, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic and who arrived on the territory of the Russian Federation in a mass emergency, to the subjects of the Russian Federation.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Federal'nyj konstitucionnyj zakon ot 30.1.2002 N 1-FKZ (red. ot 13.12.2024) "O voennom položenii". Konsul'tantPljus.ru, <www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_35227/7d26c4e1754d86f891581f27b402a422efd344e0/>.

⁵⁵ Ukaz o vvedenii voennogo položenija na territorijach DNR, LNR, Zaporožskoj i Chersonskoj oblastej. Kremlin.ru, 19.10.2022, <www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69631>.

⁵⁶ Putin poručil vrio glavy MČS vyletet' v Rostovskuju oblast'. Argumenty i fakty, 18.2.2022.

⁵⁷ Rasporjaženie gubernatora Rostovskoj oblasti ot 18. fevralja 2022 goda No 26 "O vvedenii režima povyšennoj gotovnosti na territorii Rostovskoj oblasti v svjazi s ugrozoy vozniknovenija črezvyčajnoj situacii, svjazannoj s pribytiem graždan iz prigraničnyh s rostovskoj oblast'ju territorij". Rg.ru, 19.2.2022, <<https://rg.ru/documents/2022/02/19/rostov-rasp26-reg-dok.html>>.

⁵⁸ Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 12.3.2022 N 349 (red. ot 25.09.2024) "O raspredelenii po sub'ektam Rossijskoj Federacii graždan Rossijskoj Federacii, Ukrainy i lic bez graždanstva, po stojanno proživajuščih na territorijach Ukrainy i Rossijskoj Federacii, vynuždenno pokinuvših žilye pomeščeniya i pribyvših na territorii sub'ektov Rossijskoj Federacii v ěkstreennom massovom porjadke". Konsul'tantPlus, <www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_411374/>.

The resolution establishes the distribution of over a hundred thousand Ukrainian citizens among all subjects of the Russian Federation (except for the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg and the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea).

According to the Ukrainian human rights organization *ZMINA Human Rights Center*, deported Ukrainians report that their documents certifying Ukrainian citizenship have been confiscated in Russia.⁵⁹ In such cases, the person is held hostage and can no longer leave Russia, since the consular missions of Ukraine on the territory of the Russian Federation are unable to operate. Under pressure from local security forces, Ukrainian citizens are thus forced to take Russian citizenship. By deporting Ukrainians to its own territory, Russia is compensating for the domestic demographic crisis.

Prisoners serving their sentences in Ukrainian prisons are particularly affected by forced resettlement. Since the beginning of the war, at least 2500 prisoners have been deported from prisons in the territories occupied by Russia.⁶⁰ In October 2022, during the withdrawal of the invading troops from the right bank of the Dnieper, detainees were transferred to the VK-7 camp (HOLA Prystan' city / Kherson region), then to Simferopol' in Crimea, and finally to Russia. At the end of 2022 / beginning of 2023, the prisoners were distributed to ten colonies in the Russian regions of Krasnodar, Volgograd and Vladimir.

The occupation administration is systematically putting pressure on Ukrainians to take Russian citizenship. Men who do so can then be drafted into so-called assault units, i.e. for suicidal attacks on Ukrainian positions.⁶¹ One method used to blackmail the acceptance of Russian citizenship is the threat of "loss" of Ukrainian documents, which makes it impossible to leave the Russian-controlled territories.

The forced expulsion of Ukrainian citizens began even before the formal annexation of the conquered territories in the fall of 2022. In July 2022, the aforementioned "Gauleiters" of the Kherson region, Vladimir Sal'do, and the Zaporizhia region, Yevhen Balyc'kyi, signed decrees allowing the forced expulsion of Ukrainians for "extreme activities".⁶² The simultaneous signing indicates an order from Moscow.⁶³ Following the annexation of the occupied territories, Putin legalised this type of deportation by decree of 27 April 2023.⁶⁴

Deportation orders can also be extended to Ukrainian citizens who do not actively oppose the occupation, but merely have a different opinion than the

⁵⁹ Za danymi OON, Kil'kist' deportovanykh do Rosiji ukrajinciv stanovyt' ponad 2,5 mil'jony, ale ci dani mozhut' byty netochnymi. *Zmina.info*, 19.11.2022.

⁶⁰ V Rossiju vyvezli okolo 2,5 tysjach zaključennykh s okkupirovannykh territorij. *Pravda.com.ua*, 6.4.2023.

⁶¹ Russia to Intensify Forced Mobilisation in Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine – National Resistance Center. *Ukrainska Pravda*, 10.02.2025. – Russia Starts Drafting Ukrainians From Occupied Territories. *Newsweek* 20.11.2024.

⁶² V Rossiju vyvezli okolo 2,5 tysjach zaključennykh s okkupirovannykh territorij. *Pravda.com.ua*, 6.4.2023.

⁶³ Kollaborant Balickij rasskazal o massovoj deportacii ukraincev. *Tsn.ua*, 23.2.2024.

⁶⁴ Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 27.4.2023 No 307 "Ob osobennostjach pravovogo položenija otdel'nykh kategorij inostrannykh graždan i lic bez graždanstva v Rossijskoj Federacii". Oficial'noe opublikovanie pravovykh aktov, 2.7.4.2023, <<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202304270013>>.

of the occupiers. In a report by the UK Ministry of Defence on March 11, 2024 states: "There is a real possibility that anyone who does not have a Russian passport in the temporarily occupied territories after July 1, 2024 will either be deported or arrested."⁶⁵ Deportation is also a way of confiscating the property of Ukrainian citizens. According to Russian law, the owner must be present at the time of the new registration of real estate. If he is prohibited from entering the occupied territory, the occupiers "nationalize" the property.

Deportation of children

The deportation of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation prompted the International Criminal Court to issue an international arrest warrant against Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria L'vova-Belova. According to Article 78 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, the evacuation of children from occupied territories to a foreign state is prohibited.⁶⁶ Dar'ja Herasymčuk, the Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Child Rehabilitation,⁶⁷ reported that as of 1 September 2023, more than 744,000 Ukrainian children had been illegally transferred to the Russian Federation.⁶⁸ Russia does not provide any information on children who have been abducted. As of March 15, 2024, the following figures on violence against Ukrainian children have been confirmed: 535 killed, 1257 injured, 2088 missing, 13 victims of sexual violence, 19,546 deported or forcibly resettled, of whom 388 returned to Ukraine. The first wave of deportations began even before the large-scale invasion. The deportation of Ukrainian children from boarding schools in the DNR and LNR to the Rostov region of the Russian Federation began on February 18, 2024. The Russian practice can be called kidnapping for the purpose of complete assimilation. The kidnapped children are forced to take Russian citizenship. Following the annexation of territories under Article 5(7) and (10) of the so-called Constitutional Laws on the accession of the DNR, LNR, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions, Russia has legalized the forced acquisition of Russian citizenship by Ukrainian children under the age of 14.⁶⁹ This created a 'legal' basis for the forced renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship and the acceptance of Russian citizenship by Ukrainian children under the age of 14.

⁶⁵ <<https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1767115760466313671>>.

⁶⁶ Dodatkovyj protokol do Ženev's'kych konvencij vid 12 serpnja 1949 roku, ščo stosujetsja zachystu žertv mižnarodnyh zbrojnyh konfliktiv (Protokol I), vid 8 červnja 1977 roku. Verkhovna Rada Ukrajini, 8.12.2005, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_199#Text>. – Umland, Russlands Kinderraub (footnote 50).

⁶⁷ Russia's actions against ukrainian children violate CRC – Commissioner Daria Herasymchuk. [Mediacenter.org.ua](https://mediacenter.org.ua), 30.5.2023.

⁶⁸ Predstavnyky Ofisu Presydynta u mežach prezentaciji proektu Bring Kids Back UA pozpovyly nimec'kym parlamentarjam pro Vykradených Rosijeju ukrajins'kych ditej. [President.gov.ua](https://president.gov.ua), 8.9.2023, <<https://president.gov.ua/news/predstavniki-ofisu-prezidenta-u-mezhah-prezentaciji-proektu-85469>>.

⁶⁹ Podpisan Federal'nyj konstitucionnyj zakon o prinjatii s Rossijskuju Federaciju Chersonskoj oblasti i obrazovanii v sostave RF novogo sub"ekta – Chersonskoy oblasti. [President Rossii, Dokumenty](http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/69516), 5.10.2022, <<http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/69516>>.

According to the Ukrainian human rights organization *Regional Center for Human Rights*, at least 386 children from the occupied territories have been illegally adopted by families in Russia since the end of 2022.⁷⁰ The driving force behind this policy is the Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria L'vova-Belova, who herself illegally adopted a boy from Mariupol who had official guardians in Ukraine. As human rights lawyer Ekaterina Raševskaya claims, Russia's adoption policy is a PR strategy designed to show that Ukrainian children are safe in Russia and to encourage families in the country to adopt children from the occupied territories.

In May 2023, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine and then "Minister for the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories", Iryna Vereščuk, reported that the Russian authorities were changing the identification data of children, i.e. their surnames, first names and dates of birth.⁷¹ This not only makes it difficult for international law enforcement agencies or the countries of adoption to search for the children, but also makes it impossible for future adults to identify themselves as Ukrainians.

Since the summer of 2022, Russia has been deporting children to occupied Crimea and regions of the Russian Federation to children's camps or recreational facilities. Against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, some parents agreed to the relocation, assuming that it would be a temporary arrangement.

The number of places where Ukrainian children are relocated has increased over time: in February 2024, Belarus joined Russia's efforts to relocate children. The aim of the resettled children's stay in a Russian camp is to "reprogram" their consciousness. The children are not allowed to return to the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions after their "summer camps" in Russia. The education of the deported children in the camps is carried out according to Russian curricula. However, after the end of the supposedly temporary resettlement to summer camps, to which some parents had even agreed, the camp administration often refused to send the children back, citing the dangers in the occupied territories and, in the case of the liberated territories, due to the control of supposedly Russian territories by Ukrainian occupiers.⁷²

In 2022, the head of a children's camp in occupied Crimea refused to send the children back to their parents in the liberated city of Kherson, saying that the children were already Russians. Children who held pro-Ukrainian views or spoke Ukrainian among themselves were told that they could not return to Kherson. In some cases, it was claimed that the Ukrainian parents had abandoned the children and no longer expected them to return.⁷³

⁷⁰ Россiяне незаконно усыновили по меньшей мере 386 украинских детей: как происходить геноцид и кто его возглавляет. Zmina.info, 7.12.2022.

⁷¹ VRF menjaju imena i daty roždenija vyvezennym iz Ukrainy detjam – Vereščuk. Corre spondet.net, 31.5.2023.

⁷² Weeks turn to months as children become stuck at camps in Crimea. The Guardian, 27.12.2022.

⁷³ Rosija gotuje vykradených ukrajinských dětí dlja svojich podalšých vojen – sluchannja u Kongreci SŠA. Golos Ameriky, 1.2.2024.

Reeducation

The occupying forces are "brainwashing" Ukrainian children in order to erase their Ukrainian identity. All school subjects are taught exclusively in Russian. Subjects such as history, social studies, literature and geography teach propaganda about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian ethnicity and political institutions in Ukraine. The curriculum includes the study of articles, speeches and interviews of Vladimir Putin. Since September 2022, the topic of "conversations about important things" has been dealt with as part of the extracurricular activities – propagandistic civics, which is known from Russia.⁷⁴ At the end of 2023, beginning of 2024, the topics "Crimea and Sevastopol: 10 years in the home port", "Allies of Russia", "Heroes of our time" (participants in the "Special Military Operation") and "Special Forces Day" were added. The cultural programme includes performances by pro-Kremlin artists, propagandists, politicians, war veterans and members of military organisations from Russia and Belarus, as well as excursions to places of patriotic importance.⁷⁵

A common slogan of educational policy is: "You are the future defenders of our fatherland, Russia!" Indoctrination includes military training in high schools with the participation of former participants in the "Special Military Operation" (including hate propaganda against Ukrainians) for students aged 14 and over, the formation of cells of the Youth Army (*Junarmiya*) in the occupied territories, and the inclusion of children and young people from eight to 18 years of age in the military training of units of the Russian Armed Forces.⁷⁶ In 2023, about 100 *Junarmiya* youths in the regions of Russia enlisted in the Russian army and were sent to the combat zone.

In July 2022, a new youth organization was founded in Russia, including the occupied territories, the "Movement of the First" (analogous to the Soviet pioneer organization), to "shape the children's worldview," as it is called, "on the basis of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values."⁷⁷ On September 1, 2023, a new textbook on modern history was introduced in all schools of Russia and in the occupied territories of Ukraine. The sections of the textbook on the period from the 1970s onwards have been completely rewritten, and a new section on the so-called "special operation" has been added. The textbook justifies the war against Ukraine and is a diatribe of hatred.⁷⁸ One of the professional groups from which the willingness to engage in ideological indoctrination is relentlessly expected are teachers.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Replacing books, militarisation and "conversations about important things". How Russia is changing the identities of Ukrainian children under occupation. Svidomi.in.ua, 4.7.2024.

⁷⁵ V Krymu detskij lager' otkazalsja vernut' rebenka domoj v Kherson. Krym.Realii, 29.12.2022.

⁷⁶ As an overview: <[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Юнармия](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Юнармия)>. – Dar'ja Talanova: "Blood drips from the satchels. Patriotism Education in Russia's Schools, in: OSTEUROPA, 12/2022, pp. 115–126.

⁷⁷ Rosija na TOT zalučyla ponad 100 tys. ditej do propagandyst'kych organizacij, – gromads'ki aktyvisty. Espresso.tv, 26.3.2024.

⁷⁸ Vitalij Portnykov. Pidručnyk amoral'nosti. Krym.Realiji, 10.8.2023. – Tetiana Kotelnikova: Russia is Indoctrinating Schoolchildren throughout Occupied Ukraine. Ukraine Alert, 17.10.2024.

⁷⁹ School Teacher: A High Risk Job under Russian Occupation. Amnesty International, Public Statement, 4.10.2024, <www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Public-statement-Teachers-Ukraine-1.pdf>.

Population policy

The number of Russian nationals in the occupied territories is increasing. By populating the occupied territories with Russians, the potential for protests is reduced. Russia promotes resettlement among its own population to the occupied territories with the promise of higher incomes, career advancement opportunities and cheap housing loans. Most of the vacancies are in the reconstruction of destroyed cities. In August 2023, the deputy Prime Minister Marat Chusnullin has launched a three-year programme for the restoration of the occupied territories.⁸⁰ Between 2023 and 2025, cultural sites and about 2500 apartments and municipal facilities are to be restored. In its report on the regional economy, published in August 2023, Russia's central bank speaks of growing internal labour migration, especially in construction, agriculture and transport. The migrant workers come mainly from the Central Federal District, Siberia and southern Russia.⁸¹ One incentive is higher wages for migrant workers than for natives. For example, the average salary of a construction worker in the DNR is about 40,000 rubles, while resettled workers in Mariupol receive about 100,000 rubles.⁸² Anyone who settles in the occupied territories is entitled to preferential mortgage conditions.⁸³ However, the locals are unable to provide proof of their creditworthiness due to a lack of access to Ukrainian information systems.⁸⁴ Many newcomers from Russia, both military and civilian, take on lucrative posts in the occupation administration, while even local collaborators often lose their positions.

The issuance of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens (passportizacija) has been an instrument of occupation policy since 2014.⁸⁵ People without Russian citizenship are denied basic rights and access to basic services, such as healthcare. Anyone who wants to receive a salary or pension must have a Russian passport. Since Ukrainian banks can no longer operate in the occupied territories, but pensioners are entitled to Ukrainian pensions, a network of money changers has emerged who exchange hryvnia for rubles.⁸⁶ According to a presidential decree of April 2023, residents without a Russian passport are considered foreign citizens from December 2024 and can be persecuted and deported. Without a Russian passport, it is hardly possible to live in the occupied territory anymore.⁸⁷ As soon as a male

⁸⁰ За 3 года регион-шефы восстановят порядок 8400 объектов в новых регионах. *Novosti gtrklr.ru*, 3.8.2023.

⁸¹ Doc "Regional'naja ekonomika: kommentarii JV" Bank Rossii, *cbr.ru*. 12.3.2025.

⁸² Почему в новые регионы едут на заработки. *Vedomosti*, 13.9.2023.

⁸³ Elina Beketova: Behind the Lines: Ethnic Cleansing by Home Loan. Russian Banks are Offering Cheap Mortgages for Homes in the Occupied Territories as the Invaders Seek to Colonize Ukraine and Drive out Local Residents. *Centre for European Policy Analysis*, 23.1.2025.

⁸⁴ Donosy, repressii, zamešćenie naselenija. Čto proisходит на территориях Украины, уже два года оккупированных Россией. *Currenttime.tv*, 26.2.2024.

⁸⁵ Dieter Gosewinkel: The Passport as a Weapon – Russia's Policy of "Passportization". *WZB* 13.4.2022. – Fabian Burkhardt: Russia's Passportization of the Donbas: From a Restricted to a Full Citizenship? *Russia Analyses*, 414/2022.

⁸⁶ Kateryna Panasiuk: Coercion and Control: Life Under Russian Occupation. *Centre for European Policy Analysis*, 6.3.2024.

⁸⁷ Petrov: Russia in the Occupied Territories (footnote 2).

resident of Russia, he is subject to conscription in the Russian army.

Expropriations

Expropriations have been a systematic feature of the occupation policy since 2024/25. The aim is to reward the change from Ukrainian to Russian citizenship and to promote the resettlement of Russians to the occupied territories. As early as September 2014, the inviolability of private property in the Donetsk People's Republic was undermined by a "law" through the procedure for the "introduction of temporary state administrations in enterprises and institutions".⁸⁸ The introduction of "temporary administration" by the separatist authorities in 2014 radically changed the possibilities for doing business in the occupied territories. Now it no longer matters how a company is registered, but only who controls its resources and financial flows. When farmers leave the occupied territories, their property is often looted. Companies are also being looted by Russians and local collaborators.

Property rights are no longer protected, and the search for protection under Russian law is a hopeless undertaking.⁸⁹ businessmen shy away from long-term investments.

Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians had to leave their homes, apartments, shops, gardens and fields behind as they fled the Russian invaders. Russia quickly distributed attractive or at least undamaged properties among its own population. Abandoned workshops, shops and cafés were handed over to new operators loyal to the Kremlin. Soldiers, civil servants and construction workers moved into vacant apartments and houses. In occupied cities such as Mariupol', Melitopol' and Enerhodar, residents reported that entire families had moved in from Russia – into the fully furnished apartments of Ukrainian families.⁹⁰

In the occupied territories, the right to private property depends on Russian citizenship and personal presence on the property or in the company at the time when Russia's authorities decide to re-register the property. Private property can be declared ownerless if the owner stays outside Russia for more than half a year – the occupied territories are treated as Russian territory – and does not pay the bills for an apartment. Refugees or internally displaced persons can thus be easily expropriated. Any potential apartment seeker can report an "ownerless" apartment.

⁸⁸ Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov DNR No 35-8 ot 26.9.2014 g. O porjadke vvedenija vremen-nych gosudarstvennyh administracij na predprijatijach i v učreždenijach. Npa.dnronline.su, 25.4.2015.

⁸⁹ Anatolij V. Kostruba: Nationalization of real estate property in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine: some legal aspects of the protection of civil law. Kieler Ostrechts-Notizen, 2/2014–1/2015, pp. 22–28.

⁹⁰ Ann-Dorit Boy: Russia Moves to Expropriate Homes in Occupied Regions. Spiegel international, 7.5.2024.

Lists of "ownerless" dwellings are regularly published on the website of the Donetsk City Council and are therefore available for confiscation or illegal transfer of ownership. The Russian authorities are taking away apartments and other real estate, including garden plots, by decree.⁹¹ The furnishings and possessions can be considered "ownerless", including documents, photographs and personal effects, if the dwelling itself is marked as "ownerless".

The holders of Ukrainian passports have no rights whatsoever. No real estate agency in the occupied territories works with the property of "foreign citizens". If an apartment is not registered in the Russian real estate register, it cannot be sold, and without a Russian passport, the owner cannot re-register. The same applies to companies, many of which were only provisionally registered in the DNR after 2014, for example. After the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia, it is impossible to re-register companies under Russian rules as a result of Ukrainian citizenship of the owners. The market in the occupied territories is overloaded with properties that cannot be sold, while the owners have no access to their property. Since about 2018, it has been impossible to sell an apartment in the DNR without registering it in the self-proclaimed republics. It is now impossible to sell, bequeath or give away apartments without re-registering them from the DNR registers to Russian registers. If in 2018 in Donetsk it was still possible to sell an apartment from a distance, e.g. from Kiev, by re-registering it in the land registry of the DNR and paying for the services of intermediaries, now, according to Russian law, Ukrainian citizens who fled the occupied territories, including residents of Mariupol', Volnovacha and Donetsk, deprived of all property rights.

Large infrastructure construction projects, especially in Mariupol, illustrate Russia's intention to remain in the occupied territories forever. A new federal highway is being built along the land corridor from Rostov-on-Don to Mariupol' and on to Crimea. Some local highways to the border with Russia are being upgraded as an alternative to the Crimean bridge. The construction of a major railway line in the southern Ukrainian steppe along the coast of the Sea of Azov to Crimea is progressing rapidly. In addition to military logistics, the railway transports goods to the commercial port of Mariupol, which are exported to Russia, especially grain from the occupied territories.

For these construction projects, the old concrete and asphalt plants in Jenakijeve, Mariupol' and Volnovacha were reopened and even new ones were built. In the heavily destroyed frontline district of Volnovacha, the quarries where gravel is extracted have resumed their work. Their operation requires blasting, which has not been allowed in the zone near the front since 2014.⁹² As early as 2022, Chinese companies began investing in large construction projects in the occupied territories.⁹³

⁹¹ Tipovoj porjadok. Vyjavlennija, učeta i prinjatija v municipal'nuju sobstvennost' beschozjanyh nedvižimych veščej i vymoročnogo imuščestva. Gispn-dnr.ru, 27.2.2023.

⁹² <<https://t.me/andriyshTime/28491>>.

⁹³ Andrii Dikhtiarenko: Chinese companies help Russia conduct the "Great Construction" in the occupied Donetsk region. Ukraine Frontlines, 16.2.2025.

"Normalization"

Logistically, the occupied territories are cut off from Ukraine, but have not yet been fully integrated into the Russian transport network. Since 2014, there have been no functioning airports in the occupied territories, neither in Donec'k nor in Luhans'k. Airports in Berdjans'k, Melitopol' or Novaya Kachovka never existed anyway. There is also a lack of direct train connections so far. The Jasinovataja-St. Petersburg has never been put into operation.⁹⁴ The occupied territories are, however, connected to Russia by a dozen trains, the most important of which run from Yasinovataja to Luhans'k and two trains to the Russian border. Even after the annexation, however, the border must be crossed on foot. Then you can take a train to Rostov-on-Don.

Over time, a certain degree of normality returns to the cities that are no longer embattled, people sell vegetables, car repair shops and cafés are working again, meat is available as in the pre-war period. The locals earn money by reselling everything they buy on one side of the border, in Rostov-on-Don or Taganrog or at wholesale markets, in the occupied territories. The border is easy to cross, Rostov on the Don and Taganrog are nearby, and food is cheaper there. Pharmaceutical products are also a business. The most lucrative is the transport industry. In the occupied territories, demand is nourished by the needs of the Russian army. Many of the soldiers and employees in the occupation administrations, who are highly paid by local standards, are driving up prices. New deals, such as the construction of a highway for Russia's troops, are generating revenue. Teachers and doctors who work near the front line receive additional remuneration.

There is a gap between the territories occupied in 2014 and the territories newly occupied in 2022. In Makijivka, in the "old" occupation area, a salary of 20,000 rubles for a teacher is considered normal. The salaries of teachers reach a maximum of 30,000 rubles and are then considered normal. In the newly occupied Volodars'k, for example, teachers earned 80,000 rubles in the first year of the occupation. Teachers with diplomas in the Russian language are rare in the newly occupied territories, while in Donec'k teachers with a specialization in Russian are plentiful. Ukrainian teachers must become Russian teachers.

Lack of service

Even if the living conditions under the occupation forced us to adapt, the Russians could not completely break the insubordination, insubordination and resistance.⁹⁵ Ukrainian military receive news about Russian military movements. Information about the repression is passed on to Ukrainian human rights organizations and journalists. Insubordination is also expressed in the refusal to pay taxes or accept a Russian passport. According to the

⁹⁴ V DNR zapustjat poesda v Moskvu i Sankt-Peterburg. Komsomol'skaya Pravda, 7.10.2019.

⁹⁵ On the Concept of Unservedness Iris Därmann: Undienlichkeit. History of Violence and Political Philosophy. Berlin 2020.

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, 44,171 schoolchildren in the occupied territories received online education according to the Ukrainian curriculum in November 2024. These children are at risk of being denounced and punished at any time; Orthodox priests, among others, participate in the denunciation.⁹⁶

Peaceful protests took place in March and April 2022, but were then suppressed. It was replaced by partisan warfare, largely organised by partisans from the "Yellow Ribbon" (*Žovta strička*).⁹⁷ The military resistance also includes the "Legion of Freedom of Russia" and the "Russian Volunteer Corps", which recruit defectors from the Russian troops and have carried out sabotage actions in the occupied territories, but also in Russia, namely in the border areas of Belgorod and Kursk, especially in 2023 and 2024 in cooperation with the Ukrainian SBU. The commander of the "Russian Volunteer Corps" is the Russian right-wing extremist and White Rex founder Denis Kapustin, who came to Germany in the early 2000s as a Jewish quota refugee.⁹⁸

Ukrainian partisans or special commandos regularly target collaborators in the occupation administration, Russian police and soldiers, and pro-Russian military bloggers. Killings of collaborators and occupiers, damage to Russian vehicles and disruption of Russian-controlled infrastructure and fuel depots are still commonplace today.⁹⁹ The Crimean Tatar Ateš movement (Ateš = fire), founded in September 2022, is particularly well known for this, whose members carried out attacks mainly in Crimea and Nova Kachovka, but also on the Trans-Siberian Railway in Ekaterinburg.¹⁰⁰ The commissioning of the railway line connecting Crimea with Rostov-on-Don along the Sea of Azov had to be postponed several times because Ukrainian partisans disrupted train traffic in the occupied territories.

The resistance increases the cost of self-protection among the occupiers, teaches high-ranking collaborators to fear, contributes to target acquisition for the Ukrainian military and repeatedly prevents the occupiers from replenishing. He denies Russia's liberation narrative and documents that despite the adaptation necessary for survival, there are still opportunities to show backbone. The occupation, collaboration and resistance are becoming part of Ukraine's collective memory, as is the direct experience of violence at the front and in the communities under fire. Anyone who expects Ukraine to be "land for peace" should name the price: terror peace and forced conversion to Putin's Russianness.

Tags:

Occupation, annexed territories, dictated peace, Russification

⁹⁶ Oleksandr Pashkover: When Education Comes with a Risk to Life: How 44,000 Young Ukrainians in the Occupied Territories Receive a Ukrainian Education in Secret. Network for Border-Crossing Journalism, "What about Ukraine" Newsletter, 19.12.2024.

⁹⁷ Yuras Karmanau, Hanna Arhirova: Yellow Ribbon Guerrillas Lead Ukraine's Resistance Effort. Associated Press 9.8.2022, Kyiv, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221013140451/https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2022/0809/Yellow-Ribbon-guerrillas-lead-Ukraine-s-resistance-effort>>.

⁹⁸ <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russisches_Freiwilligenkorps>.

⁹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_resistance_in_Russian-occupied_Ukraine>.

¹⁰⁰ Ateš has a Telegram channel: <https://t.me/atesh_ua/116>.

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