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Who Are the Fighters?

Irregular Armed Groups in the Russian-Ukrainian War since 2014

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Editorial correspondence & manuscripts should be sent to: Dr. Andreas Umland, Department of Political Science, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, vul. Voloska 8/5, UA-04070 Kyiv, UKRAINE; andreas.umland@cantab.net

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Contents

The War in Ukraine and Irregular Armed Groups

Andreas Heinemann-Grüder

The sequence of revolt and organized violence in and around Ukraine since late 2013 culminated in a watershed first in European, then in global politics, following the beginning of Russia's fully fledged war against Ukraine from 24 February 2022 onwards.[1] The violent conflict that escalated over the last ten years represents a multi-causal and multi-dimensional series of events that were not pre-ordained by any master plan. Structural prerequisites and critical junctures created their own path dependencies. Ukraine's post-Soviet nation- and state-building was incomplete and evidenced many vulnerabilities, which turned into entry points for Russia's imperial interference. The crisis of legitimacy, the repeated frustration of popular hopes to overcome kleptocracy, corruption and oligarchic clientelism provided fertile grounds for Russia's aggression and its mobilization of discontent. However, without Russia's military intervention the internal fractures would have remained a domestic affair of Ukraine.

The irregular armed groups that mushroomed in Ukraine as a result of the turn of the originally peaceful Maidan protests into violent insurgency and counter-insurgency were and are critical actors in the conduct of war. Originally, the conflict derived its explosiveness from the deep crisis of legitimacy of the Ukrainian government under the then President Viktor Yanukovich, a crisis that grabbed the center, epitomized by the demonstrations and the insurgency on Ukraine's main square, the Maidan, but extended to the regions as well. Anti-government sentiments were fueled by

1 This publication is the result of a joint project by the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC), the St. Petersburg based Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR) and the Kyiv based Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation (IEAC), which was generously funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. I would like to particularly thank Olena Shevchyk for her diligent research assistance over the years and Heike Webb for her help with editing the English translation.

frustrations over rampant kleptocracy, patronage, clientelism and corruption, as well as the erosion of the state monopoly of violence. The violent conflict was not pre-ordained or over-determined by historical or geopolitical forces or allegedly polar ethnic identities. The organized violence, the experience of massive destruction, harm, torture, repression, pain, trauma and displacement polarized, antagonized and hardened identities. From December 2013 onwards, the use of violence by Ukraine's special forces and right-wing extremist groups was the key trigger for turning the peaceful protest movement on Kyiv's Maidan square into a radical quest for changing the regime, which ultimately led to the ouster of President Yanukovich on 22 February 2014. Latent tensions between pro-European, pro-Russian, nationalist and regionalist as well as Soviet-oriented forces manifested themselves in the course of events.

This volume focuses on irregular armed groups as force multipliers, agents of illicit warfare and self-interested actors of violence. In a project conducted from 2016 onwards and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, teams from the St. Petersburg-based Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR, one of the few remaining independent social science institutes in Russia), the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation (IEAC) in Kyiv and the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) in Germany collaborated on the collective action of irregular armed groups.[2] The war in and against Ukraine provides fertile ground for the study of collective actors formed in the course of violent action.

Why Irregular Armed Groups?

After the change of government in Kyiv in February 2014, and in the course of the Russian intervention in Ukraine's south and east,

2 The CISR team consisted of Natalia Savaleva, Oleg Zhuravlev, Maksim Alyukov, Svetlana Erpyleva, Andrey Nevskij. Particular thanks go to Viktor Voronkov from CISR. The IEAC team consisted of Andreas Umland, Anton Shekhovtsov, Anton Pisarenko, Kostiantyn Fedorenko, Volodymyr Kopchak, Leonid Poliakov and Andrey Matiukhanov. The BICC team included Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and Olena Shevchyk, who built up the project's data bank and contributed to fact-checking, project management, and editing.

the Ukrainian government lost control over parts of its security sector. State-controlled services were defunct or switched sides—a sign of state erosion or even state capture before the Maidan protests. Pro-state militias in turn began to compensate for the paralysis or defection of the Ukrainian security sector. Russia sponsored pro-Russian militias and sent its own armed forces, although under disguise, to the Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

The study of irregular armed groups usually focuses on conducive or enabling conditions, among them political or economic grievances, greed, access to weapons or lootable resources, opportunities such as weak statehood or on onset conditions and conflict triggers such as political murder, terror attacks, pogroms or excessive state violence. A perspective on micro-dynamics looks instead at factors that transform opportunities into action, among them incentives to join an armed group, legitimizing strategies, interaction patterns between state and non-state actors and among irregular groups. Studying micro-dynamics is about the transformation of irregular groups into political or civil society organizations.

Any military is characterized by a defined and known hierarchy, by internalized command structures. None of this was a given in the irregular armed groups. Often, the groups were lumped together on an ad hoc basis; the men fighting together barely knew each other. What characterized their groupness? One of the key capabilities for survival in a combat group is mutual trust, based on a shared sense of purpose and reliable communication. In this respect, the irregular armed groups proved highly vulnerable. Loosely formed groups around a self-declared or chosen leader converted over time into more or less professional combat units with hierarchical structures and command and logistic chains, i.e., into battalions. The term battalion pertains to a military group of the infantry with a size varying between 300 to 1,200 people.

Armies worldwide have used this term differently, but as a rule, a battalion consists of a couple of companies or rotes. In the context of the violent conflict in Ukraine, the term "volunteer battalion" pertains to a distinct military unit with a name, a commander, a headquarters and distinct location, which was mobilized

for the specific purpose of enacting or resisting the Russian annexation of Crimea and the separatism in Donbas. Groups were often summarily called battalions, regardless of their size. The term, therefore, has a broad meaning, and at times battalions were relabeled into regiments or brigades. A battalion consisted, as a rule, of infantry rotes, stormtroopers, reconnaissance, artillery, communication units, a medical unit, and logistics. A rote is made up of up to a hundred persons, these rotes were composed in turn of platoons (взвод). The battalions often fought together with brigades, a brigade usually consisting of 1,500 to 5,000 men. Brigades and battalions are characterized by their capability to act flexibly and autonomously.

The key findings of our project can be summarized as follows: The battalions in the Ukrainian conflict were irregular, but by no means non-state—they represented pro-state militias, either for the Russian de facto regimes in Donbas or the Ukrainian state. Among the pro-Ukrainian battalions, we identified three types: Volunteer battalions that built on right-wing paramilitary organizations; battalions created "from above" by state security apparatuses; and battalions created and sponsored by oligarchs. In comparison, the pro-Russian battalions were either continuations of existing nationalist organizations in eastern Ukraine or were established directly by the Russian state and semi-state sponsors in Russia. The irregular battalions on the Russian and Ukrainian sides were predominantly established by state agencies, i.e., they did not emerge autonomously "from below" but were created and maintained for hybrid warfare or to compensate for the weakness of regular forces.

The relative success (or failure) of battalions was determined by the organizational qualities of the commanders, connections to political, economic and social support groups and their ability to include diverse strata. From 2015 onwards, the vast majority of battalions was transferred to (quasi-)state structures in the areas controlled by Russia and those under the control of Ukraine. Only a few radical right-wing battalions in Ukraine remained beyond state control, while Russian "security agents" brought autonomous battalions and their commanders under hierarchical control too.

A novelty of the irregular battalions in the violent conflict in Ukraine was the recruitment, fundraising and legitimization through social media. For several battalion commanders, participation in the war became a source of social capital to launch a career as a politician. In an environment that was and still is permeated by the presence of irregular battalions, the popular interactions with irregular actors of violence are dynamic, complex and characterized by insecurity, fear and opportunism.

The importance of irregular armed groups for Russia has been increasing since it began its war against Ukraine in 2014/15. These irregular armed groups act in coordination with the Russian Ministry of Defense, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the foreign intelligence service and the presidential administration. Russia's mercenaries practice exterminatory warfare and operate as parallel or shadow armies, which can rarely be held accountable.

Russia's infamous Wagner group and its successor organizations are one of the remnants of the war in 2014/15. Its combatants specialize in capturing cities, they provide agile ground forces for reconnaissance, sabotage operations and the indiscriminate liquidation of people attributed to the opposing side. The relationship between regular and irregular groups is strenuous. There are repeated complaints from irregular combatants that Russia's regular army puts them at a disadvantage when providing them with weapons, ammunition, vehicles, food and other supplies or sends them on high-risk missions without support—the main reason for the mutiny of the Wagner group against the Ministry of Defense in Russia.

Beyond the war in Ukraine, Russia`s irregular armed groups turned into an instrument of Russia's foreign and security policy. They can be deployed flexibly and covertly and cannot be held accountable for crimes—or only to a limited extent. Within their missions, business interests and military objectives are intertwined. Beyond Ukraine, Russia's military companies serve to destabilize pro-Western and stabilize anti-Western governments, for example, in Syria, Libya, Mali, Sudan or the Central African Republic. They prepare for, support and complement the deployment of regular forces and are likely to operate at a lower overall cost than regular forces.

Deaths and injuries among irregular combatants are officially invisible. The exploitation of lucrative gold, diamond, oil or gas deposits is an expression of the economic and political fusion of oligarchic and military interests that lie behind these private military companies. Russian irregular armed groups interact with the Russian Ministry of Defense, especially the military intelligence (GRU), as well as the FSB, the foreign intelligence service (SVR) and the presidential administration. They complement but do not replace regular security organs.

The term "armed conflict in Donbas" or "war in Donbas" has been common since 2014. However, the region of violent conflict is not identical with "Donbas"—Donbas is linked to the Donetsk coal basin, which includes part of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but also parts of Dnipropetrovsk region and Rostov region of Russia. On the other hand, the northern parts of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts (historically belonging to *Slobozhanshchyna*) and the southern part of Donetsk oblast (Azov region) are not included in Donbas. The label "armed conflict in Donbas", frequently in use until February 24, 2022, incorrectly excluded Russia's annexation of Crimea and the later ambition to undermine Ukraine's existence as an independent nation-state. With Russia's launch of a war of annihilation of Ukraine as a sovereign state, the term "Donbas conflict" is even more misleading—the war results from Russia's aggression, not internal strife.

The war in Donbas is part of the overarching Russian–Ukrainian inter-state armed conflict that began with the Russian aggression in Crimea in February 2014. The organized violence shifted from violent clashes between Maidan and anti-Maidan forces in early 2014 to separatism sponsored and conducted by Russian-controlled military from March/April 2014 onwards to an enduring rivalry between February 2015 to 2022 and the resumption of a fully-fledged war by Russia against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The violence polarized and antagonized identities which in turn provided feedback loops to further violence.

Starting with the war against Ukraine in 2014, the irregular armed groups have become agents of influence of the Russian autocratic regime, war profiteers and auxiliary forces for state security

agencies. Russia's irregular armed groups reflect the Russian regime's aggressive, criminal and oligarchic nature, the privatization and commercialization of organized violence, the coexistence of regular security agencies and state-terrorist shock troops and the competition of various security agencies over resources and access to political power.

No war ends with a return to the status quo ante, each war transforms the role images and the behavior of adversaries. Wars undermine trust in agreements and common goods. Communicative ties dissolve, intermingled societies fracture and split apart. War fosters enmities which were not present in the first place. Latent resentments turn into manifest enmity, and any outlook at future peace and reconciliation will have to take long periods of emotional demobilization and recognition of inflicted pain into account.

Organizations of Russian Nationalists in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Nikolay Mitrokhin

Why did Russian nationalist organizations exist outside Russia and particularly in Ukraine? What role did they play in the occupation of Crimea and the Donbas region? Were they agents of the Russian state or autonomous actors? In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of the organizations of Russian nationalists in the post-Soviet area and their relations with the authorities of the Russian Federation. These organizations are frequently of a paramilitary nature, armed Russian nationalism has access to firearms and explosives.[1] Depending on the situation, they can be supplied by the black market or government agencies, or they may be the spoils of war. "Armed Russian nationalism" refers to the non-governmental and network organizations based on ideas of Russian nationalists, including those that are fully or partially under state control.

The utmost mobility of Russian national3ists and their willingness to participate in the paramilitary activities and the real war, as well as their exceptional brutality and determination, came as a complete surprise to external observers of the war in Donbas starting in spring 2014. Small groups of pro-Russian "volunteers" reinforced by local militia were able to fight the divisions of the Ukrainian Army and special forces for months. This raised the question of whether this was a war with "volunteers" or with a professional army (Mitrokhin 2015a; Mitrokhin 2015b; Mitrokhin 2017).

The following analysis is based on publications in the media, on websites of socio-political organizations and social networks as well as interviews conducted by the author from 2015 to 2018 in Ukraine and Russia. A peculiar source of information is the correspondence between a whole string of "masterminds" behind the acts of aggression in Ukraine, which was hacked by Ukrainians and

1 http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=20010661.

published by the Ukrainian media or phone calls of the same individuals which were intercepted by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and made public.[2]

The movement of Russian nationalists already existed in the last decades of the USSR as an independent social movement (Mitrokhin 2003). The first legal organizations of Russian nationalists were founded in 1987 and by the end of perestroika, they were already in the hundreds. It is widely assumed that all of them were or are run from Moscow and that they, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, are directly supervised by the Russian secret service. However, even a brief look at the history of Russian nationalism from 1987 to 2017 reveals that the matter is not quite that simple. Russian nationalists both in Russia and abroad were in opposition to the executive power first of the Soviet Union and later of Russia. The umbrella organizations of those in favor of keeping the empire in the republics of USSR, such as the International Fronts and the United Works Councils that closely collaborated with Russian nationalists, criticized Moscow for the absence of real support and later on suspected a "betrayal" of Russian speakers abroad. Russian nationalists inside Russia were skeptical about democratic reforms; they supported the dissolution of the USSR (i.e. they opposed Mikhail Gorbachev) and then, just as consistently, opposed Boris Yeltsin (Laruelle 2003), the new president of the Russian Federation. They not only criticized Boris Yeltsin vigorously and persistently on various occasions but also his successor Vladimir Putin, remaining in opposition to both of them (Smith 2002). In the late 2000s, the Russian authorities started to pursue repressive policies against the oppositional part of the movement of Russian nationalists. Some of their radical leaders and ordinary activists ended up behind bars, while others were forced to immigrate (Pribylovski 2015). A considerable number of Russian nationalists supported the mass protests against electoral fraud in big cities of Russia in the

2 A substantial amount of data concerning the involvement of Russian nationalists in the events in question has been published. Hundreds of Russian nationalists have given interviews to the media, some have published their memoirs. Dozens of Russian nationalists' organizations are proud to be part of the intervention in Ukraine and publish relevant information about their involvement.

winter of 2011/2012. Indeed, some radicals from these backgrounds became part of Ukrainian volunteer battalions in 2014 to 2015.

Despite their public criticism of Putin the radical nationalists were keen to contribute to the development of the "Russian World" project, promoted by Russian ideologists. This resulted in the active participation of Ukrainian and other post-Soviet states' Russian nationalists (foremost in Belarus and Latvia) in the so-called *Russian Spring,* a series of public protests and riots in eastern and southern Ukrainian cities from November 2013 to May 2014 leading to Russia's occupation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region.

Social Framework of the Russian Nationalist Movement

The dissolution of the USSR left a huge number of people unemployed. In Russia, various members of the formerly privileged classes who had been serving the empire (foremost the military, Party officials, and low-level propagandists) felt humiliated and debased. After the defeat of the "national patriotic" forces in October 1993—the coup attempt in Moscow—, some became activists of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church has evolved into a major, though not parliamentary, party of Russian nationalists and has influenced both Russia's domestic and international po9licy (Mitrokhin 2006). Even though the USSR ceased to exist more than thirty years ago, these groups of the debased in Russia and in the post-Soviet states alike underpin the movement of Russian nationalists. The analysis of such activists' biographies (the author studied no fewer than 200 of them) leads us to the following social strata: Military and law enforcement personnel, engineers on the payroll of large enterprises belonging to the military–industrial complex, teachers of the Russian language and culture or Cossack culture (for instance, directors of choirs and dance groups), highly qualified human sciences scholars, studying Russian history or philosophy, specializing in Slavic studies or clergy and monkhood of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the 1980s, a considerable part of

the heads of Russian nationalist organizations were political officers in the Soviet Army, military reporters, policemen and local Komsomol officials. The family members of the representatives of the aforementioned social groups (wives, children) play an active part in the Russian nationalist movement as well.

Types of Organizations and Their Coordination

Russian nationalists belong to a wide range of ideological platforms. Apart from Russian nationalists proper, there are "protectors" of the interests of the white race, Slavs, Cossacks, Orthodox Christianity, Russian culture and language, "the traditions of our ancestors" (Russian neo-Paganism), of the USSR, of "the honor" of the Russian (Soviet) officers, "the commemoration of the feats of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War", defenders of the honor and dignity of specific Russian football and hockey teams, supporters of the National-Bolshevik as well as Eurasian ideologies (Bassin; Pozo 2017), and also communists. The contemporary communists represent a highly blurred ideology and practice, they are primarily united by the idea of reviving the USSR. Regardless of the differences in publicly announced concepts, the ideology of Russian nationalism, namely the idea of defending Russians ("our people", "Slavs") from external and domestic enemies, is predominant and serves as the basis for their cooperation and consolidation. These movements are also characterized by a high level of anti-Semitism, intense anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant sentiments, as well as anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism.

Russian nationalist organizations employ two main types of communication and cooperation. On the one hand, they maintain contacts at the local level within their city or region; on the other hand, the majority of them is incorporated into the network of organizations of the same ideological line that have vertical links to the headquarters, usually in Moscow. A considerable number of these organizations' activists could, in fact, simultaneously represent a variety of vertical network organizations and be at the same time an Orthodox activist, a monarchist, a biker from the *Night Wolves* (biker club), a re-enactor (i.e. a constant participant in the

games recreating specific battles of the past), a veteran of the air borne forces or of the Afghanistan war and have a wealth of previous experience in being part of some other organizations.[3] The permanent squabble, i.e. hostile competitiveness and unconstructive criticism, inside the community of Russian nationalists, allows its members to be well acquainted with all the other activists, at least in their own city. Often the major tactics of nationalist organizations do not coincide with the declared principles of action. An Orthodox parish, for example, could function either as a mere religious community or as a center for political and cultural propaganda or it can also serve as a center of paramilitary units. The latter is true for many so called "Cossack" parishes, where one of the priests is a confessor of the Cossack community and they consider this temple "their own".

The following types of organizations can be distinguished: cultural and subcultural (for instance, bikers and re-enactors), religious, propagandistic, lobbying and sports organizations, political parties, mass media, commemoration communities (some real and some to be found only online, from the organizations of the "Afghanistan veterans" to websites such as "we lived in the USSR" in social networks), organizations of "actionists" (holding actions for the mass media and spectators), paramilitary groups (i.e. uniformed members , official headquarters, weaponry), including some private security companies, and armed underground units.

Armed Russian Nationalism

The armed underground movement of Russian nationalists emerged during the Transnistrian conflict at the end of 1991—beginning of 1992. It was based on the blending and joint activities of Russian nationalists with a common social background—former veterans of the Afghanistan war, mostly soldiers of various special forces (air borne forces, GRU special forces, airborne assault units). After the war, many of them served as low-ranking personnel in the law enforcement. Those were former low enforcement agents

3 http://petrimazepa.com/ru/nonwhite.html.

who formed the Riga OMON, Cossacks from Southern Russia and members of political organizations of Russian nationalists from big cities (some of them were young people who had not yet served in the army).[4] The crucial factor for establishing the underground network was the ability to get hold of unregistered firearms.

Former members of the Riga OMON, a special police unit, became the core of the armed underground movement of Russian nationalists. OMON squads were established in 1988 and were officially pronounced to be detachments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the armed support in the fight against organized crime. But in fact, they were used to disperse public meetings and other forms of mass protests. Initially, OMON squads were controlled by the KGB and GRU and were composed of former members of such elite units of the Soviet Army as air borne GRU special forces, airborne assault units, border guards and marine corps. Many of them served and fought in Afghanistan. In the former USSR republics, their main task became the fight against separatism and ethnic conflicts. After the failed putsch of August 1991 against Gorbachev, a considerable part of the Riga OMON along with their families and vast amounts of unregistered weapons confiscated from the local republican police were evacuated to the City of Tyumen, Russia.[5]

However, shortly thereafter, part of the unit led by its commander Cheslav Mlynnik moved to Transnistria, where they assumed leading positions in the detachments fighting against the Moldovan authorities to establish control over the rebel enclave on the left bank of the river Dniester. It was these armed groups, founded by the former OMON members (and some of their mentors from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Latvian SSR), that attracted volunteers from among Cossacks and other Russian nationalists. In the aftermath of the armed part of the conflict in the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, some Russian nationalists were

4 OMON = in Russian Отряд мобильный особого назначения (mobile special purpose unit of the Russian National Guard).

5 Aleksandr Petrushin Tyumen Secrets of Riga OMON, Tyumen Courier16 September 2006, (No. 124-125); Tyumen Courier 25 September 2006 (No. 128); Tyumen Courier 30 September 2006 (No. 131), http://svpressa.ru/society/article/41768/.

willing to carry the war on, frequently under the leadership of that same Mlynnik, who turned into the main recruiter of volunteers and mercenaries. "His" combatants were engaged in combat operations in Abkhazia (1992-1993), in Moscow (October1993), in the former Yugoslavia (1993-1995) and in Chechnya (1993-1996).[6]

Mlynnik and some members of his unit moved to Saint Petersburg in early 1992. There, Mlynnik and Roman Tsepov, the owner of a private security company providing security services to Anatoly Sobchak, the Mayor of Saint Petersburg, had business together.[7] Tsepov was the key middleman between the criminal underworld of the city, law enforcement authorities and the Mayor's office. In the following years, right up to the day he was poisoned in 2004, Tsepov managed to retain his authority in the underworld relying on his relationship with Vladimir Putin.[8] In the 2000s, Mlynnik was the representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the settlement in Abkhazia and held the rank of colonel in the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.[9] No information is available concerning his activities after 2008. In one of the interviews, he stated that he "serves his country" but offered no further details.[10]

The impact of the Transnistrian region of Moldova and the Riga OMON on the war in the Donbas region is quite tangible. Vladimir Antiufeyev, the former mentor of the Riga OMON at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Latvian SSR (and afterwards the Minister of Public Security in the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldavian Republic in 1992-2011), became the Deputy Prime Minister for Security Issues of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in summer of 2014.[11] Aleksandr Boroday and Igor Girkin, the future Prime Minister and chargé d'affaires for security and defense of the Donetsk People's Republic respectively, began their political careers

6 http://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2016/11/12/1566341.html.
7 http://konkretno.ru/2010/03/19/aleksandr-nevzorov-nazval-strashnuyu-cenu.html.
8 http://www.compromat.ru/page_16478.htm.
9 He was referred to as a retired colonel in an interview: http://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2016/11/12/1566341.html.
10 https://www.fontanka.ru/2016/10/28/156/.
11 http://zavtra.ru/blogs/pyat-vojn-generala-antyufeeva-.

as combatants in the Black Sea Cossack Host in the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic.[12]

The network of armed Russian nationalists began to grow exceedingly after 1992, escaping the direct control of one single person or even a group of individuals. Several substantive factors affected its development. A considerable number of Russian nationalists was engaged in the armed confrontation with the pro-government forces in October 1993 in Moscow, and most of them were obviously radicalized. The First Chechen War gave Russian nationalists an opportunity to acquire combat experience either in the army or in various police and even Cossack divisions. Russian nationalists got access to unregistered firearms and provided the underground movement with fresh manpower from the former military who felt frustrated and willing to fight their unfinished battles.[13]

On the background of these episodes of violence, the neo-Nazi organization Russian National Unity started to grow rapidly. It had numerous regional units (even in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States), which incorporated former military into their political structures and in private security companies. The sustained armed hostilities in Yugoslavia were instrumental for recruiting armed nationalists and to establish contacts with radical Serbian nationalists. The Russian National Unity became the first fully-fledged, long-lived and full-scale paramilitary organization of Russian nationalists in the modern Russian history (Likhachev 2005). Despite its internal crisis and de facto break-up in the early 2000s, its former members, first of all Ukrainian nationals, played a significant role in Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Cossack organizations became another essential element in armed Russian nationalism. Like the Russian National Unity, they combined radical forms of Russian nationalism (and occasionally neo-Nazism

12 http://strelkov-i-i.livejournal.com/9119.html.

13 In 2005, a former commander of a GRU brigade, Vladimir Kvachkov and his former subordinates were accused of arranging an attempted murder of Anatoly Chubais, a famous Russian politician of the Yeltsin years. Though Kvachkov was acquitted of the attempted assassination of Chubais, he was shortly afterwards arrested and convicted of creating an underground organization consisting of former military who were preparing an armed insurrection, https://ria.ru/society/20091020/189647285.html.

as well) with commercial (private security companies) and criminal activities.

In the 2000s, new characters with no combat experience but with membership in radical neo-Nazi organizations were continuously joining the armed underground movement. They were looking for firearms to use in terrorist activities against their political opponents and their number one enemy—labor migrants. Two of them became the most notorious. The Fighting Force of Russian Nationalists in the mid-2000s committed several high-profile political murders in Moscow.[14] The gang's main hit man was a former marine from Sevastopol and an FSB warrant officer.[15] Another gang, the *Savior*, organized a series of explosions, including the massive terrorist attack on August 21, 2006 at the Cherkizovsky market in Moscow, which entailed a significant number of victims (14 people died, 61 were wounded). It was founded by an "Old-Believer", a hand-to-hand and knife combat instructor and yet another FSB warrant officer.[16]

The so called archaeological looters, who searched the battlefields of World War II for weaponry and artefacts with the intent of selling them, supplied these gangs with firearms and explosives. Re-enactment movement became the legal part of this fairly common business. On certain commemorative dates, reenactors staged mass performances dressing up in the uniforms of the armies of various historical epochs. In the 2000s, the re-enactment movement started to enjoy the authorities' special attention. It was seen as a great opportunity to be utilized for patriotic education, since re-enactment was genuinely popular among a broad audience.[17]

Knife combat clubs and sports clubs for various "Russian" martial arts (such as "slavjano-gorickaja borba", "Russian" and "Cossack" fighting style) served as a cover for neo-Nazi armed gangs. In these clubs, teenagers were introduced to the world of right radicalism and neo-Nazism and taught how to kill with a knife quickly and effectively, knives designed to kill were sold. In

14 https://batenka.ru/protection/born/.
15 https://theins.ru/politika/8873.
16 http://www.newsru.com/russia/08aug2007/vzryv_4erkiz.html.
17 https://graniru.org/opinion/mitrokhin/m.238381.html.

general, the whole network of the armed underground movement, including communities of local war veterans, Cossacks and neo-Nazis, was not very expanded—probably around one hundred individuals all over Russia. It was mainly controlled by the Russian secret services, monitoring the radical elements.[18] However, the network was substantially assisted by support groups and therefore stayed operational.

This milieu split over the events in Ukraine. Those who served in the Soviet and Russian armies unequivocally adopted the official interpretation, which was declared by the Russian authorities. Although they were right-wing extremists and Russian nationalists, their main idea was the protection of the Russians and Russia. Persons who did not have such military experience, rather took the Ukrainian side, since their political ideal was a white supremacist state and not a state of exclusively Russian people. They were not ready to go into battle against their brothers-in-race. They perceived contemporary Russia as a country where ethnic minorities and migrants would receive too much support from the state. At the same time, they saw Ukraine as still a Slavic land. Ukraine's official support of the openly right-wing extremists batallions (first and foremost the Azov Regiment) provided neo-Nazis with opportunities for self-expression, obtaining legal weaponry and realization of their own political significance. Both parts of the movement eventually came together on the Donbas battlefields.

New Techniques of Controlling Russian Nationalists

In the 1990s, the organizations and parties of Russian nationalists were constantly in conflict with Russia's acting executive branch. In the 2000s, the situation changed dramatically. At that time, the presidential administration of the Russian Federation began to establish a management system for controlling all significant segments of the Russian political scene and began to actively cooperate with the Russian leader's potential allies abroad (Laruelle 2012).

18 For instance, Igor Girkin, an FSB colonel, was also a moderator of the Forum of Collectors, where far-right groups could buy weaponry; he was also a coordinator for part of the volunteers willing to participate in combat operations.

The new publicly announced ideology was based on the idea of Russia "getting up from her knees", strengthening herself, punishing her numerous domestic and external enemies and, de facto, beginning to rebuild the lost USSR.

Already in the early 2000s, a network of semi-official organizations was established in order to manage social and political "projects". Through these organizations, official communication was carried out and public funds were distributed. One of these organizations was the *Civic Chamber*, founded in 2005 for supervising the "third sector". Another example is the Council for Matters of Cossack Communities by the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation founded in 2009. The outsourced employees of political funds close to the Kremlin monitored such projects directly. They practically acted as civil servants without being officially on the governmental payroll.[19] This allowed the governmental authorities to hire experts specializing in political and dubious criminal activities. At the same time, private organizations which officially had nothing to do with the presidential administration of the Russian Federation could always be held responsible for the actions of these experts (Wilson 2005). This is how, through the "Institute of Commonwealth of Independent States Countries", the so called "Russian Spring" in Ukraine was coordinated.

In the 2000s, the cooperation with internet activists and social networks became a significant part of the activities of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation. In 2013-2014, pro-Kremlin internet communities turned into an important propaganda and mobilization tool in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but the major communities and groups had been created long before the conflict started (Mitrokhin 2015).[20] The revival of the "USSR victory in the Great Patriotic War" mythology along with the respective symbolic connotations and projections into the modern age proved to be one of the key unifying ideas for these activists (Demmel 2016). According to this mythology, the war between "our people"

19 Author's facebook interview with one of the former members of such an organization. March 2018.

20 On the organizational structures of such societies see: http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/8848.

and "fascists", which included all kinds of "Russia's adversaries", was not over yet (Jablokov 2016). Accordingly, every supporter of Russia should be an anti-fascist and prepare himself for the upcoming imminent battles. Numerous on-line activists understood this message as an invitation to by ready for guerrilla warfare. This virtual support was quickly transformed into a real one thanks to the sport and military-patriotic clubs as well as to an active distribution of various educational and guidance materials such as the ones promoting the actions of GRU saboteurs.[21]

The *Rodina* political party, one of the Kremlin key political agents, who supervised the pro-Russia actions in Ukraine in the winter and spring of 2014, issued a triumphant manifesto after the annexation of Crimea and stated:

> "Social patriots from Rodina were the first to utilize anti-Nazism in combat against both external enemies of Russia and corrupt pro-Western liberals inside the country, who forever disgraced themselves by supporting the anti-Russia powers in Ukraine and, therefore, committing treason."[22]

Eventually, the pro-Russian organizations, first of all the ones supporting Russian nationalism in former Soviet Republics and in exile, were integrated into a hierarchical, central management scheme in Moscow. The leaders and activists of these organizations relied on "credible" information channels usually broadcasting from Moscow, such as TV channels, newspapers, on-line publications, renowned bloggers or internet communities. They were able to create a specific discourse environment for their readers, which allowed them to manipulate the readers extensively and was ultimately aimed at stimulating the desire to move from reading and sympathizing to real actions.[23] Thirdly, the organizations with no vertical subordination structure were offered horizontal schemes of including them into the mission of serving Russia. In order to do

21 http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD_207.pdf.

22 http://www.rodina.ru/novosti/slovo-i-delo/RODINA-Krymskaya-pobeda-2014.

23 For a detailed review see http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/8848.

so, the whole system of cooperation with the so called "compatriots", i.e. the pro-Russian sympathizers abroad, was restructured. In 2001-2012, with the use of Russian budgetary funds and some private investments, a framework of foundations and organizations focusing exclusively on promoting Russia's positive image was established; it connected local Russian-speaking organizations to funding from Moscow and politically influenced local Russian-speaking communities. This framework consists of the following organizations and foundations: World Congress of Compatriots (founded in 2001), Moscow House of the Compatriot (2002), Foundation for Exploring the Historical Perspective (2004), Russian World Foundation (2007), Foundation for Support of Public Diplomacy named after Gorchakov (2010), Fund for Support and Protection of Compatriots' Rights (2012).

Each of these organizations has its own field of expertise and area of responsibility. For instance, the Foundation for Support of Public Diplomacy named after Gorchakov works with young people and academic elite; the Fund for Support and Protection of Compatriots' Rights provides financial support for organizations and law offices who defend the rights of Russians and "compatriots" against the countries they live in. However, the only organization with regional offices was the World Congress of Compatriots (Kotkina 2017, 64-65; Gasimov 2012).

Other forms of cooperating with the Russian cultural diaspora included the Congresses of Compatriots, congresses of the Russian Press as well as events organized by regional administrations in Russia. Since 2001, the Moscow city government has established a special department for cooperation with compatriots and since 2002, the Moscow House of Compatriot has been active, it facilitates such programs as "Russians abroad in the fight against fascism".[24] Its branch in Sevastopol has been the center of pro-Russian activities over many years and the main rallies in 2013-2014 were held in front of this building.

24 http://pravfond.ru/?module=articles&action=view&id=2134.

Reasons for the Anti-Ukrainian Campaign

Obviously, Russia's political class in general did not accept or acknowledge Ukraine as a state independent from Russia and was not ready to recognize the Ukrainian national borders. The concept of Russia as a "liberal empire" supervising Ukraine's sovereignty was extremely popular at the highest level of Russia's executive branch. This resulted in the active engagement of Russia's government on Crimea and especially in Sevastopol in the 1990s and 2000s. Another obvious example is the flagrant interference in the internal policy of Ukraine, beginning at least with the presidential election of 2004.

Russia's leadership placed their stakes on Viktor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian politician, and received an ambivalent outcome. Yanuckovich did not defy Russia's interests but did not promote them either. He was building up his own networks of influence in the government, while giving priority to his own criminal family clan. As long as Yanukovich was president of Ukraine, it was impossible to implement Russia's plans of including Ukraine in a joint Union State with Russia and Belarus.

After losing the support of the Ukrainian people in 2004 during the "Orange Revolution", the Russian authorities decided to seriously fight for Ukraine. As a result, the whole framework for cooperation and dealing with Ukraine was restructured. If previously Ukraine was dealt with on an ad hoc basis, when challenges emerged, since 2005, persons holding ranks as high as Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation or his deputies started to deal with Ukraine-related issues on a regular basis.[25] Ukraine was taken care of by the assistants to the Russian president (S. Glazyev and V. Surkov) and some staff members of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation. One such staff member was Vladimir Chernov (born 1951), who in 2012 was appointed as head of the Office for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the presidential administration of

25 Author's interview with a former consultant of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation, Moscow, June 2018.

the Russian Federation and, according to the hacked letters of Kirill Frolov, was given the role as "supervisor of Ukraine".[26] In the internet, there are numerous references to Chernov's work for the Soviet foreign intelligence (as rank of colonel), including his deportation from the United Kingdom in 1983.[27] Before Chernov joined the staff of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation, he was an adviser to Sergey Ivanov, the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation between 2001-2007, who in turn was appointed as head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation in December 2011. Ivanov (born 1953), who had worked with Chernov as far back as in Finland's KGB station, assigned the essential task of supervising Ukraine to one of his very few associates. In March 2014, Oleg Belaventsov (born 1953) was appointed as plenipotentiary representative of the Russian president to the Crimean Federal District. He must have met Chernov personally in the United Kingdom, where he spent the years between 1982 and1985 as a counsellor of the embassy and was deported for espionage in 1985.[28] Old KGB acquaintances were thus in charge of managing Ukrainian affairs.

In the 2010s, Vladimir Putin decided to establish the Eurasian Economic Union and concluding a customs agreement with its members. This opened new perspectives for creating a strong economic alliance under Moscow's supervision. However, this alliance clearly was not complete without Russia's largest neighbor—Ukraine. The long-planned EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which would have opened the Ukrainian market to European products, competed with the integration of the former Soviet Republics

26 https://informnapalm.org/31475-frolovleaks-pussy-riot-epizod-v/ with the link to the letter of K. Frolov to M. Kuksov dated 5 June 2012).

27 https://ruspekh.ru/people/item/chernov-vladimir-aleksandrovich; http://anticompromat.org/ivanov01/litv_ivanov-s.html; the most detailed version of his personal history with the intelligence service was published in 2004, see http://modernlib.net/books/grechenevskiy_oleg/istoki_nashego_demokraticheskogo_rezhima/ read_9/.

28 On Oleg Belaventsev see Kommersant. No. 48, 22 March 2014, http://modernlib.net/books/grechenevskiy_oleg/istoki_nashego_demokraticheskogo_rezhima/read_9/. It might be that Ivanov, Belaventsov, Chernov and Bratchikov (who will be discussed below)—three of them were born in 1953 and one in 1954—first met in the KGB School.

under Moscow's auspices. Thus, a common customs and economic regime of Ukraine with the EU and with the Eurasian Economic Union would have been impossible (Pozo 2017). Vladimir Putin therefore increased the pressure on Ukraine.

Common Framework and Multiplicity of Actors

In the public space, there is no information available about the coordination of the actions of Russian authorities regarding Ukraine in 2013-2014. The Russian Spring covered at least 10 regions of eastern and southern Ukraine. Dozens of organizations and Russian governmental structures were engaged. On September13, 2013 the overall coordination of the anti-Ukraine campaign was transferred to Vladislav Surkov, who was appointed as assistant to the Russian president for relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian separatist regions occupied in 2008.[29] Surkov probably inherited this task from Sergey Glazyev, who had previously supervised the incorporation of Ukraine into the Eurasian Economic Union, and from Chernov, who supervised the domestic policy of the country. Boris Rappoport, Surkov's long-time associate and staff member of the presidential "Office for Social and Economic Cooperation with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Countries, Abkhazia and south Ossetia", became his main assistant for the liaison with non-governmental organizations.

After his resignation, Rappoport described the world view of his boss: "He has always been and remains a supporter of the doctrine "Moscow is the third Rome". He believes that every state begins to degrade the moment it stops to expand its influence. He assumes that expansion is a natural state of a healthy country."[30] It was Surkov, who in 2005 coined the expression "Russian World" and introduced it to the political discourse. Surkov's ideas were im-

29 Report by Gazeta.ru, which was not officially confirmed but subsequently supported by a variety of sources, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2013/09/13/n_3181753.shtml.

30 http://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/12/15/boris-rapoport-uzhe-v2013m-v-priemnoy-surkova-visela-karta-na-kotoroy-krym-byl-chastyu-rossii.html.

plemented through the headquarters of the southern military district in Rostov-on-Don. The troops of this military district were mainly engaged in the occupation of Crimea and in supplying the Donbas separatist militias with weaponry, ammunition and military equipment. The bulk of the pro-Russian "volunteers" was transferred through Rostov-on-Don to Crimea and the Caucasus and, according to the Russia's official version, this was the city where the former president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, was moved to. It is here that the main monument to Russia's "volunteers", who were fighting in the Donbas region, was unveiled in the presence of Surkov in October 2017.[31]

That said, a considerable number of organizations and individuals were authorized directly by Surkov and Putin to act at their own discretion within the framework of common goals and objectives. All of this can be described by the term "public-private partnership" typical for the whole Putin's system. In may be assumed, that all those activities were mainly monitored by the secret service FSB and other special forces, which occasionally "peered from behind the curtains".

Pro-Russian Agents in Ukraine

The political influence of a given organization of Russian nationalists depended directly on whether it could curry favors with the presidential administration of the Russian Federation (Mantschurjan 2016). The degree of political influence was also subject to the popularity of an organization, their ability to find associates, to set up own networks and enter into alliances with like-minded people. Two Russian political parties, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR, then led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky) and the Communist Party (CPRF), generally share nationalist views, but chose diametrically opposed policies. The LDPR ignored potential allies and rivals and, paradoxically, paid hardly any attention to the organizations of "compatriots" outside Russia. De facto, the LDPR had no allies or "clienteles" in Ukraine during Russia's aggression.

31 https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2017/10/19/n_10711940.shtml.

Throughout the conflict, it was not able to establish a single paramilitary unit under its own auspices, although it did donate some money and military equipment to the "volunteers".[32] The CPRF, on the contrary, actively collaborated with various "national-patriotic" coalitions. The revival of the USSR as the main goal of the post-Soviet communist parties coincided with the neo-imperial goals of Russian nationalists and made both forces reliable allies. The Communist party of Ukraine was one of the participants of the anti-Maidan demonstrations in winter 2013-2014 and was actively engaged with the *Russian Spring* movement, although it did not play a leading role.[33] In Russia, the CPRF was actively gathering supporters and financial help for "the people of the Donbas" but did not make a decisive difference.[34]

Within the *United Russia* party, which generally cannot be classified as an organization being deeply motivated by Russian nationalism, a separate fraction called the *Patriotic Platform* existed. It embraced the ideology of the post-imperial Russian nationalism.[35] Dmitri Sablin, the leader of the *Patriotic Platform*, and some other deputies played an active role in the occupation of Crimea and in unleashing the war in the Donbas.[36] However, it is difficult to establish the degree of cooperation of the *Patriotic Platform* or *United Russia* as a whole with partner organizations in Ukraine.

On the operational level, the key role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict was played by Dmitri Rogozin, Sergey Glazyev and Konstantin Zatulin, i.e., the former leaders of *Rodina*, which was only

32 https://www.gazeta.ru/auto/2014/05/08_a_6022997.shtml.

33 In anti-Maidan publications, the Communist Party of Ukraine has been criticized for its conciliatory position towards the new Ukrainian government. Nevertheless, the pro-Russian and anti-Maidan activities of its regional offices have been also vividly depicted, http://rabkor.ru/columns/left/2015/02/11/year-after-maidan/. On the financing and organization of pro-Russian demonstrations in the Luhansk region see https://news.online.ua/743660/vladimir-landik/. On the attempt of the Kyiv City Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine to lead the Maidan opposition, see https://riss.ru/analitycs/24338/.

34 https://www.nakanune.ru/articles/113674/; http://rusvesna.su/news/1474188476; http://uralpolit.ru/article/chel/05-02-2015/55451.

35 http://xn--b1adccaencl0bewna2a.xn--p1ai/index.php/arhiv/11886-2012-10-18-07-19-19.

36 http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/characters/2015/03/16/esli-eto-imelo-opredelennuyu-rezhissuru---rezhisseru-nuzhno-postavit-pyat-s-plyusom.

once elected to the Duma, Russia's parliament. This party had emerged from a social and political project called "Congress of Russian Communities" that, from the mid-1990s onwards, strived to represent in Russia the interests of the Russian-speaking communities in the post-Soviet area as well as of those Russian speakers who had emigrated to Russia. The *Congress of the Russian Communities* was closely related to the leadership of the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic and promoted their interests in Russia. The *Congress of the Russian Communities* was reorganized as a party and incorporated a vast number of members of right groups and right-wing extremist gangs (Titkov 2016, pp. 18-19). The party nominated former air borne officers as deputies and started to represent the air assault forces veteran communities. In 2003, the *Congress of the Russian Communities* was transformed first into an electoral bloc and then into the *Rodina* political party. Thanks to the updated image and public utilization of xenophobic rhetoric, *Rodina* achieved a decent result in the 2004 election (9 percent) and got into the parliament. However, in 2005, an anti-Semitic scandal, known as the "Letter of 500", in which it was demanded to dissolve all the Jewish organizations in Russia on account of extremism charges, the Kremlin pressed to disband the party (Titkov 2016, pp. 48-53).

The loyalty of Dmitri Rogozin and Sergey Glazyev was rewarded—they received high bureaucratic positions. Rogozin was first appointed as representative of the Russian Federation to NATO and afterwards he was promoted to the post of Deputy Prime Minister for Defense. Sergey Glazyev became the Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation for the Eurasian Economic Union. Konstantin Zatulin kept his deputy seat in the State Duma. Therefore, the former leaders of the *Rodina* party became high-ranking officials of the executive branch. On the other hand, through the private Institute of CIS Countries owned by Zatulin and the closely affiliated State Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, they were able to coordinate organizations as well as individuals in many regions of the former USSR. The purpose of the State Russian Institute for Strategic Studies is to serve the interests of the

Foreign Operations Directorate as well as other Russian secret services. In the first half of the 2010s, it was headed by General Leonid Reshetnikov, an open Russian nationalist and monarchist.

A pool of pro-Russian parties cooperated with the former Rodina leaders in Ukraine. Most of these parties were not represented in the Verkhovna Rada but had parliamentary factions in regional parliaments, especially in the south of Ukraine, among them *Ukrainian Choice, the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, the Russian Bloc, Russian Unity, Rodina* in Odesa and numerous less significant organizations, which, nevertheless, were actively participating in the "Russian Spring". Politicians of these parties legitimized the invasion of Crimea and the attempts to establish "People's Republics" in eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. Since mid-2000s, the mobilization and coordination of the pro-Russian nationalist associates was carried out through various forums and conferences as well as on the streets during the demonstrations against Ukrainian nationalists, the Ukrainian state, NATO, against Crimean Tatars or prospective shale gas production in the Donbas region. This campaign was organized by the pro-Russian groups in Ukraine in 2012-2013 and was based on anti-American slogans, since American companies were the ones to produce shale gas. The campaign was probably inspired by Gazprom, that feared a weakening of its influence in the country. Many activists of this campaign, especially in the Donbas, where the production was to be launched, later on became local leaders of the "Russian Spring". Slogans against the shale gas production were further on utilized in some cities and in the protests in the winter and spring of 2014.

Almost all the key pro-Russian activists in Ukraine had personal contacts with just two persons. Zatulin was one of them. He personally supervised Crimea and acted as a field coordinator for pro-Russian "public" organizations in Ukrainian regions. Sergey Glazyev said:

> "there is a war ongoing ... this is why Zatulin is the boss over there, he coordinates this war on the social and political front, where we keep failing."[37]

37 https://censor.net.ua/resonance/3047400/esli_my_zablokiruem_zaporoje_my_vyigraem_eto_plotina_mosty_i_energetika_bez_energetiki_krym_nejiz nesposoben.

Another key coordinator was Kirill Frolov, the head of the Ukraine department at the Institute of CIS Countries owned by Zatulin and, since 2013, the head of the Department for Relations with the Russian Orthodox Church.[38] Some documents from his correspondence indicate that he coordinated the pro-Russian combatant units in Ukraine in 2006 (probably even earlier), in particular during the blocking of roads in Crimea as well as combatant units from Odesa. In 2012, Frolov suggested to use the pro-Russian full-time militia groups from Kharkov (assault forces veterans), whom he was supervising, for the suppression of anti-Putin protests in Moscow.[39] Frolov was a leading staff member of the "Department for Cooperation between the Church and Society" of the Moscow Patriarchate, too. At least since 2012, he worked for Sergey Glazyev, the third and main coordinator of the Russian nationalists in Ukraine, who was permanently based in Moscow.

Frolov's correspondence, which has been hacked by Ukrainians, reveals that already in the early 2010s, he assisted staff members of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation, as high-ranking as its head Sergey Naryshkin, in organizing meetings with the representatives of social and political organizations as well as with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of eastern and southern Ukraine. They visited Odesa to conduct negotiations with public and church leaders. Frolov had about 50 confidants in Ukraine—a dozen of Ukrainian Orthodox Church priests and the Metropolitan of Odesa Agathangelos (Savvin), about fifteen politicians and approximately 20 to 25 activists of public organizations as well as journalists, mainly in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, on Crimea and in the Donetsk region. With their help he was able to establish contacts with potential allies of Russia wishing, through him, to be received by government agencies in Moscow. Amongst them was Hryhoriy Pedchenko, Chief of the General Staff of Ukraine.[40]

38 http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=rating&id=28.

39 FrolovLeaks, https://informnapalm.org/31142-frolovleaks-4/.

40 Some extracts of this correspondence, which counts approx. 10,000 letters amounting to18 GB, were published in 8 parts on the Ukrainian website Informnapalm; see FrolovLeaks VIII, https://informnapalm.org/33340-frolovleaks-viii-pravoslavnaya-elegiya/.

On September 13, 2013 in a letter to Frolov, Glazyev offered him to work directly for Vladislav Surkov, the assistant to Putin for relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who, as it has been mentioned above, on that very day became the chief supervisor of Ukrainian matters and preparations for the invasion.[41] On the first days of March 2014, "after meeting with big bosses", Frolov became the "supervisor of Odesa and Nikolaev". A little bit earlier, on February 27, 2014, he flew to Odesa with a budget of almost 800,000 dollars for organizing "ideological activities", purchasing weaponry and conducting "special operations". His partner was Aleksandr Zaldostanov, the leader of the *Night Wolves*, a nationalist biker club.[42]

After the appointment of Surkov, Glazyev was playing supporting roles but remained the key coordinator of the actions of Ukrainian pro-Russian public figures and the boss of Zatulin and Frolov. In winter and spring 2014, he stayed in permanent contact with them, coordinated the information flow and formulated new instructions. Glazyev was personally responsible for the supervision and organization of the Luhansk region, where he played a decisive role in convincing the local oligarchic groups to take Russia's side.[43]

These activities were financed (at least partially) by Sergey Batchikov (born in 1953)—a member of the Russian nationalist *Izborsk Club*, Glazyev's campaign chief in 2004, a businessman and a former Soviet spy in Latin America.[44] Batchikov (like Chernov,

41 FrolovLeaks VI, https://informnapalm.org/32111-frolovleaks-vi-zavtra-bylavojna/; letter from S. Glazyev to K. Frolov dated 13 Sept. 2013.

42 FrolovLeaks VII, https://informnapalm.org/32451-frolovleaks-smeta-rusvesna/; with the link to the letter from Frolov to Aleksandr Zaldostanov dated 27 February 2014.

43 https://news.online.ua/743660/vladimir-landik/. See also the abstract from a telephone conversation of Glazyev, Zatulin and Ukrainian regional politicians primarily from the Luhansk region, which was intercepted by the Ukrainian intelligence service SBU on March 1, 2014 and handed over to the Ukrainian press, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/3047400/esli_my_zablokiruem_zaporoje_my_vyigraem_eto_plotina_mosty_i_energetika_bez_energetiki_krym_nejiznesposoben.

44 He was the one who paid Frolov his salary during that period. FrolovLeaks VII, https://informnapalm.org/32451-frolovleaks-smeta-rusvesna/] (with the link to the letter from Frolov to Glazyev dated 21/04/2014.