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## The Story of One City. Occupation and Liberation of Severodonetsk

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## Introduction

Severodonetsk is one of the largest cities of the Donbass. Since September 2014 this is the location of the Lugansk military-civilian administration.

Some time ago Severodonetsk, located near Donetsk and Lugansk, was the epicenter of the "Russian Spring" in the Donbass.

During the presidential race, on 28 November 2004, the First All-Ukrainian Congress of People's Deputies and Local Councils organized by the Party of Regions took place in Severodonetsk. In particular, the "delegates" put forward the idea of separating the Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine into an independent state formation in response to the Orange Revolution. This project got a folk mockingly scornful name PISUAR ("Urinal") (the acronym of Ukrainian «Південно-Східна Українська Автономна Республіка» - "South-Eastern Ukrainian Autonomous Republic").

In the 1990s, enterprises were shut down in Severodonetsk, and the factories were frozen. In 2010 most of the plants ceased their work, and in 2011 the plant "Azot" was stopped and the overwhelming majority of the city's enterprises were factually liquidated, which caused a record level of unemployment. Economic dislocation and impoverishment of the population were one of the reasons for the success of the "Russian Spring" in this region. Especially if we recall that Severodonetsk is a big industrial city, where chemical enterprises "Azot", "Severodonetskiy stekloplastik", machine-building and instrument-making enterprises are located. "Severodonetsk produces 22.18% of Lugansk region's industrial output."<sup>1</sup>

Severodonetsk is a part of the so-called ecological "Donbass chemical triangle". Powerful chemical production had a critically destructive impact on the ecology of the region. There are virtually no agricultural enterprises and farms in the region.

The UHHRU proposes to begin the historiography of the events of the hybrid armed conflict in Ukraine in 2014-2017 namely from Severodonetsk.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/28347-silyi-ato-nachali-zachistku-severodonetska-i-boi-za-lisichansk.htm>



## **Occupation of Severodonetsk**

In April 2014 the confrontation started between the Armed Forces of Ukraine, units of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and the organized anti-government pro-Russian illegal military formations that did not recognize the results of the Revolution of Dignity and EuroMaidan and wanted to repeat on the territory of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions the so-called "Crimean scenario", that is the illegal and unlawful inclusion of the territories of these regions in the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation is providing active assistance to anti-government illegal military formations. In addition, this assistance includes both financing, supply of arms and fuel materials, and direct disguised participation of Russian servicemen and entire units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in this conflict.

On 11 May 2014, in Severodonetsk and in some cities of the Lugansk region, a non-systematic unofficial poll of citizens was held, which was called by the organizers "The referendum on state sovereignty of the Lugansk People's Republic". The witnesses interviewed by the UHHRU Documentation Center vividly described the conditions under which the so-called "referendum" took place.



Evidence of Person 1:

*"In 2014, during the presidential elections, I was appointed a deputy chairman of the district commission; the district commission oversaw the elections at 50 polling stations in the city of Severodonetsk. At that time, at the end of April, when we started distributing the election materials, Pavel Korchagin, deputy of the city council of Severodonetsk from the Communist Party and one of the local leaders of the so-called "LNR", came to the district commission's office accompanied by two or three armed people in camouflage. They began to take away the documentation. Korchagin with the armed people went to the chief of the department of registration of voters and seized the lists of voters. These were preliminary lists, but they were enough to conduct a "referendum" on their basis. School principals took very important part in the conduction of the "referendum". Some of them prohibited holding presidential elections."*

On the contrary, the poll organizers claim that this poll was official, legal and "demonstrated the will of the population of the Lugansk region to create an independent republic". Subsequently, based on the "results" of this so-called "referendum", a group of people announced the creation of the so-called "Lugansk People's Republic", which has not been officially recognized by any state in the world.

As to the life of the city during the occupation, the difficulties and problems of the inhabitants, we quote the evidence of Person 2:



*"There were difficulties with food, there were also water shortages since the beginning of occupation and until the city was liberated on 22 July 2014.*

*People had no access to their bank accounts because there was no mobile communication and the Internet. Telecommunications were periodically switched off until 22 July 2014. This began immediately after occupation of the city in May 2014. There was, in fact, a panic, and many problems were created artificially, in particular, by the members of the illegal military formations that controlled the city of Severodonetsk at that time.*

*I was a witness to artillery shellings with large-scale weapons (such as howitzers and ARSs "GRAD") and jet mortars. The missiles hit the hotel "Mir", multi-apartment buildings, and warehouses of the plant "Azot". This was done by separatists for extorting money from Firtash and Kunchenko. Often this was done in order to blame the Ukrainian army for the shellings".*

### Shelling of Severodonetsk



*The shellings were carried out by the so-called "Army of the South-East". They shelled the city themselves. These were the unit "Ghost", "Cossacks" troops and the Dryomov's unit.*

*The shellings were carried out in order to form a negative attitude towards the Armed Forces of Ukraine, since after each shelling video camera operators arrived instantly (after 3-4 minutes) and filmed the destruction with the militants' comments*

that it had been done by the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the National Guard of Ukraine.

*The nearest position of the Ukrainian Army was located 25 km from the city. Therefore, it should be absurd to assume that the Ukrainian army was carrying out shellings with mortars, effective range of which is not more than 5 km.*

*I personally witnessed how, on 10 June 2014, about 23:00, in the courtyard of my apartment building, a woman screamed that she was raped, she called for help. The violent actions were carried out by several men armed with machine guns, who, apparently, were very drunk; they tried to undress and rape a woman. I and my relatives repeatedly called the police (which officially was allegedly Ukrainian) for half an hour, while these rags were raping the woman, but everything was in vain: nobody came to stop the criminals.*

*I personally saw Russian armored vehicles with Russian flags, and Russian chevrons on the uniform of Chechens and "Cossacks" from the Russian Federation."*

Aleksey Mozgovoy



Source: <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2015/05/23/6706313.shtml>

In the period from 22 May to 22 June 2014 Severodonetsk was under the authority of the fictitious quasi-state formation "Lugansk People's Republic". Several independent IMFs operated in the city. The most numerous of them was Aleksey

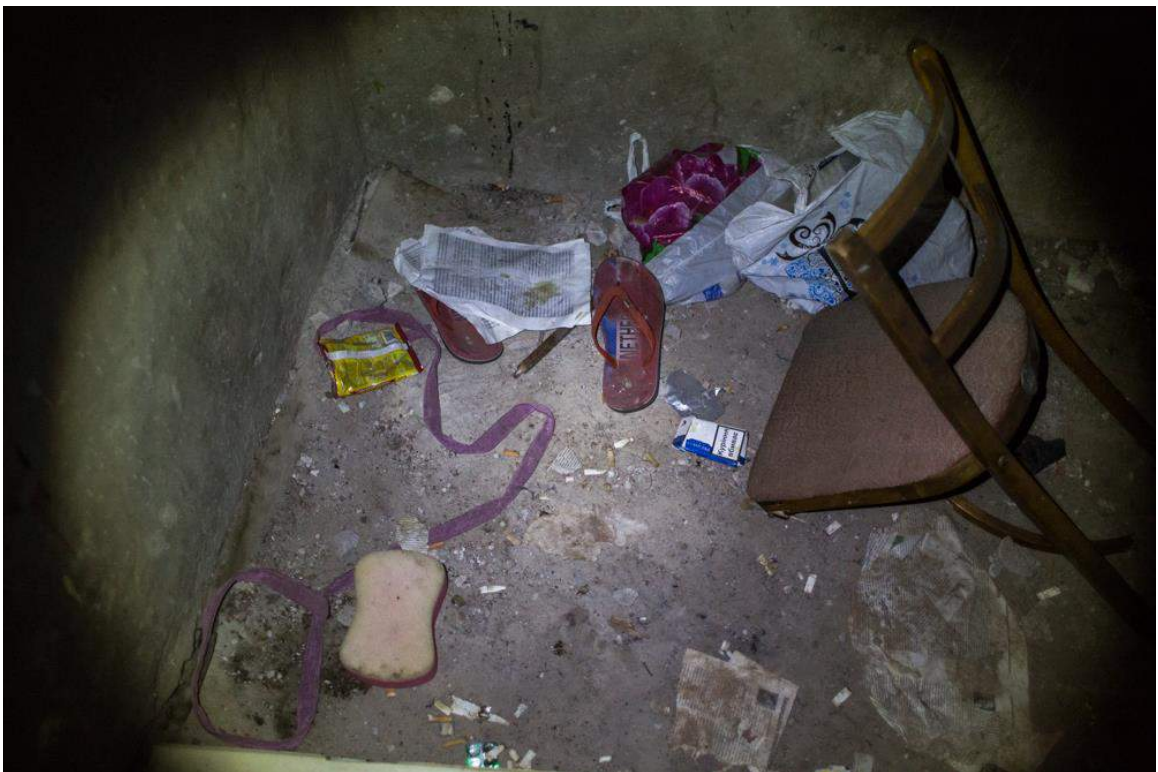
Mozgovoy's group - up to 200 people. About 50 people were in the group of Pavel Dryomov, and the smallest group - about 20 people - was headed by Sergey Pak.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of Person 3:

*"We drove up to the checkpoint, they checked my documents and asked to show the trunk, as always, every day. Then they checked with some list and said: "You're a right-winger."*

*Two more men ran up, shot up, kicked me at once in the chest, put on the floor. They began to beat me with their feet. They turned on "Lezginka" very loudly and kicked us like balls. There were two Azerbaijanis and one Russian, they were beating us at a checkpoint and put a submachine gun to my wife's stomach. My wife lost consciousness there. She was pushed into the car, one of the militants got into my "Zhiguli", and we were taken to the SINI (The State Institute of Nitric Industry. - Translator's note) in another car.*

Cellar premises of Severodonetsk SINI, the "basement" where the witnesses were held



*There were 16 people in the basement with an area of 9 square meters. We slept in turn. We slept on cardboard boxes on the concrete floor. Water was in a 5-liter canister filled by those who went to toilet.*

*There were no contacts either with parents or with wives. All documents were taken away, as well as the mobile phones.*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://eizvestia.com/politika-video/full/534-eksperty-obnarodovali-perechen-samyh-aktivnyh-terroristicheskikh-grupp-luganskoj-oblast>



*Later I was taken out for two times in two days, and they had to bring me in back. You are simply taken out to the corridor, facing the wall and two or three people begin to beat you until the loss of consciousness.*

*After two days I was convoyed to the toilet under the machine gun, I looked into the white shell and saw the blood. My urine was red-brown.*

*– I need a doctor.*

*- You're not allowed. There are no doctors for you. Our wounded fighters require the anesthetics, and you will not need any more in the quarry.*

*For some reason they all frightened us with the quarry.*

*After two days the guys started calling the doctor. I already started to breathe badly, the spasms began. The guys knocked on the iron doors for 5 or 6 hours.*

*– The old man needs a doctor.*

*– There was no order about him. It's all the same to him.*

*They said the same to my wife.*

*– Go home, take care of the children, he will never return."*

In addition to the SINI, there were other places of deprivation of liberty in Severodonetsk: the temporary detention facility of the city MIA, the Department for Fighting the Organized Crime (DFOC), etc.

Evidence of Person 4:

*«Among the detainees there were people who were stopped on the street by day or night.*

*- Hey, man, where are you going?*

*- Home, from work.*

*- Sit down, we'll give you a lift.*

*And they brought the man to a wrong place, not where he needed, but to the SINI basement or the temporary detention facility. They took everything from his pockets, put plastic handcuffs on him, kicked him a couple of times and threw him to the basement. Everyone was detained for five days, and then released. They needed manpower to dig trenches."*

An interesting detail: illegal deprivation of liberty was used not only as a repressive, intimidating measure but also as a measure of non-economic coercion. Later it will become a common phenomenon in the so-called "L/DNR".

Evidence of Person 4:

*"There was a separate group, they were called OCG. This was a brigade of builders, whom their chief passed in order not to pay a salary. The chief came to the SINI with a complaint that bandits were extorting money from him. They meet with*

*their boss, they talk. They are attacked with shots and detained. They are beaten, taken to the car and thrown to the basement. "*



Premises of the Severodonetsk DFOC, «the basement»

The first people that perished on the territory of Severodonetsk were the Ukrainian servicemen.

On 22 May 2014, during the battle with pro-Russian militants, the unit of Captain Yaroslav Myronov was sent to help the ambushed soldiers. In the battle the Ukrainian military equipment was shot down and 3 soldiers were killed - Sergiy Yaroshenko, Oleksandr Kovalchuk and Oleksandr Furman, 5 were wounded, and Captain Myronov himself was seriously wounded too.

In total, during the ATO from May 2014 to November 2017, 15 soldiers were killed (Annex 1). During the liberation of the city there were no casualties among servicemen.

Several servicemen perished on 22-23 August 2014. In the forest near Severodonetsk the "Aidar" battalion faced a group of saboteurs who were asked to give up, but opened fire. As a result of the battle, the "Aidar" combatants liquidated the saboteurs' camp, but lost six soldiers: Volodymyr Boyko, Yevgen Harkavenko, Andriy Korablyov, Oganés Petrosyan, Andriy Pysarenko, and Volodymyr Chernovolov.

Another six combatants perished during 2015-2016. The victims among servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces after the liberation of Severodonetsk can be explained by the fact that major fortifications of the so-called battalion "Prizrak" were located in the city at that time. The city itself is located on the banks of the river Seversky Donets, on the northern spurs of the Donetsk ridge, which hang over the river, therefore the relief consists of hills and uplands, as well as from ravines, gullies and valleys, which are covered with forests, suitable for the operations of the diversionary groups, mines, ambushes, etc.

### **Liberation of Severodonetsk**

The city was liberated by Ukrainian troops on 22 July 2014 after a fierce firefight with the use of small arms, grenades, heavy armored vehicles, and aircraft. The units of the National Guard of Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine and volunteer battalions, namely the territorial defense battalions and the 24th mechanized brigade, attacked the armed forces of the LNR from two sides. In the afternoon, two columns of Ukrainian troops – one from the side of Stara Krasnyanka, and the second from Varvarovka – entered the city.

During the three and a half years of the armed conflict, 20 Severodonetsk dwellers were killed (Annex 2). Two Severodonetsk dwellers perished while defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine: M.V. Lytovko and O.V. Podrezenko. Other 18 people were killed in the course of their participation in the so-called "LNR/DNR militia", including two women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> You can find information about the victims of the conflict on the interactive "Memory Map" (<http://memorialmap.org/>).





## Conclusions

The lasting conflict in the East of Ukraine and its periodic exacerbation directly affect the city's life and the number of victims that perished already after the occupation and liberation of Severodonetsk.

Despite the proximity of the line of demarcation, and factual location not far from the line of armed confrontation with the occupied part of the Lugansk region, the destroyed buildings, roads, bridges, theater, and administrative buildings in Severodonetsk have been restored.

Since 2015, for the first time since independence, an increase in population has been observed in the city, and this tendency continues to this day.<sup>4</sup>

The significant material, technical and financial assistance, including from international governmental and non-governmental organizations, significantly improved the city's economic situation.<sup>5</sup>

For the sake of objectivity, we note the political instability in the city and a complex criminal situation, the indicator of which was the resonant murder of a local MP.

"In the evening of 3 November Sergey Samarsky, a deputy of the Severodonetsk City Council, was murdered in the elite district of the city, which is the regional center of the Lugansk region since 2014, after occupation of Lugansk by Russian troops. Samarsky was a deputy from the BPP.

It is noteworthy that along with the body of Samarsky the body of another person (28 years old) was found, and, as claimed by the police, it had nothing to do with the murder of a deputy. Denis Denischenko states: "The tragedy of Sergey Samarsky is one of those swallows that demonstrate that pro-Russian and anti-state forces will gain a foothold here at any price. Therefore, in my opinion, this is a purely political ordered murder with the aim to show all other patriots and real fighters that such activity in Lugansk is very dangerous."<sup>6</sup>

In the course of the study we analyzed open sources and statistics on major human rights violations, most notably - the right to life.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://irtafax.com.ua/news/2014/12/2014-12-30-27.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ostrovok.lg.ua/news/severodoneck/v-severodonecke-norvezhskiy-sovet-po-delam-bezhencev-nrc-provel-kruglyy-stol-po-aktualnym-problemam>

<sup>6</sup> <http://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/polityka/krov-luganskogo-patriota>

## Annex 1

### List of perished servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2014-2017

1. Bilenkiy Taras Yaroslavovych
2. Bilyk Yuriy Mykhaylovych
3. Boyko Volodymyr Stepanovych
4. Garkevenko Yevgen Mykolaevych
5. Korablyov Andriy Vitaliyovych
6. Marochkanych Vitaliy Bogdanovych
7. Mykhaylov Sergiy Viktorovych
8. Petrosyan Oganeg Arutyunovych
9. Pysarenok Andriy Volodymyrovych
10. Samson Mykhaylo Mykhaylovych
11. Chernovolov Volodymyr Oleksandrovych
12. Yatsunda Igor Yaroslavovych
13. Yaroshenko Sergiy
14. Kovalchuk Oleksandr
15. Furman Oleksandr

## Annex 2

### List of perished dwellers of the city in 2014-2017

1. Buynovsky Valeriy Oleksiyovych
2. Vasyutchenko Stanyslav Oleksandrovykh
3. Evdokymov Sergiy Oleksandrovykh
4. Zavalysyn Oleksandr Sergiyovych
5. Zinovyev Oleksandr Volodymyrovych
6. Korshenko Vitaliy Ivanovych
7. Kurokhtyn Oleksandr Volodymyrovych
8. Lebedev Kostiantyn Oleksandrovykh
9. Lytovko Mykola Valentynovych
10. Maksymenko Oleg Viktorovych
11. Mykhaylenko Yevgen Vasylyovych
12. Nikolenko Yevgeniya Valeryivna
13. Podrezenko Oleksandr Vasylyovych
14. Suvorov Dmytro Mykhaylovych
15. Tverdokhlebov Sergiy Ivanovych
16. Chernobrovenko Vladyslav Viktorovych
17. Shariy Pavlo Viktorovych
18. Shymko Dmytro Evgenovych
19. Shchurov Igor Vitalyovych
20. Yushchuk Natalya Volodymyrivna