

# Map of the actors in the Donbas conflict: Russian non-state actors

▣ propagandist media

▣ independent, opposition and investigative media

▣ non-governmental organizations

▣ emigrant organizations







This analytical review of the actors of the conflict in Donbas was prepared within the framework of the Map of Conflict sub-project of the CivilM+ civil society platform.

The overall goal of the work on the Map of the Conflict is to identify the actors and groups involved in the conflict in Donbas at various levels, as well as their influence, relationships, interests, concerns and expectations. It is assumed that this analysis will help identify possible ways of influencing various stakeholders to resolve the conflict.

The publication was prepared by an independent Russian journalist, whose name is not made public for security reasons.

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# Introduction

The present document is the first part of the study on Russian non-state actors in the conflict in Donbas. It analyzes the contribution of a significant part of Russian media (both propagandist and independent) to the coverage and legitimization of the conflict for the Russian audience, as well as the role of non-governmental non-profit organizations involved in one way or another in the peaceful settlement or mitigation of the consequences of the conflict for the victims. The list of actors also included individuals — actors of information influence of the Kremlin propaganda, whose objectives include information support of Russia's actions in Donbas. This first part of the study did not include an analysis of the role of Russian and expatriate think tanks, private commercial companies and corporations, as well as numerous assistants of the Russian regime in Western democracies. The latter — while they are not Russian actors — certainly act on the side of the Russian political regime and represent its interests in developed democracies. These include foreign managers of Russian state corporations, as well as pro-Kremlin Western journalists, political scientists and political strategists who facilitate Putin's strategy abroad.

The inclusion of propagandist media in the study is also very conditional, since in fact they are not non-state actors. These are either completely state-owned corporations with 100 percent budget funding (VGTRK), or formally non-state, but fully state-controlled outlets (RT, Channel One, Komsomolskaya Pravda). All media related to propaganda are financed from the Russian state budget or from the funds of oligarchs close to the Kremlin (Komsomolskaya Pravda). In contrast, independent, critical, and investigative outlets have only non-governmental sources of funding.

Nevertheless, we considered it appropriate to place the propagandist media among the "non-state actors," because formally they do not perform the functions of public institutions and are more likely to be pro-state actors in civil society.

## Key notions:

1. **Propagandist media** — non-free pro-state media outlets with state (or "near-state") funding, adhering to the official ideology in their interpretation of events (see the definition of the term "Russian state propaganda" below).
2. **Independent (and investigative) media** — conditionally independent media taking a critical approach to the analysis of events, striving for objectivity and impartiality, publishing their own investigations of corruption and abuse of power, and financed from non-state sources.
3. **Actors of influence** — propagandists, individuals who aim at creating, developing and strengthening the propaganda information narrative in the country: officials of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, heads, editors-in-chief, as well as employees who directly work with the audience — TV presenters, observers, columnists, ideologists, "experts" and "journalists" of pro-state media.
4. **Non-governmental organizations (non-profit, non-governmental organizations, NGOs)**. Civic associations that make efforts to resolve the conflict, conduct a dialogue between representatives of various parties to the conflict, draw attention to the conflict, organize assistance to victims, protect human rights, etc. This category also includes public campaigns formed by various groups of

pro-Ukrainian activists. The campaigns are normally carried out to achieve one specific goal (release of Sentsov, Ukrainian sailors, etc.), and after reaching this goal they disintegrate. Campaigns can also grow into new campaigns with the same leaders and organizers.

5. **Communities of Russian emigrants operating abroad.** The main efforts of these actors are directed at drawing the attention of the international community and the governments of their countries to the armed conflict, at discussing with international experts possible ways of resolving it and observing international agreements and treaties by the parties, at promoting sanctions against countries and individuals responsible for inciting the conflict.

For the purposes of this report, the notion of **Russian state propaganda** includes actions aimed at:

1. Promotion of the official foreign policy of Russia by information means.
2. Creation of a positive image of Russia and its foreign policy in the eyes of Russian and foreign audiences.
3. Creation of a hostile image of Ukraine, Western countries, as well as actors of the Russian opposition.
4. Consolidation of society around traditions, "moral foundations," "spiritual bonds," a single leader on the principle of mobilization, support for the image of Russia as a "sieged fortress" in the circle of enemies.

The difference between propagandist media and regular media is that the purpose of activities of the former is not to provide impartial reporting to society, but to create narratives necessary for the authorities in society, in other words, **to create and maintain a "false reality" for the immediate benefit of the ruling regime.** This is achieved inter alia through the use of illegitimate methods of influence, including — manipulation of information, disinformation, one-sided coverage, creation and publication of fakes, etc.

High efficiency of Russian propaganda is worth particular attention. Indeed, if we take only one parameter as an example — the rating of approval of Vladimir Putin's actions as the President, then according to some social polls, after the annexation of Crimea it increased by more than a quarter and amounted to 86 percent<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, such high approval ratings could not have been achieved without a propaganda campaign of an unprecedented scale.

As will be noted many times in this report, the activities of propagandist media during the seizure of Crimea and incitement to the conflict in Donbas may become the subject for application of international conventions and treaties, as well as Russian laws prohibiting incitement to aggression. In particular, it would be interesting to conduct a legal analysis and qualification of the actions of Russian propagandists in accordance with Article 354 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "Public calls for unleashing an aggressive war." More than once, experts have traced a direct connection between what was said on television and the direct participation of Russian citizens in hostilities in Ukraine ("I went to fight in Ukraine, because I saw on TV how Russian-speakers are being humiliated there")<sup>2</sup>.

1 Volkov D. 86% of Putin: believe or not. Vedomosti, 08.12.2015, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/12/09/620191-86-putina>.

2 "I watched TV and went to kill Ukrainians," <https://npubop.livejournal.com/2312607.html?page=4>.

In short, in our opinion, there are two main reasons for such an effective influence of the mass media on the Russian audience:

1. The continuing lack of alternative to television as a source of information for the majority of the Russian population. To a lesser extent, it is true for the residents of large cities with diversified information sources, to a greater extent — to remote Russian regions, and also, surprisingly, to Russian-speaking diasporas abroad, which retain relative autonomy from the outside world and perceive the Russian mass media as the only reliable information resource either traditionally or due to poor command of local language;
2. The role of key assistants in "providing the information back up" assigned to the state-owned media by the Russian political regime. In the hybrid war against Ukraine and the West, federal TV channels were chosen as the second most important actors of penetration and influence after the armed forces.

The importance that the state assigns to propaganda can be noticed at least by the growth in funding for state-owned media in recent years. In 2020, the state media budget for 2021–2022 was increased by 40% and amounted to more than RUR 102 billion (about \$1,39 billion). The biggest financial support was provided to the RT TV channel, VGTRK, Channel One, Rossiya Segodnya<sup>3</sup>. The main "fighters of the propaganda front" — the propagandists of the main federal channels — own millions of dollars and luxury real estate abroad<sup>4</sup>.

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3 The authorities refused to reduce state support for the media amid the pandemic. RBC, 17.09.2020, [https://www.rbc.ru/technology\\_and\\_media/17/09/2020/5f61f7899a7947687f22edc1](https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/17/09/2020/5f61f7899a7947687f22edc1).

4 See for example: Apartments, cottage and Italian villa of Vladimir Solovyov. Anti-Corruption Foundation, 28.09.2017, <https://navalny.com/p/5565>.



# Propagandist media

## Television

### 1. Channel One

#### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Channel One is one of the three largest TV channels in the Russian Federation, its direct competitors are Russia-1 and NTV. It is positioned as the country's main channel, but since 2016, it lost its top ranking to Russia-1 in the rating. The form of ownership is a joint stock company, but 51% of the shares of Channel One are controlled by the state, and 29% belong to the National Media Group (Chairperson of the Board of Directors is Alina Kabaeva), and 20%, to the "pro-state" VTB bank<sup>5</sup>. General Director of Channel One is Konstantin Ernst.

Until the end of 2013, Channel One managed to maintain the image of an apolitical or loyal neutral media. With the beginning of the Euromaidan, it became impossible to stand aside — all the Kremlin's media assets were thrown onto the "Ukrainian front." The channel has been actively involved in the information war and has been criticized more than once for its obvious bias towards Ukrainian topics in news reports or socio-political talk shows. Channel One is an active promoter of the Kremlin's official position: the war in Donbas is an "internal conflict," caused by the coming of right-wing forces to power and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population in the eastern regions. In 2014–2015, the channel actively promoted the idea of "federalizing" Ukraine.

#### Interests/goals in the conflict region.

Channel One does not have its own interests or goals, but it is a relay of the state information policy in the region.

#### Actions regarding the conflict

TV critics and journalists note aggressively hostile rhetoric, a one-sided approach, manipulation of facts, and the use of unverified information in political broadcasts and talk shows of Channel One. Since 2014, the channel has been repeatedly caught in falsifications, the most famous of which is the story about the "crucified boy" in Sloviansk (July 2014). Other examples of fakes are the story of the mass exodus of Ukrainians to Russia (March 2014), a fake photo of the shelling of the MH17 liner by Ukrainian jet MiG-29<sup>6</sup>.

On 25 February 2015, correspondents of Channel One Elena Makarova and of NTV Andrey Grigoriev were detained in Kyiv and expelled from the country with a ban on entry for 5 years. Officials from Ukraine explained that the arrest was related to "anti-Ukrainian propaganda carried out by these journalists."<sup>7</sup> Since August 2014,

<sup>5</sup> VTB bought Abramovich's stake in Channel One. RBC, 07.03.2019, <https://www.rbc.ru/business/07/03/2019/5c80cc3c9a7947125d24a97e>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/tag/pervyj-kanal/>

<sup>7</sup> Correspondents of Channel One and NTV were detained in Kyiv. 25.02.2015, 25.02.2015 <https://meduza.io/news/2015/02/25/v-kieve-zaderzhany-korrespondenty-pervogo-kanala-i-ntv>.

international broadcasting of Channel One is prohibited on the territory of Ukraine. Since September 2015, the TV channel has been on the sanction list of Ukraine, its assets are blocked<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. 2. All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK)

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

VGTRK is one of the largest media holdings in the world, it owns a network of federal TV channels (Russia-1, Russia-24, Russia-Planet, Russia-Culture, etc.), radio, as well as a network of regional branches. Russia-1 is one of the three main TV channels in the country, overtaking Channel One and NTV in popularity ratings. VGTRK is funded 100% from the state budget. The financing of the holding has increased in recent years up to RUR 24.2 billion. (approximately \$33 million) for 2020, but for 2021 and 2022, a decrease is planned – the budget will drop to RUR 21.4 billion rubles (\$29,3 million)<sup>9</sup>. The Director General of VGTRK is Oleg Dobrodeyev.

Russia-1 and Russia-24 are the largest channels of the holding, leading information and socio-political broadcasters, flagship assets of the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company. Russia-1 is one of the most aggressive propagandist channels, an active participant in the information campaign against Ukraine and the West. The main actors of the country's propaganda work here — Vladimir Solovyov (Duel, Evening with Vladimir Solovyov), Dmitry Kiselyov (Deputy Director General of VGTRK, Director General of news agency Russia Today, host of the program Vesti Nedeli), Olga Skabeyeva and Evgeniy Popov (60 minutes). Director General O.Dobrodeyev constantly participates in meetings in the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, where the heads of the main state media receive guidance on the directions of information work.

In their broadcasts, Russia-1 and Russia-24 relay the main principles of the Kremlin ideologists, first of all, that the war in Donbas is an internal conflict of Ukrainians. They accuse Ukraine of war crimes and discrimination against the population of Donbas.

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

As a completely state-owned company, VGTRK does not have its own position in relation to Ukraine and Donbas, it is only a conductor of the Kremlin's position. Targets for criticism include not only Ukraine and the West, but also the Russian opposition.

### Actions regarding the conflict

News reporting, comments or expert discussions on both channels are full of aggressively hostile rhetoric towards Ukraine, alternative opinions are not allowed. As in other propagandist media, Russia-1 and Russia-24 devote a disproportionately large amount of their air time to Ukraine, while less time is given to discussing

8 Russian ministers and major airlines fell under Ukrainian sanctions. Lenta.ru, 16.09.15, <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/09/16/sanctions/>.

9 The Ministry of Finance proposed to allocate 4 billion rubles more to Channel One. Vedomosti, 26.09.2019, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/news/2019/09/26/812146-minfin-predlozhil-uvlichit>.

pressing problems in Russia. The channel discusses the future of the divided Ukraine and the "young republics," the failure of the reforms of the Ukrainian presidents. Any actions of the Ukrainian authorities are subject to ridicule or condemnation. Often, Ukrainian or Western marginal right- or left-wing extremist actors, representatives of the former Yanukovych regime now living in Russia, representatives of the ORDLO quasi-authorities, and separatists participating in hostilities act as "experts" in political talk shows<sup>10</sup>. It is also quite common to invite dummy Ukrainian or Western journalists or political researchers to political talk shows, who are supposed to portray a "different" point of view, but in fact are also subject to public ridicule. Both channels were repeatedly accused of spreading fakes, among them:

- A staged shootout in Simferopol, during which "Ukrainian militants" allegedly shot the Russian military (1.03.2014)<sup>11</sup>;
- A fake story about the shelling of the village of Semenivka with phosphorus incendiary shells on 12 June 2014, where CNN footage of 2004 was used<sup>12</sup>.

In general, the actions of Russia-1 in relation to the conflict region can be called consistent anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

Since August 2014, broadcasting of all VGTRK channels in Ukraine has been blocked.

### 3. NTV

#### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The NTV television company, founded in 1993, for 10 years before its destruction in 2003 was considered the freest and most independent channel in Russia, even though the channel belongs to oligarchic structures. NTV dared sharp criticism of the country's leadership and special services. In 2003, after a change of ownership, the campaign passed from the oligarch and media tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky to the ownership of JSC Gazprom-Media, owned by the state-owned Gazprom corporation. The "nationalization" of NTV became the main and final stage of the Kremlin's operation to destroy free media. Nowadays, NTV is a tabloid media outlet that differs from other non-free federal TV channels by even more harsh criticism of the opposition and the West, scandalous broadcasts. Director General is Alexey Zemsky.

NTV Channel is the third in the top three leaders in the propaganda information war after Channel One and VGTRK.

#### Interests/goals in the conflict region

NTV is an organic part of the Kremlin's propaganda machine. The channel has been repeatedly accused of actively participating in an anti-Ukrainian media campaign organized by the Russian authorities. Since 2014, NTV has made a significant contribution to propaganda support for the occupation and annexation of Crimea, military operations in the Donbas, and the MH-17 crash.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: The former head of the so-called "DPR" government predicted that Russia would soon recognize the Donbas republics, [https://russia.tv/video/show/brand\\_id/60851/episode\\_id/2422044/video\\_id/2315528](https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/60851/episode_id/2422044/video_id/2315528); A Russian journalist threw a glass at a Polish political researcher on the air of Russia 1, <https://ria.ru/20181219/1548264695.html>; "Get out!:" Solovyov forever kicked the Ukrainian expert out of the show, <https://ria.ru/20200318/1568768027.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Bloggers expose Vesti's lies: the "Bandera teams" are armed with the latest Russian weapons. Nasha Niva, 02.03.2014, <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=123861&lang=ru>.

<sup>12</sup> Russia 24 illustrated the bombing of Semenivka with prohibited weapons with footage from Iraq. Republic, 12.06.2014, <https://republic.ru/posts/1/1112660/>

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Like other pro-Kremlin media, NTV was constantly accused of distorting facts, attacks on media persons, fake reporting, and one-sided news reporting. In 2014, the facts of using the same dummy people in stories on different topics became widely known<sup>13</sup>. In addition, NTV aired several anonymous films (imprint not specified), in which active participants in Euromaidan or the Ukrainian authorities ("The Princess at the Parasha," "The Secret Life of Vitali Klitschko," etc.), as well as the Russians who supported Ukraine ("13 Friends of the Junta," "Another 17 Friends of the Junta") were attacked.

Since August 2014, NTV broadcasting in Ukraine has been blocked. Later, Ukraine banned 49 Russian media professionals from entering its territory, including NTV editor-in-chief Vladimir Kulistikov. Since September 2015, NTV is on the sanction list of Ukraine. The access of NTV's correspondents to the territory of Ukraine is prohibited.

## **4. RT (earlier — Russia Today)**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

RT (until 2008 – Russia Today) is a media holding established in 2005 for broadcasting to a foreign audience, including a Russian-speaking audience. Includes channels RT America, RT UK, RT International, RT Deutsch, as well as broadcasting from Moscow in Arabic, Spanish, French and Russian, RTD channel, Ruptly video news agency. It positions itself as a non-governmental organization, but the managing non-profit organization TV-Novosti is fully funded from the federal budget. Funding for TV-Novosti in 2020 amounts to almost RUR 23 billion (approximately \$310.55 million), which is RUR 12 billion more than in 2013<sup>14</sup>. The editor-in-chief from the very beginning has been Margarita Simonyan.

The Kremlin assigns a special role to RT – to justify Russia's actions and whitewash its image for an external audience. The channel has clearly succeeded in this: using manipulation of facts, widespread ignorance of the situation Russia, Ukraine and in general the problems of Eastern Europe among foreign audience, as well as traditional dislike of Europeans for America, playing on facts that can cause controversy and polarization of society, abusing the principle of freedom of speech in countries where it broadcasts. RT manages to influence public opinion in the West, however, mainly among the uneducated emigrant public, nostalgic for "strong Russia."

RT German, Spanish and French offices were opened in 2014–2015. The opening of new offices and the growth of funding for the company coincide with the post-Maidan period. The connection between the opening of new channels and Ukrainian events is confirmed, for example, by the following entry in the About Us section of German RT Deutsch: "The Ukrainian crisis has shown how the established German-language media landscape is characterized by a one-sided, often manipulative and simplistic view of things"<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Russian TV channels were accused of distorting information about the events in Ukraine. Echo of Moscow, 11.04.2014, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1298010-echo/>.

<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Finance proposed to allocate 4 billion rubles more to Channel One. Vedomosti, 26.09.2019, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/news/2019/09/26/812146-minfin-predlozhit-uvelichit>

<sup>15</sup> RT Über uns <https://deutsch.rt.com/uber-uns/> (translation from German).

RT boasts a record number of views and likes (positive reviews), however, according to journalists, the channel's audience is generally small. For example, in the spring of 2020, the Anti-Corruption Foundation of Alexei Navalny conducted an investigation into the cheating of views of the channel's videos on YouTube, having found that up to 2/3 views, likes and comments were received using bots or paid "votes"<sup>16</sup>.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

RT, like other propagandist channels, does not have its own independent position. At the same time, RT mission is to form a positive image of Russia abroad, as well as to convey the position of the Russian authorities to the international community. Another goal is to weaken the Western world from within.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

The activities of the RT channels are aimed, first of all, at the formation of positive attitudes of international community to Putin's policy towards Ukraine, a dismissive and even contemptuous attitude towards Ukraine as a "non-state.". RT has always denied the role of Russia in fomenting the conflict and involvement in the crash of MH17, denied the presence of Russian troops in Donbas.

RT conducts information activities against Ukraine through the dissemination of one-sided information, fakes and lies. Another area of action for Simonyan and her holding is to split Western public opinion by purposefully artificially inflating topics that cast doubt on democratic values and the priority of human rights in the world, inciting hatred and enmity towards social groups in Europe and Germany, primarily migrants, as well as to liberal politicians, human rights activists, thinkers who supported Ukraine.

The general narrative of RT's coverage of events during the conflict is "genocide of Russian speakers is taking place in Ukraine." RT has become the spokesperson and disseminator of conspiracy theories and unverified claims. The most marginal social media accounts, publishing rumors, fakes and annoying fantasies, were in demand by Russian state channels, including RT. It was RT that was the first to spread information about the mythical Spanish "dispatcher Carlos" who allegedly reported that MH17 was fired upon by a Ukrainian military aircraft. Later, it supported the myth of the "crucified boy" in Sloviansk. RT constantly criticizes and ridicules the Ukrainian authorities<sup>17</sup>.

Since August 2014, the channel has been banned from broadcasting in Ukraine. Since September 2015, RT has been under Ukrainian sanctions. In November 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning "propaganda from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups," in which the deeds of RT and Sputnik were especially noted<sup>18</sup>. The document says that "the Kremlin has intensified its propaganda against the EU since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in Donbas." To do this, the Russian government uses "a wide range of tools" such as "think tanks, ...

16 FBK: Simonyan winds up views on RT's YouTube channels through porn websites. Znak, 02.04.2020, [https://www.znak.com/2020-04-02/fbk\\_simonyan\\_nakruchivaet\\_prosmotry\\_na\\_yutub\\_kanalah\\_rt\\_cherez\\_pornosayty](https://www.znak.com/2020-04-02/fbk_simonyan_nakruchivaet_prosmotry_na_yutub_kanalah_rt_cherez_pornosayty).

17 How the Russia Today TV channel is lying. Answer to Margarita Simonyan. The Insider, 31.05.2017, <https://theins.ru/antifake/58435>.

18 The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the fight against "Kremlin propaganda." Vedomosti, 23.11.2016, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/23/666624-evroparlament-rezolyutsiyu>

multilingual TV companies (e.g., RT), pseudo-news agencies and multimedia services (e.g., Sputnik)<sup>19</sup>.

In July 2019, UK media regulator Ofcom issued a £200,000 fine against RT for violating broadcasting rules in the United Kingdom<sup>20</sup>. In November 2017, RT was registered in the United States as a "foreign agent"<sup>21</sup>.

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19 Cit. by: Putin's List. Forum of Free Russia, <https://www.spisok-putina.org/personas/simonyan/>

20 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/content-sanctions-adjudications/decision-tv-novosti>.

21 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-media-restrictions-rt/russias-rt-america-registers-as-foreign-agent-in-u-s-idUSKBN1DD25B>.

## Print media

### 5. Newspaper "Komsomolskaya Pravda"

#### Official position/function regarding the conflict

"Assault aircraft of the Armed Forces of Ukraine bombed the self-defense checkpoints of the Crimea on Chongar. After the artillery preparation, the nationalist battalions drove the Crimeans out of Chongar and Perekop. Three days after the start of a large-scale military operation, the volunteer and regular regiments of Ukraine from the mainland, together with units based in Crimea, surrounded Simferopol, Sevastopol and Feodosia ... The Russian fleet weighed down and headed for Novorossiysk. The red and black flag of Ukrainian nationalists is raised over Nakhimov Square in Sevastopol, Kyiv is rejoicing." This is how one of the main "military journalists" of Komsomolskaya Pravda (hereinafter – KP) Alexander Kots fantasized about "what would have happened if Crimea had not returned to Russia." In the future, the legend narrative "if not for Russia, then there would be nationalists/NATO troops in Crimea" became the main slogan of Russian propaganda justifying the capture of the peninsula.

KP is a perfect example of the tabloid and propagandist yellow scandalous and entertaining press with a circulation of 2.7 million copies (2017). The largest circulation of the daily newspaper KP and the weekly KP-Tolstushki was 34 million copies in 2009 and is still the highest among Russian print media.

It is funded from non-governmental sources. 45% of the publication is owned by Sergei Rudnov, the owner of LDV Press LLC. Also, one of the minority owners of KP shares with a stake of 4 to 7% is the editor-in-chief of the outlet Vladimir Sungorkin.

Currently, the publishing house Komsomolskaya Pravda includes (in addition to the KP) five newspapers, a radio station and a website. In 2011–14, the Komsomolskaya Pravda TV channel also worked.

#### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Despite the fact that the KP is a non-state outlet, Sungorkin constantly emphasizes his closeness to the authorities<sup>22</sup>. The KP has done a lot to justify the aggression against Ukraine. In April 2014, the journalists of the newspaper were awarded the Order of Merit for the Fatherland of the fourth degree "for objectivity in covering events in Crimea"<sup>23</sup>. The awards were presented to Sungorkin and the "military reporters" Alexander Kots and Dmitry Steshin, the authors of numerous reports from Donbas full of one-sidedness and bias and mainly justifying the actions of the separatists.

#### Actions regarding the conflict

Misinformation, aggressive attacks and falsifications in reporting on events in Ukraine and against the Russian opposition supporting Ukraine<sup>24</sup>. A campaign to discredit

22 Sungorkin said that he met Putin at the FSB. Tsargrad, 12.01.2018, [https://tsargrad.tv/news/sungorkin-rasskazal-poznakomilsja-s-putiny-m-v-fsb\\_105169](https://tsargrad.tv/news/sungorkin-rasskazal-poznakomilsja-s-putiny-m-v-fsb_105169).

23 For the capture of the Crimea. Vedomosti, 05.05.2014, <https://vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/05/05/za-vzyatie-kryma>.

24 Skoybeda U. Politician Leonid Gozman said: "A beautiful outfit is the only difference between SMERSH and the SS."

Boris Nemtsov after his murder. Examples of headlines of KP articles that contain signs of disinformation and propaganda, calls for unleashing an aggressive war:

- «Zakhar Prilepin gathered his battalion in the "DPR" (Alexander Kots, 13.02.17).  
Quote:  
  - **«What are the ultimate goals of this war?**  
- Kyiv is the ultimate goal. We will not hide.
  - **- You want to change the government in Kyiv or annex it to Russia?**  
- Kyiv is a Russian city. Russian Ukrainian city. Our business is small. They will decide at the top. But I think that there should be no such mistakes as were there with Yanukovich... The entire Ukraine is a goal. There can be no other goal».
- "Ukrainian "volunteers" in Donbas raped children" (Dmitry Steshin, 07.08.2016);
- "Kyiv began a punitive operation against the insurgent Sloviansk" (Alexander Kots, 04.24.14),
- "In Kyiv, they ate a "Russian-speaking" baby" (12.01.15)
- "What is taught in Ukrainian school: The first ancient ... nation" (30.07.2018).
- "The punitive operation of Kyiv in Donbas is coordinated by the United States,"
- "Ukraine is ruled by nine criminals and a client of a mental hospital" ...
- "Lustration is Maidan illustration" (04.24.2014). Quote: "The only ones who are really interested in the general lustration are the Right Sector militants. Because only in this case they will have no competitors in the struggle for power. <...> Under the [lustration] banner the Maidan rampaged, the junta seized power"<sup>25</sup>.

The KP clearly proved itself as a "wartime" media when it facilitated the persecution of the 17-year-old schoolboy Vlad Kolesnikov, who spoke in support of Ukraine, and after the pan-Russian persecution by the country's most circulated newspaper, he committed suicide<sup>26</sup>.

## 6. LIFE

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The pro-Kremlin Internet tabloid the Life.ru media channel (until 2014 – LifeNews) was created in 2008 and belongs to the News Media holding of Aram Gabrelyanov. In 2013–2017, the LIFE TV channel was in operation, too. The channel became famous for its "innovative" approach to receiving news in the form of a payment system for receiving instant exclusive information, photos or videos from the scene.

LIFE is one of the most active participants in the hatred campaign against Ukraine since the beginning of Euromaidan. It established itself as the main source for disseminating fakes, one-sided and unverified information. Since the beginning of the conflict, LIFE journalists have supported the separatists, worked in Donbas on the part of Russian and separatist armed formations. The LIFE studio operates in ORDLO, and the WarGonzo group, one of its propagandist projects, is also stationed there.

Komsomolskaya Pravda, 13.05.2013, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26073.5/2980350/>.

25 <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26224.4/3106744/>.

26 For more details, see: I. Yakovenko. The main result of the year is the vertical of moral idiocy. 29.11.2015, <https://igoryakovenko.blogspot.ru/2015/12/134.html>.



## Actions regarding the conflict

Life.ru and the LifeNews TV channel have been repeatedly accused of calling for aggression against Ukraine, supporting and glorifying separatists<sup>27</sup>, persecuting the opposition, manipulating facts and using fakes. On 17 July 2014, LifeNews was the first to report on "a new victory of Donetsk militias" – the downing of MH17, which they initially mistook for the An-26 aircraft of the Ukrainian Air Force<sup>28</sup>. Other examples of fakes are: "Voters in the Netherlands are hiding their faces, fearing revenge from Ukrainian radicals"<sup>29</sup>, "The former head of the internal troops said that there were foreign snipers on the Maidan"<sup>30</sup>, "The security forces allowed tourists in Ukraine to shoot at civilians"<sup>31</sup> та ін.

## 7. Sputnik

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Along with Russia Today (RT), the Sputnik news agency is often cited as one of Putin's main propaganda tools in the West.

Sputnik is a project of the international news agency Rossiya Segodnya (formerly RIA Novosti and Voice of Russia), aimed at a foreign audience. The editor-in-chief of Sputnik is Margarita Simonyan, she is also the editor-in-chief of the RT (Russia Today) TV channel and MIA Rossiya Segodnya. The Director-General of Rossiya Segodnya is the propagandist of the Russia-1 channel Dmitry Kiselyov. Sputnik offices are located in Washington, Cairo, Beijing, London, Montevideo, Bishkek and other cities. Broadcasting is conducted in 30 languages. Sputnik includes a radio station of the same name, websites and press centres. As a government agency, Sputnik is funded from the state budget.

The style and content of Sputnik's news broadcasting in relation to Donbas and Ukraine as a whole look like purposeful actions to promote and justify Russia's actions, criticize Ukraine and the West. The work of Sputnik's editorial offices in the Baltic countries is particularly aggressive towards Ukraine.

Sputnik broadcasts are blocked in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine. The news agency is often indicated in the reports of Western intelligence services and think tanks as a weapon of Russian propaganda and has been accused of disinformation by Western media and media figures, in particular by French President Emanuel Macron<sup>32</sup>.

In November 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning "propaganda from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups," in which the "deeds" of RT and Sputnik were especially noted<sup>33</sup>.

27 Which cause did Motorola die?, <https://life.ru/p/917965>.

28 The MH17 disaster: how the versions of the Russian media changed. BBC Russian Service, 28.09.2016, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-37496581>.

29 <https://ru.krymr.com/a/27666764.html>.

30 The former head of the internal troops said that there were foreign snipers on Maidan. LIFE, 10.09.2017, [life.ru/p/1042365](https://life.ru/p/1042365).

31 The law enforcers allowed tourists in Ukraine to shoot at civilians. LIFE, 11.08.2014, <https://life.ru/p/138238>.

32 Macron accused Russia Today and Sputnik of "propaganda." Radio Liberty, 29.05.2017, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28516886.html>.

33 The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the fight against "Kremlin propaganda." Vedomosti, 23.11.2016, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/23/666624-evroparlament-rezolyutsiyu>

In 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on combating propaganda from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups, which are aimed at "distorting the truth, provoking fear, doubt and division in the European Union." All of this is being used to "challenge democratic values," ensure support for the Kremlin's policies within Russia and create the illusion of failed states in eastern Europe.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

With regard to the conflict region, Sputnik defends exclusively the political interests of the Kremlin abroad.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

The news coverage of the events in Donbas by the agency, like other propaganda media, is features by the absence of its own position, justification and cover for Russia's actions, one-sidedness, aggressiveness, manipulation of facts, falsifications. In general, the work on Sputnik can be called not reporting, but deliberate disinformation. The agency actively promoted the idea that Ukraine should say goodbye to Crimea<sup>34</sup>, the version about the Ukrainian trace in the MH17 disaster<sup>35</sup>, myths about the failure of Ukrainian reforms and the economic collapse in Ukraine<sup>36</sup>, about "discrimination of the Russian language" in Ukraine<sup>37</sup>, etc.

## **8. Federal News Agency (FAN)**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

The Russian news agency "Federal News Agency" (FAN) is the main project of the "media factory," which, along with the "troll factory" (also known as "Prigozhin trolls"), constitutes the unofficial "media holding" of Yevgeny Prigozhin (see the section Propagandists for more information about Prigozhin). In total, together with FAN, 15 more "information and scandalous" websites belong to the "media factory"<sup>38</sup>.

It takes an aggressive anti-Ukrainian position, publishes negative information and misinformation about the leaders of the Russian opposition, organizes campaigns of harassment against opposition and independent investigative journalists, as in the case of the discovery and the first detailed description of PMC Wagner<sup>39</sup>. FAN works in close cooperation with the "troll factory," together they create and distribute fakes. FAN accounts have been banned from Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook and

34 FBI investigation against Sputnik and how does Poroshenko want to return Crimea? Stopfake.org, 18.09.2017, <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/rassledovanie-fbr-protiv-sputnik-i-kak-poroshenko-hochet-vernut-krym-sfn-175/>.

35 Bershidsky Yu. Sputnik got confused in its fake versions of the crash of Malaysian Boeing. The Insider, 19.03.2018 <https://theins.ru/antifake/95587>.

36 Sputnik illustrated the recent news about Ukraine with a photograph from two months ago. Stopfake.org, 28.04.2015, <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/sputniknews-proillyustriroval-aktualnuyu-novost-ob-ukraine-fotografiej-dvuhmesyachnoj-davnosti/>.

37 "Genocide of Russians in Ukraine": How Russian Mass Media React to the Situation with Buzhanskyi's Bill. Stopfake.org, 21.07.2020, <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/genotsid-russkih-na-ukraine-kak-rossijskie-smi-reagiruyut-na-situatsiyu-s-zakonoproektom-buzhanskogo/>

38 RBC investigation: how a "media factory" grew out of a "troll factory." RBK, 24.03.2017, <https://www.rbc.ru/magazine/2017/04/58d106b09a794710fa8934ac>.

39 New threats against Novaya Gazeta, 19.10.2018, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/10/18/78241-novye-ugrozy-v-adres-novoy-gazety>.

Google News<sup>40</sup>. The agency was accused of interfering with the US elections<sup>41</sup>, for which in December 2018 the US Treasury added FAN to the Specially Designated Nationals List<sup>42</sup>.

With regard to the conflict in Donbas, the FAN is actively promoting the main Kremlin narrative for the propagandist media – the narrative of “genocide against the Russian-speakers, which is organized by the fascists who seized power in Ukraine.” FAN constantly publishes fakes and negative information regarding Ukraine.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

FAN is actively working to discredit the Ukrainian authorities and stir up the conflict. The agency has no interests in the conflict region.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

FAN is an active participant in the actions of Russian propaganda against Ukraine. Its work, like the activities of other pro-Kremlin media, is aimed at justifying Russia's aggression in Donbas, providing favorable coverage of the separatists' actions, fakes regarding MH17, and persecuting the democratic opposition and its leaders who supported Ukraine.

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40 A US court dismissed the Russian media FAN in a lawsuit against Facebook. RIA Novosti, 21.07.2019, <https://ria.ru/20190721/1556731543.html>.

41 \$2 million a month: how much “Putin's chef” spends on the 2018 American elections. The Bell, 20.10.2018, <https://thebell.io/2-mln-mesyats-skolko-povar-putina-tratit-na-amerikanske-vybory-2018>.

42 The United States imposed sanctions against the FAN agency, Mishkin and Chepiga. RBC, 19.12.2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/19/12/2018/5c1a86fb9a7947ac5e581452>.

## Influencers — propagandists

### 9. Alexey Gromov

#### Official position/function regarding the conflict

A. Gromov is the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration (PA). He is a key PA official in charge of the information policy of the Russian state media. The Presidential Administration had played the role of a single ideological centre even earlier, but it became especially evident in connection with the beginning of the Euromaidan and in subsequent events in Crimea and Donbas. Alexey Gromov enjoys full confidence of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He personally oversees the production of state propaganda and censorship, media activities, coverage of the President's work and the so-called presidential journalistic pool, and also decides on financing and supporting the media.

Until autumn 2016, responsibilities for controlling the media were distributed between two first deputy heads of the Presidential Administration: Gromov was responsible for television and newspapers, and Vyacheslav Volodin was responsible for the Internet. However, with the departure of Volodin to the State Duma and the appointment of Sergei Kiriyenko as Head of the Presidential Administration, Gromov gained control over all the media. In addition, he oversees the activities of the press services of law enforcement agencies. He holds meetings for representatives of press services in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor-General's Office, the Investigative Committee and other departments<sup>43</sup>.

#### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Gromov's interests include propaganda support for the armed conflict in Donbas and all events related to it. For example, a large-scale operation was organized to shield Russia after the MH17 disaster. Considering the similarity of news stories and the main comments of all propaganda channels regarding this event, instructions for coverage also came down from the PA.

#### Actions regarding the conflict

Gromov interacts directly with the editors-in-chief of key state media outlets. The main directives on information coverage of the most important topics come from his office<sup>44</sup>. Many editors-in-chief have repeatedly reported their participation in regular meetings at the Presidential Administration with the participation of Gromov<sup>45</sup>. In 2016, the hacked correspondence of media tycoon Aram Gabrelyanov showed that ready-made ordered materials were sent from Gromov's department to Izvestia and Life newspapers<sup>46</sup>. Since Euromaidan, the leadership of the Presidential Administration has been actively interacting with a group of political strategists and experts who provide propaganda work and have flooded all federal television channels. Among

43 A. Kynev Putin & Co: Who is Who in the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, [https://zakon.ru/blog/2020/7/10/putin\\_co\\_ili\\_who\\_is\\_who\\_v\\_administracii\\_prezidenta\\_rossijskoj\\_federacii\\_84798](https://zakon.ru/blog/2020/7/10/putin_co_ili_who_is_who_v_administracii_prezidenta_rossijskoj_federacii_84798).

44 Master of the puppets. "Project." <https://www.proekt.media/portrait/alexey-gromov/>

45 Ibid.

46 Gabrelyanov Aram Ashotovich. Putin's list. FSR, <https://www.spisok-putina.org/personas/gabrelyanov/>.

these media persons, there are also citizens of Ukraine who play the role of "whipping boys" on various political talk shows. As it turns out, they receive payment for that<sup>47</sup>.

After the start of the aggression in Ukraine, a sharp activation of Russian international broadcasting channels was also recorded: funding for RT from the state budget after 2014 was increased, new editions were created (French, German, Spanish RT). In November 2014, the Sputnik propaganda agency was created.

On 17 June 2015, Gromov spoke at the opening ceremony of a memorial plaque in memory of the VGTRK journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin who died in Donbas, where he said: "This is a war in which, unlike others, the "Press" sign did not help or save, but on the contrary ...", thus hinting that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are allegedly targeting journalists<sup>48</sup>.

## 10. Aram Gabrelyanov

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Gabrelyanov is a media tycoon close to the Kremlin, founder and Director General of the News Media publishing house, which owns the tabloid media Life, Mash, WarGonzo, etc. From 2011 to 2016, he was the Chair of the Board of Izvestia newspaper.

Gabrelyanov always tried to emphasize his loyalty to the authorities. He said, for example, that "no tabloid in the world can be unpatriotic,"<sup>49</sup> «"The President, Prime Minister and Patriarch of All Russia are three forbidden topics, because they cannot be criticized."<sup>50</sup>

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Gabrelyanov is a typical pro-Putin publisher and owner of a media outlet, dependent on the Presidential Administration and contacts with the officials, for whom the concept of freedom of speech is not applicable. Life.ru and other media outlets of Gabrelyanov are non-free media that serve the interests of the Kremlin and perform its tasks.

Gabrelyanov repeatedly spoke extremely aggressively and impartially against the Ukrainian authorities, supporters of the Maidan, and always emphasized his full support for Russia's policy towards Ukraine. The close and direct cooperation of Gabrelyanov's media with the Presidential Administration was confirmed by the publication in 2016 of materials of his personal correspondence, which were exposed by hackers of Anonymous International. Namely, it was revealed that the outlets Izvestia and LIFE posted paid materials upon guidance of the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Alexei Gromov, coordinating their texts directly with Gabrelyanov<sup>51</sup>.

47 Fees of foreign "whipping boys" on Russian talk shows get disclosed/ Lenta.ru, 17.10.2017, [https://lenta.ru/news/2017/10/17/deneg\\_net/](https://lenta.ru/news/2017/10/17/deneg_net/)

48 Gromov: there is no targeted fire in Donbas at the cost of the lives of killed journalists. RIA Novosti, 17.06.2015, <https://ria.ru/20150617/1074273091.html>

49 Azar I. "I have a mission." Aram Gabrelyanov on honest journalism and love for Putin. Lenta.ru, 28.05.2012, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2012/05/28/gabrelyanov/>.

50 Kashin O. Aram Gabrelyanov: "Putin is the Pope of the nation, you can't accuse him of anything." OpenSpace.ru, 11.07.2011, <http://os.colta.ru/media/paper/details/23555/>.

51 Aram A. Gabrelyanov. Putin's list. FSR, <https://www.spisok-putina.org/personas/gabrelyanov/>.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

In April 2014, Gabrelyanov closed the Ukrainian edition of the newspaper Life, as its journalists refused to publish materials under the titles "Protect Us, Russia," "Russia, SOS," and "Neo-Bandera's Dictatorship"<sup>52</sup>.

Since Euromaidan, his media outlets have been describing in an extremely tendentious manner the events taking place in Ukraine and in the area of the armed conflict. The most irreconcilable anti-Ukrainian authors such as Zakhar Prilepin, Semyon Pegov and Andrey Babitsky are published on the pages of his media.

Examples of headers from Life.ru:

- "Poklonskaya: Heavenly Hundred of the Maidan are devils from the ashes" (21 November 2016);
- "Schizophrenia Country: Ukraine parasitizes on the remnants of technology — and this infuriates the United States" (18 August 2018).

Since May 2016, Gabrelyanov has been on the list of Ukraine's personal sanctions against Russian propagandists<sup>53</sup>.

## **11. Yevgeny Prigozhin**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

Yevgeny Prigozhin is a businessman, one of those close to the President Putin. Officially, Prigozhin's structures are involved in construction, development, catering for schools, catering for senior officials and for high-level official events (for which he was nicknamed "Putin's chef"). Unofficially, the circle of affairs of Prigozhin's shadow empire is much wider.

Prigozhin's functions in relation to the conflict are in his tacit support of covert operations on the territory of Ukraine, as well as in the creation and financing of formations of professional mercenary fighters — private military companies (PMCs), including those participating in hostilities in Donbas.

Since 2016, Prigozhin, a number of employees of the "troll factory" and his companies have been included in the U.S. sanction list<sup>54</sup>. ⚭ This list is being supplemented. The last time agents of Prigozhin's media were included in the list was in July 2020<sup>55</sup>. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, VKontakte and YouTube are clearing out fake troll accounts and blocking new ones<sup>56</sup>.

52 Shepelin I. Gabrelyanov closed the Ukrainian LIFE because of the rejection of the article "Neo-Bandera's dictatorship." Republic, 9.04.2014, <https://republic.ru/posts/l/1081845>.

53 Kyiv has imposed sanctions against the heads of Russian media. Interfax, 27.05.2016, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/510474>

54 Prigozhin and Kovalchuk came under the U.S. sanctions. Medusa, 20.12.2016, <https://meduza.io/news/2016/12/20/prigozhin-i-kovalchuk-popali-pod-amerikanskije-sanktsii>.

55 The United States imposed sanctions on people and companies associated with Prigozhin. RBK, 15.07.2020, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/15/07/2020/5f0f4a829a794767c98aa6b3>.

56 A. Krechetova. Google and Facebook have revealed the scale of "Russian interference" in the U.S. elections. Forbes, 30.10.2017, <https://www.forbes.ru/tehnologii/352217-google-i-facebook-raskryli-masshtab-vmeshatelstva-rossii-v-vybory-ssha>.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

Prigozhin's activities in relation to the conflict are aimed at supporting hybrid warfare by military and non-military means.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

As a close friend of the President, Prigozhin is entrusted with the most serious and delicate assignments, including:

1. "Military" operations — the creation and support of private military companies that are involved in hostilities in different parts of the world, incl. in Ukraine, carry out sabotage operations, guard strategic facilities (for example, oil pipelines in Syria).
2. "Non-military" operations — the creation and support of the "troll factory" and media factory" that are network organizations aimed at propaganda work in social networks, the creation of media, the purpose of which is to fight the Russian opposition, undermine democracy around the world, interfere in the affairs of others countries, including in elections (for example, the U.S. in 2016, etc.).

This activity is not funded by the state directly, but is facilitated through the laundering of public funds — Prigozhin's structures receive large public contracts from the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (MO), which are then used as private money<sup>57</sup>. According to investigative journalists, the company is supervised by the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense<sup>58</sup>.

In 2014, the Wagner PMC militants, along with the paratroopers of the Black Sea Fleet, took part in the occupation of Crimea as "polite people:" they seized administrative facilities, disarmed Ukrainian military bases, etc<sup>59</sup>. In 2014–2015, they participated in hostilities in Donbas<sup>60</sup>.

"Troll Factory" (official name is "Internet Investigation Agency") is a media structure created with the aim of spreading disinformation, influencing public opinion, discrediting the opposition, mainly on social networks. The agency uses fake accounts from which the "trolls" — paid employees, mostly young people 20–30 years old — share fake information through the network, provoke and insult other users, enter into a skirmish with them, defend the position of the authorities, in particular, on armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

## **12. Dmitry Kiselyov**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

Dmitry Kiselyov is the TV presenter of VGTRK (Russia-24 and Russia-1), one of the most influential and well-known actors of information propaganda on Russian TV. Not only he appears on television himself, where he hosts the social and political broadcast Vesti Nedeli on Russia-1 TV channel, but he is also an official – he heads

57 The Phantoms of War: How the Russian Private Army appeared in Syria. RBK, 25.08.2016, <https://www.rbc.ru/magazine/2016/09/57bac4309a79476d978e850d>.

58 In Ibid.

59 Korotkov D. "Slavic Corps" returns to Syria. Fontanka, 16.10.2015, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2015/10/16/118/>.

60 In Ibid.

the international news agency Rossiya Segodnya, the largest state-owned media agency in Russia.

Kiselyov has repeatedly spoken aggressively in his broadcasts about Ukraine. The main position is Ukraine's denial of independence, statehood and legitimacy: "Ukraine is a project of the West," "There is no Ukraine. Now it is a virtual concept, a virtual country and a failed state" (May 2014),<sup>61</sup> "Ukraine is a state of chaos, lawlessness and absurdity" (2017). As media experts emphasize, this formula later became one of the main tools in the propaganda "manuals".

Since 2015, Kiselyov has been under sanctions from Ukraine, Moldova, Switzerland, Canada, the United States and EU countries.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

As an actor of influence working on a Russian state television channel, Kiselyov defends the interests of the Kremlin in the region of the conflict: he aggressively criticizes the Ukrainian authorities, calls Ukraine "under-state," and supports the separatists of ORDLO. Kiselyov's crimes are calls for war, statements in support of Russia's aggressive actions, justification of the separatists' actions, and insults against Ukrainians.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Kiselyov's actions are expressed in aggressive propaganda against the people and the government of Ukraine, the spread of threats, disinformation and fakes. Examples of fakes and intentional manipulations are:

- "In Sevastopol, the Americans were already planning their military base, and Poroshenko, who was expelled from Crimea weeks before the referendum, would obviously encroach on the peninsula and its inhabitants" (March 2019);
- "Ukraine is now probably the most dangerous place in the world for journalists..." (September 2016);
- A plot in Vesti Nedeli about the battles at Donetsk airport, where soldiers in uniform and with stripes of the Russian Armed Forces are clearly visible. At the same time, the behind-the-scenes journalist calls them "fighters of the armed forces of the "DPR" (January 2015);
- A plot entitled "Malignant mutation of Ukrainians" about the new date of the Day of the Defender of Ukraine, 14 October. The plot emphasizes that this is the date of the creation of the UPA. In this story, the UPA is presented in an absolutely negative light, in particular, it is said that the UPA is guilty of the destruction of the village of Khatyn<sup>62</sup>.

Kiselyov also distorted information about Euromaidan and in the most serious way, which was reflected in the decision of the Russian Public Commission on Press Complaints<sup>63</sup>.

61 Dmitry Kiselyov: "Now Ukraine is a virtual country, and our portal is real!" The Republic, 15.05.2014, <https://republic.ru/posts/l/1097998>.

62 Fakes in the Vesti Nedeli program with Dmitry Kiselyov. Stopfake.org, 24.10.2014, <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/fejki-v-programme-vesti-nedeli-s-dmitriem-kiselevym/>.

63 <https://www.presscouncil.ru/index.php/praktika/rassmotrennye-zhaloby/3007-zhaloba-na-vesti-nedeli-s-dmitriem-kisilevym-iz-za-osveshcheniya-evromajdana?showall=&start=9>.



Among his propaganda projects is the pro-Russian portal [Ukraina.ru](http://Ukraina.ru).

In general, signs of crimes may be seen in Kiselyov's activities in accordance with the current articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: Art. 205.2 (Public calls for terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism), Art. 354 (Public calls for unleashing an aggressive war), Art. 282.1 (Incitement to hatred or enmity, as well as humiliation of the dignity of a person or a group of persons on the basis of gender, race, nationality...), Art. 280 (Public calls for extremist activities).

## 13. Vladimir Solovyov

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The TV presenter of Russia-1 channel is one of the most famous Russian influencer propagandists. Solovyov is known for his extremely hostile attitude towards Ukraine and servile praise of the Russian government. He is the anchor of the broadcast "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin" at Russia-1, makes documentaries about Putin and for several years was the only journalist to whom Putin gave long interviews.

Solovyov's position in relation to Ukraine has changed several times over a certain period. "How many Ukrainian and Russian lives are you willing to claim in order to capture Crimea ...?"<sup>64</sup>, he asked even before all the events on the Maidan in early 2013. "We brought this day closer as we could. Crimea and Sevastopol are again part of Russia. Historical justice has triumphed!" (18 March 2014).

With regard to the conflict in Donbas, Solovyov took a quite definite position from the very beginning: "In Novorossia, anti-fascists are fighting against the fascists."<sup>65</sup>

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Since 2014, Solovyov's TV broadcasts have been created and supervised by the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (see info about Alexey Gromov) in order to maintain and increase the rating of Vladimir Putin (which has been falling since 2017 no matter what), fanning the atmosphere of hatred towards Ukraine and its supporters in Russia (first of all, the Russian liberal opposition-minded intelligentsia). Solovyov also actively participates in fanning the "sieged fortress" myth beneficial for Kremlin when "everyone is enemies around" in order to mobilize society around government.

### Actions regarding the conflict

Since February 2014, Solovyov has been involved in justifying the capture of Crimea and military expansion against Ukraine and laundering the image of Russia, for which he was secretly awarded by the president "for objective reporting of events in Crimea" alongside 300 other employees of the Russian state media outlets. At the same time, Solovyov's merits were especially noted — he received not a medal, like most of those awarded, but the Order of Alexander Nevsky<sup>66</sup>.

64 Vladimir Solovyov explained why Russia does not need Crimea. Notes, 30.05.2016, <https://primechaniya.ru/sevastopol/stati/13447>.

65 The logic of the beast. AiF, 01.07.2014, <https://aif.ru/euromaidan/opinion/1199193>.

66 For the capture of the Crimea. Vedomosti, 05.05.2014, [www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/05/05/za-vzyatie-kryma](http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/05/05/za-vzyatie-kryma).

Since 2014, during the aggravation of the situation in Ukraine, in particular, in Donbas, the social and political talk show "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" has turned from a weekly into a daily one, in order to more effectively cover Russian population with anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

Solovyov became famous for aggressive attacks on speakers with an alternative position, not only verbal, but also physical: there were fights in his studio, he kicked one Ukrainian speaker out of the studio right during the recording<sup>67</sup>.

## 14. Margarita Simonyan

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Editor-in-chief of RT (Russia Today), MIA Rossiya Segodnya and Sputnik, Simonyan occupies key positions in propagandist media created for broadcasting to a foreign audience, including a Russian-speaking audience. She headed the holding of foreign language broadcasting Russia Today in 2005 (when she was 25 years old).

Simonyan quite definitely speaks about the "mission" of her media: "In a sense, not having your own foreign broadcasting is like not having a Defense Ministry. When there is no war, it seems to be unnecessary. But damn it, when there is war, it is highly critical."<sup>68</sup>

"I absolutely do not like the fact that the world is dominated (and only for the last few years, thanks to us and Al-Jazeera, it ceased to be dominated) by a single view of something ... In 2008 [during the Russian-Georgian war — author], our coverage was not the best ...it was much smaller than it is now, so our voice drowned in this chorus, and now [during the conflict with Ukraine – author] we are heard"<sup>69</sup>.

In relation to the conflict region, Simonyan takes a pro-imperial position and, if she criticizes the Russian government, it is only for weakness and lack of resolve. For example, from the very beginning of the conflict, she actively advocated the for issuing passports to the population of ORDLO, but the Kremlin left such calls unanswered. In June 2018, she wrote: "I will organize some social movement #Citizenship of Donbas. Who is with me?"<sup>70</sup>.

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

The media led by Simonyan, were created with the aim of promoting the Russian agenda in the world. They are part of a hybrid war against Ukraine and are spreading one-sided information, fake news and lies. In general, the activities of the media of Margarita Simonyan contribute to the development in Russia and abroad of such a picture of the world which ultimately leads to massive crimes against humanity and the murder of thousands of innocent citizens on the territory of Ukraine.

67 "Give it to the NKVD for execution:" Solovyov expelled a former MP of the Verkhovna Rada from the studio because of the words about the UPA. Gazeta.ru, 27.02.2020, [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/02/27\\_a\\_12978715.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/02/27_a_12978715.shtml).

68 Russian media from within. Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of Russia Today. Interview with O. Kashin. Afisha, 18.10.2011, <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/gorod/archive/ministry-of-truth-simonyan/>.

69 Azar I. Margarita Simonyan: "I'm not going to pretend that I am objective." Lenta.ru, 7.03.2013, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2013/03/07/simonyan/>.

70 [https://twitter.com/M\\_Simonyan/status/1004696918537179136](https://twitter.com/M_Simonyan/status/1004696918537179136).

## Actions regarding the conflict

Simonyan personally on her social networks, as well as her media, promoted a positive attitude to the annexation of Crimea and the actions of separatists in Donbas. Like other influencers, Simonyan calls the hostilities in the Donbas an "internal conflict" in Ukraine, denies Russia's role in the MH17 disaster and blames Ukraine for it. The fact that her position does not change over the years, but only strengthens, is evidenced by her tweet in relation to the mass protests in Belarus: "In general, it's time for polite people to put things in order there, of course. We know they can do it" (August 2020)<sup>71</sup>. The activities of Simonyan and the media she leads contribute to positive assessment of Putin's policy in Ukraine, as well as a negative attitude towards Ukraine and Ukrainians, among the part of international community.

Simonyan's efforts did not go unnoticed on both sides. In 2014, Vladimir Putin, by a secret decree, awarded her the Order of Merit to the Fatherland of the 4th degree, "for objectivity in covering events in Crimea." In May 2016, RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan, along with the heads of other propagandist media, was banned from entering Ukraine<sup>72</sup>.

In 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on combating propaganda from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups that says: "The Kremlin has intensified propaganda against the EU since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in Donbas ..." To do this, the Russian government uses "a wide range of tools," including "multilingual TV companies (e.g., Russia Today, or RT), pseudo-news agencies and multimedia services (e.g., Sputnik), social networks and Internet trolls"<sup>73 74</sup>.

In 2020, her personal Twitter account received the label "State-owned media, Russia," which is used to label non-free government media. Twitter then refuses to promote accounts with such labels<sup>75</sup>.

## 15. Vladimir Sungorkin

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Editor-in-chief and director of Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP) publishing house. Sungorkin is one of the main Russian actors of information influence, or propagandists. He has been working in KP since 1975. Despite the fact that the KP is a non-state publication, it stresses its closeness to the authorities in every possible way ("The current President is exactly the person who needs to be supported in all his undertakings")<sup>76</sup>.

71 [https://twitter.com/M\\_Simonyan/status/1294140006882189312](https://twitter.com/M_Simonyan/status/1294140006882189312).

72 Poroshenko has banned the heads of some Russian media outlets from entering Ukraine. Vedomosti, 27.05.2016, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2016/05/27/642747-poroshenko-vezd-ukrainu>.

73 The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the fight against Kremlin propaganda. Vedomosti, 23.11.2016, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/23/666624-evroparlament-rezolyutsiyu>.

74 Resolution of the European Parliament of 23 November 2016 on strategic communications of the EU to counter propaganda against it by third parties (2016/2030 (INI), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0441\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0441_EN.html)

75 Twitter has started tagging media and journalist accounts associated with the state. Meduza, 06.08.2020, <https://meduza.io/news/2020/08/06/twitter-nachal-markirovat-akkaunty-smi-i-zhurnalistov-svyazannyh-s-gosudarstvom-metki-poluchili-rt-i-margarita-simonyan>.

76 Sungorkin said that he met Putin at the FSB. Tsargrad-TV, 12.01.2018, [https://tsargrad.tv/news/sungorkin-rasskazal-poznakomilsja-s-putinyem-v-fsb\\_105169](https://tsargrad.tv/news/sungorkin-rasskazal-poznakomilsja-s-putinyem-v-fsb_105169).

With the victory of Euromaidan, the beginning of the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of a conflict in Donbas, the newspaper's narrative under the leadership of Sungorkin aims at public mobilization. In 2014, he talked about it as follows:

"M. KOROLYOVA: Our listeners are asking you: "In your opinion, do our federal media objectively cover the events taking place in Ukraine?"

V. SUNGORKIN: Well, of course, they are on the positions of the Russian state and Russian interest, therefore ... certainly you cannot speak of such complete objectivity, right? I think they are playing along with the Russian state.

M. KOROLYOVA: So, as the editor-in-chief of Komsomolskaya Pravda, are you ready, for example, to provide a tribune to the other side?

V. SUNGORKIN: I'm not ready! In this situation, I am absolutely not ready. What for? Why should I provide them with a possibility to have their say? How can I give him [Bandera] the floor, if today they are zombified by their Goebbels so that we never dreamed of?". (From an interview with Echo of Moscow)<sup>77</sup>.

This position is reflected in a special, one-sided selection of news and information, coverage of events and interpretation of facts. Unverified or knowingly falsified information often appears on the pages of the newspaper; there is no room for equilateral discussions with a neutral discussion of different positions.

### Actions regarding the conflict

Actions regarding the conflict. Creation of fakes, misinformation, manipulation of facts. Sungorkin often gives interviews and speaks out on Ukraine. Some specific examples:

- Creation of a myth about "Captain Voloshin" who allegedly shot down a Malaysian Boeing<sup>78</sup>. Sungorkin personally took part in the video interview with the "eyewitness" in the KP studio. Following the KP, this legend was disseminated as "verified information" by Russia-1 TV channel and other propagandist media. In subsequent years, KP already said that the Boeing was shot down by Ukrainian Buk<sup>79</sup>.
- Propaganda of hatred against Ukraine, maintaining the myth "Ukraine is not a state" and "it will soon collapse". Examples:
  - "Vladimir Sungorkin: In Ukraine, everything will be even worse than under Poroshenko";<sup>80</sup>
  - "Vladimir Sungorkin: Ukraine is definitely on the eve of another Maidan, with a predictable result";<sup>81</sup>
  - "Editor-in-chief of Komsomolskaya Pravda Vladimir Sungorkin: The Ukrainian authorities continue to go crazy!"<sup>82</sup>

77 "Minority opinion" broadcast at Echo of Moscow, 28.03.14, <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1288200-echo>.

78 Varsegov N. Malaysian Boeing was shot down by a Ukrainian pilot – Captain Voloshin. Komsomolskaya Pravda, 22.12.2014, <https://kp.ru/daily/26323.5/3204312/>.

79 The Boeing over Donbas was shot down by the Ukrainian Buk. KP, 08.12.2014, <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/26768.7/3800099/>.

80 Radio Komsomolskaya Pravda, 30.05.2019, <https://radiokp.ru/podcast/chto-budet/11333>.

81 <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/26767.4/3798697/>.

82 <https://www.kp.kz/daily/26676.7/3698526/>.

# Conditionally independent, opposition and investigative media

## 16. Echo of Moscow

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Echo of Moscow (EM) is the most famous and popular information political talk radio station. In 2009–2013, it was recognized as the most cited radio station in Russia<sup>83</sup>. The owner of 66% of the radio station's shares is JSC Gazprom-Media<sup>84</sup>.

The general direction of the broadcasting ideology is the liberal systemic opposition with the "permitted" level of criticism of the authorities. From the very beginning of its existence in 1990, EM has adhered to the principle of providing all meaningful points of view on events (including pro-government and non-democratic). The non-systemic opposition tends to regard EM as the mouthpiece of the Kremlin, as EM often gives the floor to representatives of the Russian government and broadcasts the pro-Kremlin position.

However, EM has a significant impact on oppositional audiences. The coverage is also supported by the fact that it is the only radio station criticizing the authorities, giving the floor to opposition politicians, which still operates in the FM band. Also of great importance for the audience is the EM website <http://echo.msk.ru>, registered as a separate media outlet, on which popular critical opinions are published.

The official position of EM regarding the events in Ukraine can be called limitedly independent. The editorial board does not recognize the annexation of Crimea, does not call it Russian, but does not openly call it Ukrainian either. EM covered Euromaidan in detail and fairly objectively. With regard to the downed Boeing MH17, EM also provides all alternative points of view, openly covers the trial in the Netherlands, talks about journalistic investigations, which in general can be called a rather bold position in the face of lack of freedom of the media.

On the one hand, functions regarding the conflict can be defined as playing the role of an independent media with a critical position in relation to the authorities. On the other hand, to convey to the target audience (educated middle class) the Kremlin's position. Apparently, this function is the condition for the continued existence of the radio station.

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

EM tries to provide independent information on the military operations in Donbas, but is bound by commitments with the Kremlin, which include not directly criticizing Putin and presenting the authorities' point of view on events. The fulfillment of these obligations and other compromises with the authorities seem enable EM existence as a relatively independent liberal media.

83 Medialogia: Ekho Moskvyy is the most cited radio station for 5 years. EM, 07.05.2014, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1315236-echo/>

84 <https://www.gazprom-media.com/ru/company/show?id=22>.

Thus, it is in the interests of EM to provide objective information to the audience, while not giving reasons for a sharp reaction from the authorities. This corresponds to the position of Aleksey Venediktov, Editor-in-Chief of EM, "to maneuver between two sides."<sup>85</sup> However, in an environment where even simple silence and disapproval of the Kremlin's actions can be extremely risky for the media, EM can be considered the freest FM radio station in Russia.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

EM is criticized from both sides: the authorities and their supporters accuse the radio station of "pro-Ukrainian" coverage of events in Donbas,<sup>86</sup> while opposition critics often accuse editor-in-chief Venediktov of duplicity. Igor Yakovenko speaks of EM as follows: "The Venediktov's Echo of Moscow is a very effective and sophisticated unit of the Kremlin's information troops."<sup>87</sup> In an interview at the beginning of 2018, Venediktov called the military conflict in Donbas "internal."<sup>88</sup>

At the same time, EM quite openly and objectively talks about the military conflict, fakes of propaganda media, investigations of war crimes, gives the floor to opposition authors and representatives of Ukraine. On the other hand, EM tries to avoid direct criticism of Putin by staying "above" the conflict. Most of the criticism of EM is directed against the regular propagandists of the state media outlets and Putin's odious "information guardians." EM actively quotes and gives the floor to representatives of the authorities (for example, Putin's press secretary D. Peskov, whom EM editor-in-chief Aleksey Venediktov calls his friend)<sup>89</sup>, the systemic opposition or liaison mediators between the Kremlin and the opposition (K.Sobchak, A.Krasovskiy, etc.).

## **17. Novaya Gazeta**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

Novaya Gazeta (hereinafter — NG), <https://novayagazeta.ru>, is the largest print publication that can be called "independent" in terms of freedom of speech. It was created in 1993 after a split in the editorial board of Komsomolskaya Pravda. A controlling stake belongs to the editorial team, minority shareholders are Mikhail Gorbachev and businessman Alexander Lebedev. This is the fact that the co-owners are independent from the state that predetermines the newspaper's relatively reporting policy. Nevertheless, it is often reprimanded for her lack of an impartial view and "partisanship."

NG consistently and harshly criticizes Russia's actions in Donbas, thoroughly and independently covers the military, as well as social and humanitarian situation in the conflict region, conducts bright and high-profile journalistic investigations.

85 Ibid.

86 Echo of Moscow is about to challenge Roskomnadzor's warnings. SOVA Center, 05.11.2014, <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2014/11/d30587/>.

87 Igor Yakovenko: They want to cover Ukraine with the Broom [Venediktov's surname sounds like broom in Russian – translator's note], [https://yakovenkoigor.blogspot.com/2019/08/blog-post\\_12.html](https://yakovenkoigor.blogspot.com/2019/08/blog-post_12.html).

88 The essence of events. Echo of Moscow, 05.01.2018, <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/sut/2123522-echo/>.

89 Reuters S., Goryashko S. "Between two sides:" life and rules of Alexei Venediktov. BBC, 29.04.2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-51844470>.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

The interests of the outlet include the most objective coverage of the conflict and the humanitarian situation in Donbas, as well as the establishment of the truth about the causes and perpetrators of military actions.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

In May 2014, NG journalist Pavel Kanygin, covering the development of the conflict and the so-called "referendum on the independence of Donbas," was kidnapped by the separatists, who demanded a ransom for him in the amount of \$30,000 US dollars. He was tortured and released for ransom<sup>90</sup>. In June 2015, during a business trip to Donbas, Kanygin was again detained and beaten by representatives of the "DPR" state security members<sup>91</sup>.

Kanygin is also the author of important investigations into the involvement of the Russian military in the MH17 downing<sup>92</sup>.

## **18. TV channel Rain**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

Rain (<https://tvrain.ru>) is a private round-the-clock informational TV channel. It belongs to the media holding of the same name, the main owner of which is Natalya Sindeeva, who is also the founder and Director-General of Rain Television Company. The media holding also includes other liberal media outlets – Slon.ru and Republic. The general broadcasting policy is moderately independent. The TV channel covers in detail the complex domestic Russian topics, political and social protests in Russia, the activities of the opposition, gives the floor to the opposition democratic politicians and public figures, conducts investigations its own and in detail covers partner journalistic investigations.

Nevertheless, TV Rain prefers to distance itself from the most pressing issues. For example, although the channel covered Euromaidan in detail, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the seizure of eastern Ukraine, it subsequently distanced itself from this topic.

As a democratic media, the channel does not approve of Russia's actions and does not support separatist regimes, but refrains from sharp statements and comments in connection with the conflict.

An important feature in the history of TV Rain is the ban on its broadcasting on the territory of Ukraine by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting in 2017. Among the reasons were the violation of Ukrainian legislation in the field of commercial advertising, but it seems that the real reason was the trips of Rain reporters to Crimea unauthorized by the Ukrainian authorities, as well as the

90 A Novaya Gazeta correspondent abducted during the coverage of the "referendum," <https://www.newsru.com/world/12may2014/kanygin.html>.

91 Novaya Gazeta special correspondent Pavel Kanygin was brought to Russia. Novaya Gazeta, June 16, 2015, <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2015/06/16/112949-spetskor-171-novoy-gazety-187-pavel-kanygin-171-on-napravil-na-menya-pistolet-i-sprosil-ya-za-nih-ili-za-171-ukropov-187-kogda-ya-skazal-8212-za-mir-mgbshnik-srazu-dal-mne-kulakom-v-glaz-187>.

92 P. Kanygin "There was no Buk on our field. Not a trace, not from the tracks, not from the bicycle." Novaya Gazeta, 07.06.2015, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2015/06/07/64439-171-na-nashem-pole-171-buka-187-ne-bylo-ni-sleda-8212-ni-ot-gusenits-ni-ot-velosipeda-187>.

map of Russia with the image of Crimea in "Here and Now" broadcast. Sineeveva commented on the decision of the National Council as follows: "The TV channel is guided by Russian law when depicting a map of Russia. In accordance with Article 65 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Crimea is a subject of the Russian Federation."<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, as the only democratic television channel (albeit predominantly on the Internet), TV Rain cannot be disregarded when analyzing the Ukrainian-friendly Russian media market.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Neutral coverage of events in Donbas. TV Rain publishes journalistic investigations, for example, about the recruitment of Russian mercenaries.<sup>94</sup> Another useful area is the analysis of fakes of state media in the broadcast "Fake News," for example, a large investigation into the creation of the myth of the "crucified boy" in Sloviansk<sup>95</sup>, etc. In general, it is necessary to note the benevolent and comprehensive coverage towards Ukraine. The channel details the course of the trial in the Netherlands for the MH17 disaster.

## **19. Grani.ru**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

Grani.ru ([www.grani.ru](http://www.grani.ru)) is an independent online outlet of the oppositional democratic direction. It covers in detail the actions of the opposition, including protests against Russian aggression in Ukraine, publishes materials in support of Ukraine, is engaged in exposing media fakes of propagandist media and harshly criticizes the Russian authorities. The website offers a lot of analytics, including a special section dedicated to Ukraine<sup>96</sup>. Among the authors are opposition leaders, civic activists, publicists, human rights activists, including Ukrainian commentators (for example, Vitaly Portnikov).

Grani.ru became one of the first four Russian opposition websites blocked in March 2014 at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office in accordance with the Lugovoy law ("the law on extrajudicial blocking of extremist websites"). At the moment, access to the website in Russia is possible only through VPN, Tor or a mirror <https://grani-ru-org.appspot.com>). In June 2020, the European Court of Human Rights awarded EUR 10,000 to each of the websites Grani.ru and Kasparov.ru for extrajudicial blocking<sup>97</sup>.

93 [https://tvrain.ru/news/nats\\_po\\_ukraina-425256/](https://tvrain.ru/news/nats_po_ukraina-425256/).

94 Erzhenkov S. Who recruits Russian volunteers and what they are promised. Rain, 26.02.2015, [https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/reportazh/kto\\_verbuet\\_rossijskih\\_dobrovoltsev\\_i\\_chno\\_im\\_obeschajut\\_istorija\\_odnogo\\_naemnika\\_ekskljuziv\\_dozhdja-382605/](https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/reportazh/kto_verbuet_rossijskih_dobrovoltsev_i_chno_im_obeschajut_istorija_odnogo_naemnika_ekskljuziv_dozhdja-382605/)

95 Where did the story of the crucifixion of a 3-year-old boy come from on Channel One? Rain, 07.07.2014, <https://youtu.be/W9BjogewWXk>.

96 <https://grani-ru-org.appspot.com/Politics/World/Europe/Ukraine>.

97 <https://zona.media/news/2020/06/23/grnru-ksprvru>.



## 20. MBK-Media

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Network socio-political information outlet created by Mikhail Khodorkovsky (<https://mbk-news.appspot.com>). It was founded after the blocking of the Open Russia website by Roskomnadzor in 2017. Over the short period since establishment (2017), MBK-Media has become one of the most influential independent information resources with a developed reporters network in the regions of Russia and abroad. In 2019, it was among the ten most cited Internet websites<sup>98</sup>. It was repeatedly nominated and received numerous journalistic awards.

The website is currently blocked on the territory of Russia and is available only on the mirror <https://mbk-news.appspot.com> or through VPN services.

MBK-Media is one of the projects of Open Russia organization, founded by Khodorkovsky back in the days of Yukos, in the early 2000s. In 2017, the Prosecutor-General's Office of the Russian Federation entered three foreign legal entities — Otkrytaya Rossia and Open Russia Civic Movement (both from the UK) and the Institute of Modern Russia, Inc. (USA), headed by Khodorkovsky's son Pavel, into the register of "undesirable organizations." For some reason, this gave the Russian special services a reason to persecute the Russian movement "Open Russia," although formally it has nothing to do with them, does not have a legal entity, and most importantly, it cannot be an "undesirable organization" (according to the law, these can only be foreign NPO)<sup>99</sup>.

With regard to the conflict region, MBK-Media takes a balanced position, actively criticizes the Russian authorities, and gives the floor to opposition and pro-Ukrainian authors.

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

MBK-Media was created as an independent information resource for providing impartial coverage of events, including in Ukraine. Dozens of articles by Russian and Ukrainian authors are devoted to the military conflict, as well as the humanitarian situation in Donbas.

## 21. Радіо «Свобода»

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Radio Liberty (hereinafter RL) is an international media holding (full name Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), broadcasting in 26 languages, including Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar. Funded by the U.S. Congress ([www.svoboda.org](http://www.svoboda.org)). The Russian Service of RL acts as an independent outlet guided only by the holding's general mission in promoting democracy, is registered in Russia as an independent media outlet, and part of the editorial office is located in Moscow, which allows us to speak of it as a separate Russian media.

Broadcasting remained on medium waves, but most of the broadcasts are available on the Internet.

98 Federal media: October 2019. Medialogy, <https://www.mlg.ru/ratings/media/federal/7028>.

99 A. Koshik. Penalty for Khodorkovsky: what the pensioner, doctors and teacher were punished for. Radio Liberty, 06.07.2018, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29344947.html>

As an international media guided in its activities by the principles of neutrality and impartiality, RL journalists try to refrain from direct opinionated comments on the conflict, but the comments of the invited speakers are clearly pro-Ukrainian in nature.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

Providing objective, balanced and verified information about the conflict and humanitarian situation along the contact line. The RL editors strive to provide an alternative point of view to the propaganda mainstream in Russia.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

The Russian service of RL critically and independently covers the actions of the Russian authorities and the events related to the conflict in Donbas, devotes a lot of its airtime to discussing a peaceful settlement in the region. In 2014, the Moscow editorial office fired its longtime employee, Andrey Babitsky, for approving Russia's actions in Crimea. Babitsky now lives in Donetsk and is part of the Russian propaganda system<sup>100</sup>.

In 2015, the Ukrainian service of Radio Liberty launched a special TV project "Donbas. Realities TV" reporting about "the life in uncontrolled territories, the supply of weapons, Russian military personnel, foreign mercenaries, corruption schemes in grey area."<sup>101</sup>

In addition, in 2014, immediately after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia, the Ukrainian service launched Crimea.Realities – a separate information project with its own Internet broadcasting, and since 2015, medium-wave radio broadcasting, which can be received over most of the peninsula. It also covers events in the Donbas. Currently, the project runs three information websites: in Russian (Crimea.Realities, <http://ru.krymr.com>), Ukrainian (Crimea.Realities, <http://ua.krymr.com>) and Crimean Tatar (Qırım.Aqiqat, <http://ktat.krymr.com>)<sup>102 103</sup>.

The Russian service of the RL also broadcasts the programs entirely devoted to the events in Ukraine and Donbas: "Roads to Freedom" (hosted by Ukrainian political scientist Vitaly Portnikov), "Ukraine. 5 years later" and others. RL tells in detail about the military conflict, peace initiatives, humanitarian and social situation in the region, about the activities of Russian human rights defenders and activists in support of Ukraine<sup>104</sup>.

A significant part of the air of the Russian service of the radio station is devoted to events in eastern Ukraine.

Also, given the crisis with objective information from Ukraine in 2016, Radio Liberty, together with the Voice of America radio, launched the Current Time TV channel, broadcasting its programs live on satellite TV and on the website <https://www.currenttime.tv>.

100 Journalist Andrei Babitsky, dismissed from Radio Liberty, will launch a TV channel in Donetsk. Meduza, 10.07.2015, <https://meduza.io/news/2015/07/10/uvolenny-s-radio-svoboda-zhurnalist-andrey-babitskiy-zapustit-telekanal-v-donetske>.

101 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/z/17073/about>.

102 <https://ru.krymr.com/p/5612.html>.

103 <https://ru.krymr.com/p/5612.html>

104 See, for example: Wagner A. In Search of the Truth About War. Volunteers from 11 countries visited Sloviansk. Radio Liberty, 08.09.2019, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30153077.html>.

In December 2017, Radio Liberty and its projects Crimes.Realities, Idel.Realities, Kavkaz.Realities, Siberia.Realities, Sever.Realities, Faktograph, Tatar-Bashkir Radio Service Svoboda (Azatliq Radiosi), the TV channel Current Time, as well as the limited liability company Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were included by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation in the list of media outlets "performing the functions of a foreign agent."<sup>105</sup>

## 22. BBC Russian Service

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The BBC Russian Service is part of an international state-owned media holding (in its case, British Broadcasting Corporation) headquartered in the UK (<https://www.bbc.com/russian>). The outlet has a wide reporter network in Russia and other countries of the former USSR.

The Russian service is one of the oldest services of BBC, it began to air during the World War II. In Soviet times, it occupied an honorable place among the "enemy voices," its broadcasts were jammed. In the perestroika and post-perestroika times, it retained its position as a balanced, objective radio, covering problems and events ignored by the federal media.

BBC is closely following the development of events in the Donbas. The position in relation to the region of the conflict is objective and balanced. Like other independent media, BBC primarily advocates for freedom of speech and freedom of access to information, therefore, the priority for BBC is to provide information to the public in detail, provide different points of view and verify information.

### Actions regarding the conflict

Actions: BBC Russian Service provides detailed information on the events in the conflict region. Its journalists publish investigations. Basically, its investigations concern Russian propaganda agents and the exposure of their fakes. Examples are investigations of the Internet activities of the "troll factory" and RIA FAN, as well as their founder Yevgeny Prigozhin<sup>106</sup>, Wagner PMC in Donbas<sup>107</sup>, as well as exposing fakes. The BBC published journalistic investigations about Russian mercenaries<sup>108</sup> about the persons involved in the MH17 disaster<sup>109</sup>.

In February 2020, BBC launched a documentary podcast series "Business Trip to Donetsk," dedicated to the work of journalists covering the armed conflict.<sup>110</sup>

105 [minjust.gov.ru/ru/deyatelnost-v-sfere-nekommercheskih-organizaciy/reestr-inostrannyh-sredstv-massovoy-informacii](http://minjust.gov.ru/ru/deyatelnost-v-sfere-nekommercheskih-organizaciy/reestr-inostrannyh-sredstv-massovoy-informacii).

106 Zakharov A., Fokht E. "This is not Prigozhin:" how "a Patriot" will fight "anti-Russian media." BBC, 4.12.2019, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-50632900>.

107 Syria, Africa, Ukraine. Where and how PMC Wagner recruits people and where they send them. BBC, 23 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-46291929>.

108 For example: Ivshina O. Chechens in Eastern Ukraine: Investigation by the BBC. BBC, 29.05.2014, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140529\\_donetsk\\_chechens\\_ivshina](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140529_donetsk_chechens_ivshina).

109 Burlaks on the Don. Who is "Vladimir Ivanovich" whom the investigation in the MH17 case is looking for. BBC, 28.04.2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-52439476>.

110 Podcast "Business Trips to Donetsk," Episode 1. Escalation. BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/media-51243569>

## 23. Meduza

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Meduza is a privately held online media outlet ([www.meduza.io](http://www.meduza.io)). The editorial office is located in Latvia, but consists entirely of Russian-speaking authors. Created in 2014 by immigrants from Lenta.ru. After creation, it quickly became a popular website. In October 2019, it ranked first in the top 30 most cited Russian Internet resources<sup>111</sup>. Meduza is a news aggregator and conducts its own investigations, some of which have become famous<sup>112</sup>.

In its Editorial Code, Meduza advocates the objectivity and impartiality of journalism<sup>113</sup>, but its materials have repeatedly found themselves in the center of scandals. Perhaps the loudest of them is connected with the case of the non-existent "underground organization 'Network'". Meduza published material about the involvement of the arrested persons in the cases of murder, thereby actually taking the side of the prosecution. Subsequently, the material was analyzed in detail and criticized by the opposition media, accusing the media of bias and publishing unverified data. However, the dirty deed was done: Meduza's article was noticed and used in their own interests by the propagandist media<sup>114</sup>. This and other scandals (in particular, the sexual harassment involving its editor) negatively affected Meduza's reputation as a free and impartial media.

The position of the publication in relation to the military conflict in Donbas can be called balanced and neutral. The topic of Donbas does not rank first among the editorial information priorities. Nevertheless, Meduza generally honestly and objectively reports about the events and the humanitarian situation in Donbas, covers the complex process of a peaceful settlement, reports efforts of the Ukrainian government, and actively covers the MH17 case.

## 24. Fontanka.ru

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Fontanka is an independent internet outlet based in St. Petersburg (<https://www.fontanka.ru>). It was created in 2000 by reporters from the St. Petersburg Agency for Investigative Journalism (AZHUR-Media), which published materials about the connections of officials of the St. Petersburg mayor's office (including Putin) with the criminals. One of the founders of Fontanka, Andrei Konstantinov, is the author of the Gangster Petersburg book series<sup>115</sup>. Fontanka.ru is undoubtedly the most deserved and well-known regional investigative media in Russia. It was Fontanka that first reported about Wagner private military company in October 2015. It also found out that the Wagner PMC militants are fighting in Luhansk region<sup>116</sup>.

111 Medialogy, <https://www.mlg.ru/ratings/media/socmedia/7029>.

112 See, for example, investigations by Ivan Golunov, <https://meduza.io/feature/2019/06/08/my-prizyvaem-vseh-perepechatyvat-polnye-teksty-rassledovaniy-ivana-golunova>.

113 Editorial Code. Meduza, <https://meduza.io/pages/codex>.

114 Bloody Network: Federal TV channels drew attention to Meduza's material about the defendants in the Penza case. Open Media, <https://openmedia.io/news/n1/krovavaya-set-federalnye-kanaly-obratili-vnimanie-na-material-meduzy-o-figurantax-penzenskogo-dela>.

115 Andrei Konstantinov, personal website, <http://akonstantinov.spb.ru/bio.html>.

116 Korotkov D. They fought for Palmyra. Fontanka.ru, 29.03.2016, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2016/03/28/171>.

Fontanka.ru also investigates in detail the secret businesses of Yevgeny Prigozhin (see the corresponding item above), the activities of the "troll factory" and the "media factory," and exposes fakes of propagandist media.

Fontanka manages to maintain relative institutional independence: the founders did not allow its transfer to the control of state structures. In 2019, AZHUR-Media, which owns the outlet, came under the control of businessman Viktor Shkulev<sup>117</sup>.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

Fontanka has no specific interests in the region. It considers its mission to deliver comprehensive information to the audience.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Examples of high-profile investigations are reporting about the leaders of the so-called "DPR/ LPR,"<sup>118</sup> about the participation of Russian mercenaries in hostilities on the side of the separatists<sup>119 120</sup>, about Yevgeny Prigozhin and his secret financing of trolls and pro-Russian militants<sup>121</sup>, a series of publications about the participation of Wagner PMC militants in the military conflict in Donbas and in Syria<sup>122 123</sup>.

Fontanka.ru journalist Denis Korotkov, who is the author of the most high-profile investigations, received threats and was forced into hiding<sup>124</sup>.

## **25. The Insider**

Insider is another important Russian independent investigative media, critical of the Russian authorities (<https://theins.ru>). Founded in 2013 by an opposition leader, journalist and activist Roman Dobrokhotov. For its investigations and independent position, the outlet was awarded the World Forum for Democracy Prize of the Council of Europe (2017), as well as the European Press Prize (2019) jointly with Bellingcat.

The Insider actively exposes fakes of the Kremlin media, thus realizing its mission of objectively and comprehensively reporting to the audience and helping the audience distinguish the truth from falsification.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

The Insider is known for its high-profile journalistic investigations: about secret special operations of the FSB abroad (the murder of Litvinenko, Perepelichny, Khangoshvili, poisoning of Skripals, etc.), about the participation of Wagner PMC

117 The owner of Maxim and Starhit bought the online publication Fontanka.ru. RBK, [https://www.rbc.ru/technology\\_and\\_media/10/01/2019/5c3703159a79475c20d54cb4](https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/10/01/2019/5c3703159a79475c20d54cb4).

118 New Russia in faces. Fontanka.ru, 11.06.2014, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2014/06/11/178>.

119 "DPR" Reserve: At least 30 people left St. Petersburg to fight in Ukraine, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2014/07/09/122>.

120 For example: Ukrainian Mujahideen is expected in St. Petersburg, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2015/09/11/131>.

121 For example: Korotkov D. A little business in the Syrian war. Fontanka.ru, 26.06.2017, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2017/06/26/084>.

122 For example: Korotkov D. Wagner's List. Fontanka.ru, 18.08.2017, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2017/08/18/075>.

123 Korotkov D. They fought for money. Fontanka.ru, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2017/08/23/044>.

124 The author of the investigation about PMC Wagner was sent a wreath with the inscription "traitor to the Motherland." BBC, 18.10.2018, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-45906295>.

in the battles in Donbas<sup>125</sup>, the activities of Yevgeny Prigozhin<sup>126</sup>. Also, the outlet together with Bellingcat established the involvement of the Skripal poisoners in the UK in 2018 in the secret services<sup>127</sup> and published investigations of corruption and criminal connections of Russian officials<sup>128</sup>.

Insider is actively involved in exposing the falsifications of propagandist media. It publishes such materials in a special section "Anti-fake" on its website<sup>129</sup>.

## 26. Conflict Intelligence Team

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) is a group of investigative journalists founded by Russian journalist Ruslan Leviev in 2015. CIT is a privately-owned, independent online media outlet, funded entirely by donations from individuals. CIT in most cases practices OSINT, or Open Source Intelligence methods, that is, search and analysis of information from open sources — media, websites, social networks, etc. (citeam.org).

From the very beginning of the conflict in Donbas, the group made a significant contribution to the search for evidence and verification of the presence of Russian military personnel, mercenaries, so-called "military advisers," as well as military equipment in eastern Ukraine.

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Interests regarding the conflict region. Leviev said he created CIT when he realized that the fighting in eastern Ukraine required coordinated fact-finding by civilian investigators. "When state TV claimed that only the volunteers were fighting from Russia in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, we provided enough videos and photos to prove that Russian heavy artillery and Russian military personnel were stationed in the conflict area."<sup>130</sup> The goal of the outlet is formulated quite clearly: "to stop the harmful actions of the Russian authorities leading to the escalation of military conflicts, the death of the military and civilian population."<sup>131</sup>

### Actions regarding the conflict

CIT specializes in searching for information and establishing the involvement and degree of guilt of Russian troops, special forces and officials in war crimes in different countries of the world, including Ukraine: "Participants and eyewitnesses of the

125 «Mazai is an African Wagner. Who manages Prigozhin's affairs on the Black Continent. The Insider, 14.08.2020, <https://theins.ru/politika/prig>.

126 For example: Threats, surveillance, attacks — how Prigozhin fights independent media. The Insider, 20.08.2020, <https://theins.ru/politika/234105>.

127 The Solberetsky. The Bellingcat and The Insider were able to confirm the involvement of Petrov and Boshirov in the special services. The Insider, 14.09.2018, <https://theins.ru/politika/117161>.

128 For example: Kirilenko A. Mafia on state order. How the new Kremlin oligarchs are connected with the underworld. The Insider, 2.06.2015, <https://theins.ru/korruptsiya/10407>.

129 <https://theins.ru/antifake>.

130 The Conflict Intelligence Team Versus The Kremlin. Khodorkovsky, 4.04.2016 <https://khodorkovsky.com/the-conflict-intelligence-team-versus-the-kremlin>.

131 CIT <https://citeam.org/donate>.

events publish a large number of photos, videos, text messages that need further analysis, as well as verification, geolocation. For a more effective investigation, we often have to establish direct personal contact with the military and their relatives in order to verify certain information, as well as obtain new facts."<sup>132</sup>

The most high-profile investigations are:

- Special Forces of the GRU of the Russian Federation in Donbas (2015), <https://citeam.org/16-brigada-gru-may-2015/>;
- Geolocation of the stay of the GRU special forces in Luhansk (2015), <https://citeam.org/mamai-luhansk/>.

## 27. Pskov Province

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Pskov Province is a regional large-circulation newspaper published in Pskov (<http://gubernia.media>). In 2014–2016, the newspaper made a great contribution to the search and publication of evidence of professional Russian military participation in hostilities on the side of separatists in Donbas. From 2000 to 2016, the newspaper's publisher was the well-known opposition politician Lev Schlosberg.

The newspaper published a number of high-profile investigative articles shedding light on the participation of Russian military personnel in the armed conflict in Donbas. In 2014, its publisher Lev Schlosberg became a finalist for the Andrei Sakharov Prize for Journalism as a Deed for the newspaper's investigations and independent position. In 2015, Pskov Province received the Gerd Bucerius International Freedom of Speech Prize.

In 2016, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation recognized the NGO Svobodnoye Slovo, which is the founder and publisher of Pskov Province a "foreign agent."<sup>133</sup>

### Interests/goals in the conflict region

Objective and comprehensive reporting about the armed conflict.

### Actions regarding the conflict

In August 2014, Pskov Province reported secret funeral of contract soldiers of the 76th Guard Airborne Assault Division in Pskov who died under "unknown circumstances."<sup>134</sup> Comparing the available information with data from social networks, the reporters came to the conclusion that the paratroopers had died in the fighting in eastern Ukraine. This was one of the first serious indications that professional Russian military personnel are fighting on the side of the separatists in Donbas<sup>135</sup>.

Subsequently, the newspaper published a whole series of investigative materials

132 Ibid.

133 The Ministry of Justice considered the publisher of the newspaper Pskov Province to be a "foreign agent." ASI, 04.07.2016, <https://www.asi.org.ru/news/2016/07/04/132500>.

134 Semenov A. War will write off everything. Pskov Province, 25.08.2014

135 Schlosberg L. Dead and Living. Pskov Province, 25.08.2014, [http://gubernia.media/number\\_705/01.php](http://gubernia.media/number_705/01.php).

about the deaths of Pskov contract soldiers in Donbas and how the Russian Ministry of Defense is hiding this information<sup>136</sup>.

Immediately after the publication, the authors of the article began to receive threats, the film crew of TV channel Rain, and Novaya Gazeta reporters who arrived at the cemetery were attacked. An attack was made on Lev Schlosberg, he was severely beaten. Other journalists also faced threats as soon as they began to deal with this topic<sup>137</sup>.

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136 A sensation that wouldn't have been better. Pskov Province, 25.08.2014, [http://gubernia.media/number\\_705/02.php](http://gubernia.media/number_705/02.php). Semenov A. "The circumstances of the death of each of the servants have been established ...," Pskov Province, 12.11.2014, [http://gubernia.media/number\\_716/02.php](http://gubernia.media/number_716/02.php) and other materials.

137 The councilor Schlosberg, who was investigating the death of the airborne troops, was beaten. BBC, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/rolling\\_news/2014/08/140829\\_rn\\_shlosberg\\_pskov\\_beaten.shtml](https://www.bbc.com/russian/rolling_news/2014/08/140829_rn_shlosberg_pskov_beaten.shtml).



# Non-governmental organizations and campaigns

## 28. Memorial

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The international historical, educational, human rights and charitable society Memorial is the largest and most influential of the independent NGOs remaining in Russia (<https://memohrc.org>). It has a wide network of regional offices in Russia, as well as offices in Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Belgium, France, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The Memorial Human Rights Center (HRC Memorial), a division of International Memorial, was created in 1991 to "organize and coordinate human rights work"<sup>138</sup>.

In its statements, Memorial strongly condemns the actions of the Russian government to seize Crimea, condemned the so-called "referendum" on independence and reported human rights violations in the war area.

### Actions regarding the conflict

Memorial Human Rights Center conducts broad and independent human rights work in hazardous areas and the hot spots, including in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Georgia and South Ossetia (in 2008) and in Ukraine (since 2014). Memorial conducts human rights monitoring in the conflict areas, provides legal reception of citizens, legal support for complaints, and helps in organizing social assistance.

In May 2014, Memorial employee, human rights defender and journalist Andrei Mironov and Italian journalist Andrea Rochelli went to Sloviansk area to monitor and report on the armed conflict, where they died as a result of mortar shelling<sup>139</sup>.

## 29. Women of the Don Union

### Офіційна позиція / функції щодо конфлікту.

The Women of the Don Union is a Russian human rights NGO. Registered in the city of Novocherkassk, Rostov region (<https://www.donwomen.ru>). It was established in 1993, initially with the aim of protecting the rights of women, children and families, then began to deal with the rights of military personnel. It took an active part in the search for prisoners of war, killed and missing in the course of both wars in Chechnya, provided legal assistance to the parents of the soldiers. It was engaged in peacekeeping activities in the Caucasus after the Russian-Georgian armed conflict (August 2008).

138 Oleg Orlov on the work of the Memorial Human Rights Center, <https://memohrc.org/ru/specials/oleg-orlov-o-rabote-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial>.

139 Baryshnikov V. Death of Mironov and Rochelli. Radio Liberty, 25.05.2014 <https://www.svoboda.org/a/25397651.html>.

One of the goals of the organization is "to achieve civil harmony and peace between people, nations and nationalities"<sup>140</sup>. Among the directions of the Union's activities are "rehabilitation of victims of military conflicts, the development of a culture of peace, non-violence, tolerance"<sup>141</sup>.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Since 2014, the Union began to work with the conflict in Ukraine. Opinion polls were conducted with residents of Russia and Ukraine living near the border. These polls showed that there are people on both sides of the border who are ready for dialogue. At the same time, Women of the Don helped refugees from eastern Ukraine: they distributed humanitarian aid and provided legal advice<sup>142</sup>. Women of the Don is an active member of CivilM+ Platform and participates in discussions in the preparation of statements and analytical reports. The initial idea of creating the platform was to initiate civilian support for official peace negotiations and was called "civilian Minsk"<sup>143</sup>.

On 7 October 2016, Valentina Cherevatenko, Head of the Union, was awarded the Anna Politkovskaya Prize, established by the international non-governmental organization RAW in War (Reach All Women in War), for her peacekeeping activities<sup>144</sup>.

## **30. Lights of Eirene**

Lights of Eirene is a private initiative of Russian pacifist and anti-war activists — an unlimited action for peace in Ukraine (<http://lightsofeirene.org>). It started with lighting the Lights of Peace in 2015. "Every day at 22:00 local time, we light the Lights of Peace, wherever we are, and we wish an end to armed conflicts. We believe that united people can stop any wars. We will continue until peaceful life returns to eastern Ukraine"<sup>145</sup>.

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

"Only dialogue between societies can bring peace to Donbas."

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Basically, activists of the movement conduct their peacekeeping actions in Moscow, as well as in other large cities. They organize peace marches, speeches and lectures on peacekeeping. Examples of specific projects are:

- Collection of humanitarian aid to displaced persons and other civilians who suffered during the hostilities in Donbas, support of Ukrainian NGOs working with the victims<sup>146</sup>.

140 About the Women of the Don Union, <https://www.donwomen.ru/about>.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Gulia K. Women of the Don about the war in Ukraine: They severed ties with loved ones for fear of losing them altogether. RFI, 19/02/2018, <https://www.rfi.fr/ru/ukraina/20180219-zhenshchiny-dona-o-voine-v-ukraine-svyazi-s-blizkimi-razryvali-iz-strakha-sovsem-ik>.

144 Valentina Cherevatenko won the Anna Politkovskaya Prize. ASI, 17.10.2016, <https://www.asi.org.ru/news/2016/10/17/142929/>.

145 The Lights of Eirene, the goddess of peace, were lit in St. Petersburg. Radio Liberty, 30.01.2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/26821329.html>.

146 <http://lightsofeirene.org/refugee/ukraine>.

- Book of Peace. Peace wishes to the inhabitants of Ukraine, collected on the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novocherkassk, Minsk and Molodechno in the summer of 2015 and 2016. The book is now kept in Kyiv. In 2019, the second volume of the Book of Peace was launched for the exchange of prisoners and political prisoners in the "everyone for everyone" format<sup>147</sup>.
- Anti-war graphics. The movement's website contains anti-war materials for printing.

### 31. Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)

The international network "Youth Human Rights Movement" was created in 1998 (<https://www.yhrm.org/ru>). Initially, the main mission of the network was to develop a new generation of young human rights defenders and civic activists. YHRM staff were engaged in the protection and monitoring of human rights in conflict areas in Russia and abroad – in Bishkek and Osh, Kyrgyzstan (in July-August 2010 in connection with inter-ethnic clashes), in Chechnya (periodically since 2009 as part of the Consolidated mobile group), in Georgia (in August 2008 in connection with the military conflict), participated in the work of human rights missions in Belarus (2010)<sup>148</sup>.

In 2013, the Norwegian Nobel Committee nominated YHRM for the Nobel Peace Prize for awareness raising activities and advocacy around the world<sup>149</sup>. In 2009, the YHRM received participatory status at the Council of Europe, the largest intergovernmental organization for the protection of human rights in Europe<sup>150</sup>.

The YHRM condemned the policy of the Russian government towards Ukraine, criticized the actions of Russian and separatist formations in Donbas. The founder and head of the YHRM, Andrey Yurov, being a member of the Human Rights Council under the President of the Russian Federation (2015–2018), constantly raised the issue of human rights in conflict zones, and also spoke at meetings of international organizations<sup>151</sup>.

#### Actions regarding the conflict

The YHRM was one of the co-organizers and active participants of the Crimean Field Mission for Human Rights (along with the Moscow Helsinki Group, see separate item) with the aim of monitoring violations of humanitarian rights on the peninsula. The Crimean Field Mission ceased operations in mid-2015 "due to pressure and obstacles from both the Russian and Ukrainian authorities"<sup>152</sup>.

After the outbreak of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, the YHRM participated in monitoring the humanitarian situation along the contact line.

YHRM announced its closure in February 2020 due to the fact that "it has actually ceased to exist as a really functioning community"<sup>153</sup>. Notwithstanding, former

147 Book of the world. Eirene's Lights <http://lightsofeirene.org/peacebook>.

148 Andrey Yu. Yurov. YHRM, [https://www.yhrm.org/ru/andrey\\_yurevich\\_yurov](https://www.yhrm.org/ru/andrey_yurevich_yurov).

149 <http://hragents.org/time/tl-mpd/#>.

150 Ibid.

151 HRC member Andrey Yurov on the humanitarian situation on the peninsula before and after the blackout. HRC website, 24.11.15, <http://president-sovet.ru/presscenter/publications/read/3414/>.

152 Based on personal conversation with project participants.

153 On the situation in the YHRM network, [https://www.yhrm.org/ru/news/network/o\\_situacii\\_v\\_seti\\_mpd](https://www.yhrm.org/ru/news/network/o_situacii_v_seti_mpd).

staff of the network continue to lead the organization's directions, including peacekeeping projects in Donbas (Alexandra Krylenkova), human rights in Donbas (Victoria Gromova).

## 32. Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG)

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

MHG is the oldest operating and one of the most reputable and influential independent human rights organizations in the territory of the former USSR (<https://www.mhg.ru>). It was formed in 1976 as an initiative dissident group and was originally called the "Public Group for Assistance to the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR." It is part of the international network of Helsinki organizations (see, for example, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group).

The MHG has condemned Russian aggression against Ukraine, criticizes the actions of the Russian authorities in Crimea, as well as the escalation of the conflict in Donbas.

### Actions regarding the conflict

The MHG employees took part in monitoring missions in the armed conflict area in 2014–2015. The MHG publishes annual reports "Human Rights in the Russian Federation in 2014," which published data on human rights violations during the conflict, and described cases of attacks on journalists trying to report the deaths of Russian military servants in Donbas.

MHG employees are members of the Human Rights Council under the President of the Russian Federation. In 2014–2015, they initiated discussion of the human rights situation in the conflict region<sup>154</sup>.

Regarding Crimea: MHG members initiated the creation of the Crimean Field Mission for Human Rights that collected information on human rights violations on the territory of the annexed peninsula. On the basis of the information collected, the Field Mission updated Russian and international structures in the field of human rights<sup>155</sup>.

## 33. Solidarity and Peaceful Resistance groups in St. Petersburg

### Офіційна позиція / функції щодо конфлікту.

The Solidarity branch of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and the Peaceful Resistance group in St. Petersburg are associations of activists that operate as platforms for discussing the issues of the protest movement, for organizing actions and joint actions. Solidarity was founded by Boris Nemtsov and other opposition leaders at the end of 2008 as a coalition of Russian democratic forces<sup>156</sup>. The movement is part of the non-systemic and independent Russian opposition.

154 Human rights in the Russian Federation in 2014. MHG, <https://www.mhg.ru/sites/default/files/files/doklad-prava-cheloveka-rf-2015-ru.pdf>.

155 Crimean Human Rights Field Mission. Brief overview of the situation in Crimea. 2015, [https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Crimea\\_Field\\_Mission\\_Review\\_May\\_2015\\_RU.pdf](https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Crimea_Field_Mission_Review_May_2015_RU.pdf).

156 <https://www.rusolidarnost.ru/about>.

The Peaceful Resistance Group is a non-partisan association of active participants in the protest movement in St. Petersburg. Its Facebook page says, "The group was created to discuss and promote events related to peaceful resistance to the regime in St. Petersburg"<sup>157</sup>.

The Solidarity and Peaceful Resistance groups are most active in St. Petersburg, where they have a large number of active supporters. Both groups take a pro-Ukrainian position, expressing strong protest against the actions of the Russian authorities in relation to Ukraine.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

Regular street mass and single actions in support of Ukraine — pickets and demonstrations, especially on Ukrainian holidays — Independence Day of Ukraine, etc. During 2014–2015, the groups organized mass demonstrations in Moscow (up to 30,000 participants) and St. Petersburg (up to 10,000) for peace in Ukraine, against Russian intervention and the annexation of Crimea. Mass actions and single pickets were held in support of Nadezhda Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, Ukrainian sailors, etc. In 2018–2020, efforts are mainly aimed at drawing attention to the problems of the Crimean Tatars — arrests and accusations of them participating in terrorist groups. Also, both groups are engaged in other types of assistance: they organize the collection of humanitarian aid and money for the victims, for Ukrainian NGOs, work as volunteers in settlements along the contact line, etc.

They also conduct numerous discussions and seminars on Ukrainian topics.

## **34. Volunteer movement in Russia**

### **Official position/function regarding the conflict**

The Russian volunteer movement is a movement of citizens with the aim of providing disinterested assistance to Ukrainian citizens affected by the conflict. The largest groups of volunteers are located in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Voronezh.

### **Interests/goals in the conflict region**

Volunteering is based on the desire of citizens to provide assistance to the civilian population of Ukraine who suffered during the hostilities, on a sense of solidarity, as well as on a sense of guilt for Russia's actions towards Ukraine.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

The movement can be divided into two directions:

1. Remote assistance — volunteers are involved in organizing fundraising and humanitarian aid in Russia and abroad and sending it to Ukraine;
2. On the ground assistance — volunteers work with the affected civilian population, first of all, with internally displaced persons in settlements along the contact line. Another group of volunteers is engaged in the collection of medicines, equipment, money for the Ukrainian military personnel, works with the wounded, and provides psychological assistance. Volunteers also implement social and cultural projects, organize the collection and delivery of humanitarian aid, money,

<sup>157</sup> <https://web.facebook.com/groups/MirnoeSoprotivlenieSPb>

many of them participate in international volunteer camps in Ukraine, work with children of internally displaced persons, take patronage over entire families.

## 35. Campaign in defense of Oleg Sentsov

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Russian solidarity actions in defense of Oleg Sentsov are part of an international campaign to free the film director and other Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia. The campaign was heterogeneous, involving artists, primarily filmmakers, as well as civil society activists, human rights organizations and opposition leaders. Basically, the activities of the Russian campaigners were aimed at publicizing the case of Sentsov and Kolchenko (the second Crimean defendant in the terrorism case along with Sentsov) and raising awareness of wider Russian society about it, attracting the attention of the international community and intergovernmental organizations (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Union, etc.), as well as to collect humanitarian aid and money for lawyers for political prisoners.

### Actions regarding the conflict

In June 2014, the Memorial human rights society recognized Sentsov as a political prisoner. Further, Memorial made repeated statements in defense of Sentsov<sup>158</sup>.

Russian filmmakers Alexander Sokurov, Vladimir Mirzoev, Alexei German Jr., Pavel Bardin, Andrei Zvyagintsev and others made statements for the release of Oleg Sentsov. Sokurov also asked Putin to pardon Sentsov at a meeting of the Presidential Human Rights Council<sup>159</sup>.

On 28 June 2014, during the closing ceremony of the Moscow International Film Festival, the President of the festival director Nikita Mikhalkov, supported the request to Vladimir Putin to assist in the release of Oleg Sentsov<sup>160</sup>.

In December 2015, the Russian branch of Amnesty International campaigned to overturn the sentences of Sentsov, Kolchenko and Gennady Afanasyev. Russian musician Boris Grebenshchikov took part in the campaign<sup>161</sup>.

On 25 May 2018, during Oleg Sentsov's hunger strike, the Pussy Riot group published an open letter in the newspaper *Le Monde*, in which they called on French President Macron to demand that Putin release Sentsov<sup>162</sup>.

On 21 May 2018, the Russian association of writers and journalists *Svobodnoye Slovo* published a statement "To save Oleg Sentsov." The statement was signed by 81 persons, as well as 33 members of the Petersburg PEN Club, 25 persons from the Free Historical Society Association of Scientists, as well as scientists, doctors and activists<sup>163</sup>.

158 Oleg G. Sentsov, List of political prisoners. Memorial, [memohrc.org/ru/defendants/sencov-oleg-gennadevich](http://memohrc.org/ru/defendants/sencov-oleg-gennadevich).

159 Alexander Sokurov asked Putin to pardon Sentsov during the HRC meeting. *Novaya Gazeta*, 12.12.2018, <https://cutt.ly/CzEyVJO>.

160 Mikhalkov joined the appeal for help in the release of the Ukrainian director Sentsov. *Kommersant*, 28.06.2014 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2502171>.

161 Grebenshchikov called for the cancellation of sentences to Sentsov, Kolchenko and Afanasyev. Gordon, [gordonua.com/news/worldnews/grebenshchikov-prizval-otmenit-prigovory-sencovu-kolchenko-i-afanasevu-110815.html](http://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/grebenshchikov-prizval-otmenit-prigovory-sencovu-kolchenko-i-afanasevu-110815.html)

162 Pussy Riot asked Macron to demand Sentsov's release [wonderzine.com/wonderzine/life/news/235513-pussy-riot-macron](http://wonderzine.com/wonderzine/life/news/235513-pussy-riot-macron)

163 Director Oleg Sentsov went on a hunger strike and has not eaten for ten days. *Meduza*, 23.05.2018, <https://meduza.io/slides/rezhisser-oleg-sentsov-ob-yavil-golodovku-i-ne-est-uzhe-desyat-dney-kak-na-eto-reagiruyut-v-rossii-i-na-ukraine>.

Sentsov was also supported by the members of KinoSoyuz. On 23 May 2018, the President of Artdocfest festival Vitaly Mansky, published a statement on the KinoSoyuz website saying that he and other members of the union support Sentsov and express "admiration for his courage and fortitude"<sup>164</sup>.

In Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities of Russia, mass actions and single pickets were held, signatures were collected under petitions demanding the release of the Ukrainian film director.

## 36. Pickets in Moscow and St. Petersburg for exchange of prisoners in "everyone for everyone" format

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

Russian civil activists have consistently advocated the exchange of prisoners of war between Russia and Ukraine. The large exchange did not take place for a long time, not least, because the very fact of the exchange would mean that Russia would recognize the participation of its military servants in hostilities. A massive public campaign in Russia for the exchange began after the new President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, on the day after his election, "called the release of all Ukrainian prisoners his number one task as President"<sup>165</sup>. In June 2018, the Ombudsperson of the Russian Federation Tatyana Moskalkova reported that up to 400 Russian citizens are imprisoned in Ukraine, which gave new meaning to civil actions<sup>166</sup>.

### Actions regarding the conflict

As soon as it became clear that Ukraine had the political will to exchange all the detainees, non-fixed-term pickets began in Moscow and other Russian cities demanding the exchange of prisoners. In Moscow, pickets were held at the reception office of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at metro stations and on various streets of the city. In St. Petersburg, on Nevsky Prospekt and Sadovaya Street. In general, according to activists, these pickets were held for more than 300 days<sup>167</sup>.

On 29 January 2019, the picket participants collected and handed over to the President of the Russian Federation petitions of citizens of the Russian Federation who are in Ukrainian prisons, with their request to the President of the Russian Federation to exchange them for prisoners – citizens of Ukraine who are imprisoned in Russia<sup>168</sup>.

On 10 October 2018, the picket participants handed over 60,000 signatures demanding an exchange to the Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights under the President of the Russian Federation<sup>169</sup>.

164 Ibid.

165 Zelenskiy named his No 1 task as a President. Telegraph, 21.04.2019, <https://telegraf.com.ua/ukraina/politika/4969981-zelenskiy-nazval-svoyu-zadachu-1-na-postu-prezidenta.html>.

166 In Ukraine, more than 400 Russians are in custody. RIA Novosti, 26.06.2018, <https://ria.ru/20180614/1522690036.html>.

167 [https://echo.msk.ru/blog/sentsov\\_obmen/2457459-echo/](https://echo.msk.ru/blog/sentsov_obmen/2457459-echo/).

168 [https://echo.msk.ru/blog/sentsov\\_obmen/2447657-echo/](https://echo.msk.ru/blog/sentsov_obmen/2447657-echo/).

169 We demand the exchange of Russian and Ukrainian prisoners. Change.org, Change.org, [www.shorturl.at/elmB4](http://www.shorturl.at/elmB4).

The time proved that the actions of civil activists who fought for the exchange of detainees in Russia, Ukraine and in many other countries had their effect. In 2019, a series of exchanges of detainees took place (in September 2019, as part of the exchange, 24 sailors who were detained as a result of the incident in the Kerch Strait returned to Ukraine). The next big exchange took place in December 2019, another one in April 2020.

### 37. Campaign for the release of Ukrainian sailors

On 25 November 2018, an incident occurred next to Crimea coast when Russian warships fired at, bulked and seized three vessels of the Ukrainian Navy — the Berdyansk and Nikopol boats and the Yany Kapu tugboat — that headed through the Kerch Strait from Odesa to Mariupol. As a result, 24 Ukrainian sailors were captured. They were accused of "illegally crossing the Russian state border" (part 3 of Article 322 of the Criminal Code of Russia). Later they were recognized the prisoners of war. All the sailors were taken to Moscow and held in Lefortovo remand prison of the FSB of the Russian Federation.

#### Actions regarding the conflict

As soon as the seizure of Ukrainian ships became known, groups of Russian citizens were formed in Moscow, and then in other cities, seeking to help them and ease the deprivations associated with their stay in the pre-trial detention center, as well as to achieve their release. The most prominent figure in the campaign was Viktoria Ivleva, a Russian writer, journalist, civic activist and photographer. In Moscow, St. Petersburg, single pickets were held with posters calling for the release of Ukrainian sailors. Ivleva's group was engaged in the collection of humanitarian aid to prisoners of Ukrainian citizens, which took place mainly on social networks<sup>170</sup>. At the same time, the campaign was widely covered in independent media (Radio Liberty, Echo of Moscow, BBC, etc.). As soon as the case of sailors became public, they started receiving hundreds of letters of support from all over the country.

As a result, the public campaign played a noticeable role in the release of the sailors: on 7 September 2019, an exchange of detained citizens took place between Ukraine and Russia in the format 35 to 35. All 24 sailors were among those who returned to Ukraine<sup>171</sup>.

The massive campaign to collect aid and support for Ukrainian sailors has become an important act of solidarity between the civil societies of Ukraine and Russia.

Upon returning home, the sailors released from captivity organized a fund for assistance for Konstantin Kotov, a Russian volunteer and civil activist who was sentenced in 2019 to 4 years in prison for "repeated violations of the law on rallies." Kotov took part in numerous pickets and rallies for the release of sailors, and also collected humanitarian aid for them. The sailors collected about RUR 60,000 and handed them over to Victoria Ivleva, whose assistant was Kotov, with a request to use money in favor of the Russian activist.<sup>172</sup>

170 <https://web.facebook.com/victoria.ivlevayorke/posts/10157163502435987>.

171 Russian volunteers handed over 24 bags of food for Ukrainian sailors to the pre-trial detention center. Crimea. Realities, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-russian-pravozashchitniki-prinesli-24-sumki-v-sizo-moryakam/29883874.html>.

172 The freed Ukrainian sailors raised money for a convicted Russian volunteer. Ukrinform, 11.09.2019, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-society/2777598-osvobodzennyye-ukrainskie-moraki-sobrali-dengi-dla-osuzdennogo-rossijskogo-volontera.html>.



# Emigrant organizations

## 38. Forum of Free Russia (FFR)

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The Forum of Free Russia was created in 2016 by a group of opposition politicians at the initiative of Garry Kasparov (<https://www.forumfreerussia.org>). At present, the FFR can be definitely called the largest platform for Russian democratic opposition, where the strategy of actions of the opposition forces and civil society, as well as up-to-date political issues are discussed.

The FFR normally makes all decisions at its conferences, which are usually held in Vilnius. Since February 2020, almost all work has gone offline. Now the main decisions on actions between the Forums are taken by the Standing Committee of the FFR.

The position in relation to the conflict in Donbas is sharply critical. The FFR condemns the actions of Russia and is doing a great job of documenting the crimes of the Russian armed forces, classifying the persons guilty of unleashing and maintaining the conflict.

### Actions regarding the conflict

The Forum constantly hosts discussions on the conflict in Ukraine and Russian-Ukrainian relations, in which Ukrainian experts participate.

One of the major projects of the FFR is the "Putin's List." This is a database created and constantly updated by the Forum "in order to search, consolidate and unify data on the persons responsible for the creation and functioning of the system of usurpation of power and suppression of civil liberties in Russia." The section "Aggressors" includes those who are "responsible for pursuing a policy of war, occupation and chaos in relation to other countries, violation of international law and international treaties in the political interests of the leadership of the Russian Federation."<sup>173</sup> A significant part of the persons in this section are persons involved in the conflict: the ORDLO militants, separatists, the leadership of the "D/LPR," the persons involved in the MH17 case, as well as their Russian curators<sup>174</sup>.

Another large project of the FFR is the International Civic Tribunal for the Crimes of the Putin regime, where the main part is devoted to the crimes of ideologists and actors of influence, guilty of unleashing and calling for an aggressive war against Ukraine<sup>175</sup>.

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173 Putin's List, <https://www.spisok-putina.org>.

174 Putin's List, <https://www.spisok-putina.org/group/agressory>.

175 FFR, <https://www.forumfreerussia.org/multimedia/video-ffr/2019-06-25/mezhdunarodnyj-obshhestvennyj-tribunal-informatsionnyj-terrorizm-putinskogo-televizora-i-ego-zhertvy/ffr>.

## 39. Free Russia Foundation

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The Free Russia Foundation is an American NGO created in 2014 by a group of Russian emigrants "to unite the Russian community abroad and support pro-democratic forces within Russia" (<https://www.4freerussia.org>).<sup>176</sup> Since then, the Foundation has implemented a number of programs in support of Russian pro-democratic movements, projects related to assistance to Russian and Ukrainian political prisoners, Russian emigrants, as well as projects in the field of combating propaganda.

The Foundation works with American politicians, members of Congress, senators, executive officials and representatives of the expert community in the West, providing them with an analysis of events in Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

### Actions regarding the conflict

In its activities, the Foundation pays considerable attention to Ukraine. The House of Free Russia operates in Kyiv. On the organization's website, it is called "an alternative embassy of Russian civil society in Ukraine."<sup>177</sup>

One of the directions of the House is EmigRussia, a humanitarian information project of Free Russia Foundation in Ukraine. Its functions include providing humanitarian assistance, "support to Russian political refugees and emigrants, as well as raising awareness of Ukrainian and Russian societies about who these people are and why they had to leave Russia that we have now, to the Ukraine they want to believe in"<sup>178</sup>. During the political crisis in Belarus, the House opened a special line of consultations for citizens of Belarus on the migration law of Ukraine<sup>179</sup>.

In June 2019, the Prosecutor-General's Office of the Russian Federation recognized Free Russia Foundation an "undesirable organization" and banned its activities in Russia<sup>180</sup>.

## 40. Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom

### Official position/function regarding the conflict

The Nemtsov Foundation remains one of the most important discussion platforms where the development of relations between Russia and the world, problems of the development of democracy and progress are discussed. This platform brings together leaders of Russian democratic opposition, economists, civic activists, artists, analysts from think tanks. One of the main goals of the Foundation is to develop an agenda to counter Russia's aggressive policy, including towards Ukraine.

The Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom was founded on 9 November 2015 in

176 Free Russia Foundation <https://www.4freerussia.org/about>.

177 House of Free Russia, <https://freerussiahouse.org/projects>.

178 Emigrussia <https://emigrussia.org>.

179 <https://emigrussia.org/ua/emigration/proekt-emigrussia-predlagaet-juridicheskie-konsultacii-po-voprosam-migracionnogo-prava-ukrainy>.

180 The Prosecutor-General's Office explained the recognition of the Free Russia Foundation an "undesirable organization." TASS, 1.07.2019, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6615314>.

Germany by Boris Nemtsov's daughter Zhanna. Among the goals of the Foundation are the protection of freedom of information, education and professional development, the inclusion of Russia and its citizens in the pan-European agenda and the promotion of European values, as well as perpetuating the memory and preserving the legacy of Boris Nemtsov.

The attitude to the conflict is sharply critical. One of key areas of activity in the last years of Nemtsov's life was peacekeeping and the fight against Russian aggression. According to Boris Nemtsov, only education can resist propaganda<sup>181</sup>. One of the objectives of the Foundation is to promote his ideas and research on the topic of war and corruption in Russia.

### **Actions regarding the conflict**

In May 2015, the Nemtsov Foundation released Nemtsov's unfinished report "Putin. War." This is a deep and comprehensive study of the causes and consequences of the seizure of Crimea and the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine for Russia and Europe<sup>182</sup>. The report is still the most complete and comprehensive study of the roots and background of the war between Russia and Ukraine, as well as the impact of international personal and sectoral sanctions on the country's economy.

The Foundation also holds annual Boris Nemtsov forums that discuss the problems of the European Union and the international community's response to Russia's aggressive foreign policy.

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181 <https://web.facebook.com/boris.nemtsov/posts/758395224230080>.

182 Boris Nemtsov et al. "Putin. War. A Report." Nemtsov Foundation, 2015, <https://www.putin-itogi.ru/putin-voia>.

