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Neither “NATO’s Foreign Legion” Nor the “Donbass International Brigades:” (Where Are All the) Foreign Fighters in Ukraine?¹

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The conflict in Ukraine continues to attract global attention. Moreover, foreigners are also involved in actual combat in the eastern part of the country. Russians, be they soldiers or volunteers, are the dominant foreign group in the war zone. Others, mostly Europeans, constitute neither “NATO’s foreign legion” nor the “Donbass international brigades,” as their numbers likely do not exceed 300 on either side of the conflict. Interestingly enough, many of these European foreign fighters share common ideological roots, i.e., anti-Americanism, anti-liberalism, extreme nationalism, fascination with authoritarianism, rejection of European integration, but these do not, however, stop them from taking opposing sides in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. They, as a group or as lone individuals, might constitute a threat to European security and must be closely monitored.

In late February 2015, within the space of three days, Spanish police forces arrested a dozen people suspected of either recruiting individuals for a terrorist organisation abroad or returning from a foreign conflict. Interestingly enough, only four of these cases were Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (a.k.a. ISIS/ISIL) linked.² The non-ISIS arrestees are allegedly returnees from the war in Ukraine, and some of them admitted to participation in the conflict on the pro-separatist side.³ Moreover, one of them also stated that “several hundred” foreigners are fighting alongside the separatists in what he called the “Donbass International Brigades.”⁴ Such pronouncements, coupled with statements on the fact that “nineteen nationalities have been present in the ranks of the Azov Regiment” (a volunteer unit of the National Guard of Ukraine),⁵ and Vladimir Putin’s claim that “NATO’s foreign legion” operates in Ukraine, substantiate the need to assess

¹ This policy paper would not have been completed without the assistance of Arkadiusz Legieć and Anna Pochylska, interns in the European Security and Defence Economics Project of the Polish Institute of International Affairs who not only acted as researchers but also drafted parts of this paper.

² A. Goodman, “Spain arrests 4 people suspected of recruiting for ISIS,” *CNN*, 24 February 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/24/europe/spain-isis-recruitment-arrests>.

³ “Spain: Spanish volunteers went to Ukraine to fight ‘fascism,’” *Ruptly TV*, 1 March 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2phabPULiCQ>.

⁴ P. Ortega Dolz, “We fought together, communists and Nazis alike, for the liberation of Russia,” *El Pais*, 27 February 2015, http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/02/27/inenglish/1425051026_915897.html.

⁵ Internet communication with a Swedish volunteer on the Ukrainian side, 19 March 2015.

the scale of “foreign fighter” involvement in the conflict in Ukraine and to look closely at the motivations of those who voluntarily decided to travel to eastern Ukraine to fight.⁶

The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

“Foreign fighters” can be defined as “non-indigenous, non-territorialised combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward, enter a conflict to participate in hostilities.”⁷ Although the phenomenon of such fighters has only recently attracted major attention, there exists a tradition of fighting in foreign conflicts that goes beyond the well-known jihadi mobilisations of the late 20th century wars in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya.

Currently, the issue of foreign fighters is receiving a lot of attention in relation to their involvement in the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Estimates from January 2015 speak of more than 20,000 foreigners,⁸ including 4,000 from Western Europe (from 12 “old” EU Member States) who joined “Sunni militant organisations” (this number does not include foreigners fighting on the government’s side, who number up to 15,000).⁹ The foreign fighters’ rise to fame was fuelled by some of their gruesome atrocities captured in ISIS propaganda videos and by, for example, Lebanese Hezbollah’s prominent presence in the battle of al-Qusayr.¹⁰ Sunni foreign fighters, who are not all jihadists, are mostly motivated by “the horrific images of the conflict, stories about atrocities committed by government forces, and the perceived lack of support from Western and Arab countries.”¹¹ Different atrocities and the same seeming global and regional indifference to the conflict motivated another, albeit much smaller group of foreigners (numbering in the low hundreds), who, in order to oppose ISIS, either joined the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Iraq or various Christian or Kurdish armed groups in Syria.¹² Yet another set of atrocities, and the desire to oppose radical Sunni jihadists targeting the Shiite-led Syrian regime motivated Shiite volunteers, who aligned with the Syrian government.¹³

In order to stem the flow of some of these individuals, labelled “foreign terrorist fighters,” i.e., those “who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts,” the UN Security Council in September 2014 adopted Resolution 2178 reaffirming “that all States shall prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups.”¹⁴ However, the resolution did not address the issue of individuals who travel to join armed forces, rebel groups or partisans abroad. Only six EU Member States (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and UK) treat joining foreign armed forces without the state’s authorisation as a crime punishable by imprisonment. Moreover, in countries such as Austria, France and Germany there is a possibility that the person who joined foreign armed forces might be deprived of his or her citizenship. Ten states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden) penalise

⁶ “Russia president calls Ukraine army ‘NATO’s foreign legion,’” *Press TV*, 26 January 2015, www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/26/394829/Putin-calls-Ukraine-army-NATO-legion.

⁷ C. Moore, P. Tumelty, “Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 31, no. 5, May 2008, p. 412.

⁸ P.R. Neumann, “Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s,” *ISCR*, January 2015, <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syria-iraq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s>.

⁹ S. Al Sarhan, “From Qusair to Yabrud: Shiite foreign fighters in Syria,” *Al Monitor*, March 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/qusair-yabroud-shiite-foreign-fighters-syria.html.

¹⁰ See: M. Burke, O. Duggan, “The man behind ‘Jihadi John’—in 60 seconds,” *The Telegraph*, 26 February 2015, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11238781/Who-is-Jihadi-John-in-60-seconds.html; P. Smyth, “The Shiite Jihad in Syria and its Regional Effects,” *Policy Focus*, no. 138, 2015, www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus138-v3.pdf.

¹¹ A.Y. Zelin, “European Foreign Fighters in Syria,” *ICSR Insight*, April 2014, <http://icsr.info/2013/04/icsr-insight-european-foreign-fighters-in-syria-2>.

¹² D. Phillips, T.J. Brennan, “Unsettled at Home, Veterans Volunteer to Fight ISIS,” *The New York Times*, 11 March 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/us/disenchanting-by-civilian-life-veterans-volunteer-to-fight-isis.html?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=.Situation%20Report&utm_campaign=Sit%20Rep%20March%2012%202015&r=0.

¹³ P. Smyth, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2178*, 24 September 2014, www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2178%20%282014%29.

recruitment of civilians into national armies, and four (Austria, France, Italy, Poland) directly criminalise mercenary activities.

Unfortunately, the conflict in Ukraine, which involves non-state actors, and paramilitary formations, often escapes the seemingly neat categorisations included in different penal codes. Consequently, the law does not always act as a deterring factor for those willing to participate in a foreign conflict. Theoretically, this could act as one of the factors behind substantial European foreign fighter mobilisation for any conflict, be it in Europe (as in Ukraine) or in its immediate neighbourhood (Syria). Nonetheless, a far smaller number of foreign volunteers are active in the conflict in Ukraine than in Syria.

Claims of Numbers and Nationalities

It is possible that up to 35,000 non-Syrians are involved in the civil war in that country, with some ISIS members also rotating to the battlefronts in Iraq. These fighters, however, constitute less than 10% of the men under arms in Syria, who could number more than 400,000–500,000 in total.¹⁵

It is worth remembering these numbers while trying to ascertain the number of foreign fighters in the conflict in Ukraine. The Ukrainian forces combating the separatists number around 50,000 men,¹⁶ and some of the most recent figures for the separatists speak of 43,000 men in their “armed forces,”¹⁷ with up to 9,000 grouped in three strike forces and acting as their offensive “spear.”¹⁸ If these numbers are correct, then one can hardly envision “NATO’s foreign legion” operating on the Ukrainian side or the “Donbass International Brigades” supporting the separatists.

Below are the estimated numbers of different nationals who are involved in the conflict on the separatist side. Unfortunately, in some cases one is not able to ascertain any specific numbers, only reports of the given nationals’ presence in the conflict zone.

Table 1. Foreign Fighters on the Separatist Side in the Conflict

Nationality	Low estimate	High estimate
Armenia	1 ¹⁹	n/a
Belarus	7 ²⁰	7+
Belgium ²¹	n/a	n/a
Brazil	1 ²²	3

¹⁵ “As Syria war enters fourth year, regime eyes victory,” *Time Live*, 11 March 2014, www.timeslive.co.za/world/2014/03/11/as-syria-war-enters-fourth-year-regime-eyes-victory.

¹⁶ “PM Yatseniuk: Some 50,000 military participate in ATO,” *Ukrinform*, 11 August 2015, www.ukrinform.ua/eng/news/pm_yatseniuk_some_50000_military_participate_in_ato_325180.

¹⁷ “V shtabe ATO utochnili, skolko boevikov i rossiyan voyuyut na Donbasse,” *Glavred*, 15 March 2015, <http://glavred.info/politika/v-shtabe-ato-utochnili-skolko-boevikov-i-rossiyan-voyuyut-na-donbasse-307309.html>

¹⁸ K. Słowik, “Wojna w Donbasie. Walki w okolicach Doniecka, Ługańska i Mariupola. ‘Azow’: Czeka nas ofensywa,” *Gazeta.pl*, 10 March 2015, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,17549374,Wojna_w_Donbasie__Walki_w_okolicach_Doniecka_Luganska.html.

¹⁹ “One has identified himself in an interview—I was a separatist fighter in Ukraine,” *Radio Free Europe*, 18 March 2015, www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-i-was-a-separatist-fighter/25455466.html.

²⁰ “Belorusy, voyuyushchiye na storone separatistov v Ukraine – kto oni?,” *UDF.by*, 9 January 2015, <http://udf.by/news/politic/115865-belorusy-voyuyuschie-na-storone-separatistov-v-ukraine-kto-oni.html>.

²¹ “Des combattants européens. Il n’y a pas qu’en Syrie. En Ukraine aussi,” *Bruxelles2.eu*, 16 February 2015, www.bruxelles2.eu/2015/02/16/des-combattants-europeens-il-ny-a-pas-quen-syrie-en-ukraine-aussi.

²² Slavamisha, “Interview with Brazilian volunteer in Novorossiia,” *Operation Novorossiia*, 2 January 2015, <https://operationnovorossiia.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/interview-with-brazilian-volunteer-in-novorossiia>.

Bulgaria	1 ²³	n/a ²⁴
Canada ²⁵	n/a	n/a
Czech Republic	2 ²⁶	n/a
Estonia	1 ²⁷	n/a ²⁸
France	4 ²⁹	n/a
Germany	n/a	100 ³⁰
Greece ³¹	n/a	n/a
Hungary ³²	n/a	30+ ³³
Israel	1 ³⁴	n/a
Italy	5 ³⁵	n/a
Latvia ³⁶	5 ³⁷	n/a
Lithuania ³⁸	1 ³⁹	5
Kazakhstan ⁴⁰	1	n/a
Kyrgyzstan ⁴¹	1	n/a

²³ D. Hudziec, "Krasaw – ochotnik z Bułgarii," *Tragediaddonbasu.net*, 7 March 2015, <http://tragediaddonbasu.net/krasaw-ochotnik-z-bulgarii>.

²⁴ Some Bulgarians might be erroneously regarded as "Chetniks" in the Serbian led pro-separatist unit.

²⁵ "Ukraine front: Greeks fight on both sides," *Failedevolution.blogspot.com*, 28 August 2014, <http://failedevolution.blogspot.com/2014/08/ukraine-front-greeks-fighting-on-both.html>.

²⁶ D. Hudziec, "Dariusz Lemański, jedyny polski ochotnik w armii Noworosji," *Tragediaddonbasu.net*, 19 February 2015, <http://tragediaddonbasu.net/dariusz-lemanski-jedyny-oficjalny-polski-ochotnik-w-armii-noworosji>.

²⁷ "Grazhdanin Estonii pro ranenyykh ukrainskikh boyevikov – privezli debilov iz zooparka i lechat," *Baltija.eu*, 8 October 2014, www.baltija.eu/news/read/40380.

²⁸ Possibly some Estonian Russians could be involved in the conflict but one is not able to determine their exact number. Moreover, some of them may not even have Estonian nationality, as is the case with many Russians living in Estonia.

²⁹ "United Continent: European volunteers fighting Kiev troops in Eastern Ukraine," *rt.com*, 30 August 2014, <http://rt.com/news/183864-ukraine-european-volunteers-fighting>.

³⁰ "Mehr als 100 Deutsche sollen für Separatisten kämpfen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 March 2015, www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/mehr-als-100-deutsche-sollen-in-ostukraine-fuer-separatisten-kaempfen-13483893.html.

³¹ "Ukraine front: Greeks fight on both sides," *Failedevolution.blogspot.com*, 28 August 2014, <http://failedevolution.blogspot.com/2014/08/ukraine-front-greeks-fighting-on-both.html>.

³² See, e.g.: <https://www.veooz.com/photos/rHERQxR.html>.

³³ This many were allegedly wounded from photos of the St. Istvan Legion—a Hungarian pro-separatist unit that included up to 16 people, but only one was "eulogized" on the "legion's" facebook profile. See: "Putin's international brigades," *Russialist*, 3 October 2014, <http://russialist.org/putins-international-brigades>.

³⁴ E. Altman, "Poyezdka v Ukrainu, v serdtse zony ATO," *Blog: Elinor Altman*, 10 November 2014, <http://elinoraltman.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/2014.html>.

³⁵ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zhjt59Ksmqs>.

³⁶ See: "Latvia Foreign Fighters Ban: Law to Punish Citizens Found Fighting Abroad in Illegal Militant Groups," *Ukraine Today*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-wlv7s3Ykg.

³⁷ "Guns found in searches of pro-Russia volunteers from Ludza," *lsm.lv*, 11 September 2014, www.lsm.lv/en/article/societ/society/guns-found-in-searches-of-pro-russia-volunteers-from-ludza.a98039.

³⁸ "Separatistų pusėje Ukrainoje kariauti susiruošęs vilnietis iš 'balos išlipo sausas'. Visą straipsnį galite rasti," *balsas.lt*, 8 July 2014, <http://balsas.tv3.lt/naujiena/797793/separatistu-puseje-ukrainoje-kariauti-susiruoses-vilnietis-is-balos-islipo-sausas>; <http://balsas.tv3.lt/naujiena/797793/separatistu-puseje-ukrainoje-kariauti-susiruoses-vilnietis-is-balos-islipo-sausas>.

³⁹ D. Pancerovas, "Tarp Ukrainos teroristų – vilnietis Pavelas Serebrenikovas ir 4 su Lietuva susiję rusai," *15min.lt*, 15 February 2015, www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/karo-zona/tarp-ukrainos-teroristu-vilnietis-pavelas-serebrenikovas-ir-4-su-lietuva-susije-rusai-784-486942.

⁴⁰ See: G. Faskhutdinov, "Trudovyye migranty vozvrashchayutsya domoy," *respublika-kaz.info*, 29 January 2015, www.respublika-kaz.info/news/politics/40152, and "Nayemniki iz Kazakhstana uchastvuyut v boyakh v Afganistane, Irake, Sirii i Ukraine," *newskaz.ru*, www.newskaz.ru/society/20141030/7147023.html.

Moldova ⁴²	1	n/a
Norway ⁴³	1	1
Poland ⁴⁴	1	5
Serbia ⁴⁵	46 ⁴⁶	100 ⁴⁷
Slovakia	1 ⁴⁸	4 ⁴⁹
Spain	1 ⁵⁰	9
Tajikistan ⁵¹	1 ⁵²	n/a
U.S. ⁵³	1	25 ⁵⁴
Uzbekistan ⁵⁵	n/a	n/a
IN TOTAL		
27 nationalities + Russians⁵⁶	84	289+

As the table reveals, the separatist forces might include fewer than 100 and up to 300 foreign fighters, i.e., 0.69% of the separatist forces. This clearly contradicts the notion of “35,000 foreign volunteers” who have passed through the ranks of the separatist “militias.”⁵⁷ Moreover, it is highly unlikely that, as Spanish volunteers stated in interviews upon their return, “several hundred” volunteers form the “Donbass International Brigades.”⁵⁸ However, while it is true that small foreign fighter units, numbering dozens or a few hundred men each, are international in character, they are certainly smaller than regular brigades. One must also treat with caution figures that indicate that “over 30,000 foreign fighters are taking part in the conflict,” the largest contingent from Russia, but it’s been claimed “many have come from Israel, Serbia,

⁴¹ See: G. Faskhutdinov, *op. cit.*, and “Kirgiz, yaki varnulsya z ‘LNR’: My vayavali tam razam z raseyskimi voyskami,” *Radio Svoboda*, 18 March 2015, www.svoboda.mobi/a/26908171.html.

⁴² “Procuratura Generală s-a autosesizat în cazul moldoveanului care luptă în estul Ucrainei,” *Unimedia*, 6 March 2015, <http://unimedia.info/stiri/procuratura-generală-s-a-autosesizat-in-cazul-moldoveanului-care-lupta-in-estul-ucrainei-89921.html>.

⁴³ See: http://vk.com/rusiczpolska?z=photo-87315879_354870018%2Falbum-87315879_00%2Frev.

⁴⁴ “Polacy już walczą w Donbasie: i po stronie rządowej, i po stronie separatystów,” *Newsweek.pl*, 5 March 2015, <http://swiat.newsweek.pl/sytuacja-na-ukrainie-polacy-walczą-w-donbasie-po-obydwu-stronach,artykuly,358408,1.html>.

⁴⁵ “Serbscy bojownicy na Ukrainie. Splacają dług wobec Rosji: ‘Walczymy z faszyzmem,’” *Defence24.pl*, 26 July 2014, www.defence24.pl/analiza_serbscy-bojownicy-na-ukrainie-splacaja-dlug-wobec-rosji-walczymy-z-faszyzmem.

⁴⁶ “Serbian mercenaries fighting in Eastern Ukraine,” *dw.de*, 14 August 2014, www.dw.de/serbian-mercenaries-fighting-in-eastern-ukraine/a-17855479.

⁴⁷ “Czetnicy na Ukrainie,” *hrjakchorwacja.blox.pl*, 13 August 2014, <http://hrjakchorwacja.blox.pl/2014/08/Czetnicy-na-Ukrainie.html>.

⁴⁸ Y. Polukhina, “Ya priyekhal syuda iz Slovakii srazhatsya s Evrosoyuzom,” *Novaya Gazeta*, 29 January 2015, www.novayagazeta.ru/society/67040.html.

⁴⁹ See: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=556115587828086&set=a.295945527178428.58977.100002889495303&type=1&permPage=1>.

⁵⁰ Involved in actual combat.

⁵¹ G. Faskhutdinov, *op. cit.*

⁵² “Vlasti Tadžikistana zayavili o gibeli tadžika, voyevavshego v Ukraine za boyevikov,” *pravda.com*, 8 January 2015, www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/01/8/7054392.

⁵³ See: “Dobrovolc iz SShA voyuyet za Novorossiyyu. Opolchentsy/DNR/LNR/Novorossiyya,” 21 September 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vflmOXEYBoE>.

⁵⁴ “Ukraine front: Greeks fight on both sides,” *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ S. Faskhutdinov, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ See below for more information on Russian foreign fighters.

⁵⁷ “Za polgoda v DNP vekhali boleye 35 000 inostrannykh dobrovoltagev-antifashistov,” *rusvena.ru*, 5 November 2014, <http://rusvesna.su/news/1415184899>.

⁵⁸ P. Ortega Dolz, *op. cit.*

Spain, Italy and Brazil.”⁵⁹ If these fighters were present in the separatist forces then they would be of immense public-relations value to the war effort of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR), and validate the theory of an international struggle for the liberation and emancipation of parts of eastern Ukraine. However, as can be seen from the table above, theirs is a relatively token presence.

All of this does not contradict the fact that the separatist forces enjoy a high level of cooperation from thousands of non-Donbass fighters. These mostly include Russian military members and Russian “volunteers.” Russian armed forces personnel in eastern Ukraine numbered up to 6,500 in August 2014, 10,000 in December 2014, and 11,000 as of February 2015 (with the numbers fluctuating because of the changing situation on the frontlines—more Russian military involvement equals a deteriorating situation for the separatists or offensive manoeuvres).⁶⁰ These forces are augmented by alleged “volunteers” from the Russian army,⁶¹ seemingly on leave and estimated by DNR authorities to have numbered up to 4,000 men in the summer of 2014.⁶² Both the estimates of soldiers and “volunteers” are not included in the table, as these individuals are hardly distinguishable from one another and one can safely assume that all serving Russian soldiers who are present in eastern Ukraine are under orders to do just that. Such an assumption, which undermines the notion that they are motivated by “religion, kinship, and/or ideology,” undermines their foreign fighter status.

However, there most probably exists another category of non-Donbass fighters who could qualify as genuine foreign fighters.⁶³ These are the so-called “Russian volunteers [...] mostly ethnic Russians from the Russian Federation, many of them are ex-military, many of them are ultranationalists [...] and] came [there] on their own.” Potentially, they make up “the largest bulk of the foreign fighters in Ukraine.” Consequently, they “play a role which is largely indistinguishable from local volunteers, the true separatists.”⁶⁴ Some of the Ukrainian sources see their presence as a direct consequence of the “hybrid warfare” being waged by Russian in the east of Ukraine that employs the usage of “everything and all means,” i.e., Cossacks, Chechen volunteers, former Ukrainian security forces members, alleged Russian “tourists,” former inmates of Russian prisons, etc.⁶⁵ Again, the numbers of these “volunteers” are not included in the table as they are in the main indistinguishable from the military men, military “volunteers” or regular separatists.

The situation is seemingly less complicated on the Ukrainian side. The Ukrainian forces, unlike the separatists (see Table 2 below), do not enjoy the strategic depth of “voluntary” support of inhabitants of a neighbouring country, i.e., relatively few foreigners fight alongside Ukrainian forces in the east of the country. However, the Ukrainian diaspora from such places as Canada or Portugal is active in the provision of aid and materiel to the military forces.⁶⁶ Additionally, a “handful” of them have travelled to Ukraine to join the fight.⁶⁷ They, however, are not included in the table below because of their presumed Ukrainian or, e.g., dual Ukrainian–Canadian citizenships.

⁵⁹ “Spain arrests eight nationals for fighting with pro-Russia separatists in Ukraine,” *theguardian.com*, 27 February 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/eight-spaniards-arrested-fighting-ukraine-pro-russian-separatists.

⁶⁰ I. Sutyagin, “Russian Forces in Ukraine,” *RUSI Briefing Paper*, March 2015, https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf.

⁶¹ P. Strzałkowski, “Wjeżdżamy czołgiem na Ukrainę, a w radiu mówią, że tu nie ma wojny – opowieść rosyjskiego żołnierza,” *Gazeta.pl*, 4 March 2015, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,17515936,_Wjezdzaamyczołgiem_na_Ukraine__a_w_radiu_mowia__ze.html.

⁶² “Serving Russian soldier on leave fighting Ukrainian troops alongside rebels, pro-Russian separatist leader says,” *The Telegraph*, 28 August 2014, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/angela-merkel/11060559/Serving-Russian-soldiers-on-leave-fighting-Ukrainian-troops-alongside-rebels-pro-Russian-separatist-leader-says.html.

⁶³ I. Kazakhov, “Stesnyayutsya, potomu i v balaklavakh’: polsotni dobrovoltage iz Yekaterinburga torzhestvenno provodili na Ukrainu,” *e.l.ru*, 11 March 2015, www.e.l.ru/news/spool/news_id-420441.html.

⁶⁴ James Miller, managing editor of *The Interpreter*, in email communication with the author, 17 February 2015.

⁶⁵ “Russia fights a hybrid war with a hybrid army,” *ukraineatwar.blogspot.nl*, 23 February 2015, <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.nl/2015/02/russia-fights-hybrid-war-with-hybrid.html>.

⁶⁶ “De Portugal para a guerra,” *Notícias Magazine*, 29 April 2014, www.noticiasmagazine.pt/2014/os-ucranianos-portugueses-estao-a-preparar-se-para-a-guerra.

⁶⁷ M. Mackinnon, “Bypassing official channels, Canada’s Ukrainian diaspora finances and fights a war against Russia,” *theglobeandmail.com*, 26 February 2015, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/ukraine-canadas-unofficial-war/article23208129.

Simultaneously, the Ukrainian side stands accused of allowing “NATO’s foreign legion” on its territory, and the pro-separatist media are full of stories of such things as a high number of mercenaries active in Ukraine⁶⁸ who allegedly speak “Polish, French, English and some Flemish” in radio communications intercepted by the separatists.⁶⁹ The reality, as Table 2 shows, is strikingly different, and while studying these numbers one can safely assume that no “foreign legion” exists in the conflict in Ukraine. It is true, however, that parts of the Azov Regiment (and perhaps other volunteer battalions) possess an international makeup, but one is not able to exactly pin down the numbers of the different nationalities amongst its alleged 1,000–2,000 members—hardly “legion” size.⁷⁰ As can be gleaned from the table below, the number of pro-Ukraine foreign fighters stands at between 100 and 300, a similar projection to that of their counterparts on the pro-separatist side.

Table 2. Foreign Fighters on the Ukrainian Side in the Conflict

Nationality	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Albania ⁷¹	n/a	10
Belarus ⁷²	50	100
Belgium ⁷³	n/a	n/a
Croatia ⁷⁴	32 ⁷⁵	32+
Denmark ⁷⁶	5	7+
Finland ⁷⁷	1	n/a ⁷⁸
France ⁷⁹	1	n/a
Georgia ⁸⁰	n/a	100 ⁸¹
Greece ⁸²	n/a	n/a

⁶⁸ See, e.g., http://russia-insider.com/en/politics_ukraine/2014/11/07/01-04-44pm/polish_mercenaries_and_arms_flood_ukraine_media_looks_other_for_unconfirmed_accounts_of_alleged_high_number_of_polish_fighters_or_mercenaries_involved_in_the_conflict.

⁶⁹ “Oficjalna wersja rosyjskiej propagandy – Polacy walczą w Donbasie,” *belsat.eu*, 9 February 2015, <http://belsat.eu/pl/artykuly/oficjalna-wersja-rosyjskiej-propagandy-w-donbasie-walczą-polacy>.

⁷⁰ “Samodzielny pułk ‘Azow,’” *24godziny.info*, 7 January 2015, <http://24godziny.info/content/samodzielny-pulk-azow>.

⁷¹ “Albanian volunteers fight in Ukraine against pro-Russian forces,” *independent.mk*, 4 August 2014, www.independent.mk/articles/7990/Albanian+Volunteers+Fight+in+Ukraine+Against+Pro-Russian+Forces.

⁷² V. Smok, “Belarusian volunteers join Ukraine conflict on both sides,” *Belarus Digest*, 23 July 2014, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarusian-volunteers-join-ukraine-conflict-both-sides-18616>.

⁷³ “Des combattants européens. Il n’y a pas qu’en Syrie. En Ukraine aussi,” *Bruxelles2.eu*, 16 February 2015, www.bruxelles2.eu/2015/02/16/des-combattants-europeens-il-ny-a-pas-qua-syrie-en-ukraine-aussi.

⁷⁴ S. Milekic, “Croatia tells fighters to return from Ukraine,” *Balkaninsight.com*, 13 February 2015, www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-calls-citizens-to-return-from-ukraine?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=578f2f24ef-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-578f2f24ef-319695321.

⁷⁵ “Croatian volunteers fighting alongside Ukrainian army; Serb counterparts helping pro-Russian rebels,” *The Japan Times*, 12 February 2015, www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/12/world/croatian-volunteers-fighting-alongside-ukrainian-army-serb-counterparts-helping-pro-russian-rebels/#.VQwp2o5Tamc.

⁷⁶ “Danske frivillige Kamper i Ukraine,” *dr.dk*, 13 October 2014, www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Indland/2014/10/13/065735.htm.

⁷⁷ “Finnish fighter in Ukraine: ‘I’m not a Nazi,’” *yle.fi*, 31 January 2015, http://yle.fi/uutiset/finnish_fighter_in_ukraine_im_not_a_nazi/7772719.

⁷⁸ Scandinavians are often called “Vikings” by the Ukrainian side. It is possible that amongst some of the “Vikings” one could find more Finns or individuals with dual, Finnish and Swedish, citizenship.

⁷⁹ See: <https://www.facebook.com/gastonbessonmercenaire>.

⁸⁰ “Georgian fighters defy Russia in Ukraine,” *aa.com.tr*, 4 March 2015, www.aa.com.tr/en/news/473984--georgian-fighters-defy-russia-in-ukraine.

⁸¹ “Georgians in Ukraine fight shadow war,” *themoscowtimes.com*, 25 January 2015, www.themoscowtimes.com/article.php?id=514853.

⁸² “Ukraine front: Greeks fight on both sides,” *op. cit.*

Ireland ⁸³	n/a	n/a
Italy ⁸⁴	1	9(?) ⁸⁵
Latvia	1 ⁸⁶	n/a
Lithuania	n/a ⁸⁷	n/a
Netherlands	1 ⁸⁸	n/a
Poland ⁸⁹	10	n/a ⁹⁰
Russia	1	n/a ⁹¹
Sweden ⁹²	5	10
United States ⁹³	1	n/a
IN TOTAL		
18 nationalities	109	268+

Manifold Motivations?

Almost every outsider is potentially able to project their understanding, complexes, biases and also fantasies onto any foreign conflict of which they have rather limited knowledge. While looking at foreign fighter motivations, one cannot help but notice a wide range of often contradictory reasons that pushed a given individual or individuals to either join the Ukrainian volunteer battalions or the separatist forces. At the same time, representatives of foreign fighters involved in the conflict on both sides often profess strikingly similar, mostly nationalistic, motivations, which seriously undermines the notion of any sort of anti-fascist war being waged by the separatist forces. Moreover, all these motivations often start with good and clear intentions but get mixed up in the minutiae of the conflict, and have relatively little to do with the actual war.

The most significant role, albeit not numerically, amongst the foreign fighters on both sides is played by the French, and this is mostly due to recruitment efforts in Western Europe. Gaston Besson, a French

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ "Italian right wing extremists as foreign fighters in the Ukraine," *isdep.eu*, www.isdep.eu/news/2356/italian-right-wing-extremists-as-foreign-fighters-in-the-ukraine.

⁸⁵ See: "A3OB / AZOV: Swedish Volunteer Michael Skillt Interview / Part 2," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD8UCGGqD5E>.

⁸⁶ "Security Police probe Latvians fighting for Ukraine," *lsm.lv*, 22 January 2015, www.lsm.lv/en/article/politics/security-police-look-into-latvians-fighting-on-ukraines-side-too.a112841.

⁸⁷ D. Pancerov, "Lietuvis instruktorius pafrontėje treniruoja į karą išvykstančius ukrainiečius," *15min.lt*, 5 March 2015, www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/karo-zona/lietuvis-karo-instruktorius-treniruoja-i-fronta-isvykstancius-ukrainos-karius-784-489131.

⁸⁸ T. den Hartog, S. Huijboom, "Brabander vecht in Oekraïne: 'Zo krijg ik eindelijk respect'," *ad.nl*, 31 January 2015, www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1012/Nederland/article/detail/3841793/2015/01/31/Brabander-vecht-in-Oekraïne-Zo-krijg-ik-eindelijk-respect.dhtml.

⁸⁹ "Polacy już walczą w Donbasie: i po stronie rządowej, i po stronie separatystów," *Newsweek.pl*, 5 March 2015, <http://swiat.newsweek.pl/sytuacja-na-ukrainie-polacy-walczą-w-donbasie-po-oby-stronach,artykuly,358408,1.html>.

⁹⁰ One is unable to determine the high estimate at this stage as many of the alleged "Poles" could in fact be Ukrainians who lived or studied in Poland, are members of the Ukrainian minority in Poland or belong to the Polish minority in Ukraine.

⁹¹ Azov Regiment propaganda speaks of true Russian nationalists fighting on the Ukrainian side, but one is not able to effectively determine their high estimate at this stage.

⁹² "Här är svenskarna som strider i Ukraina," *expressen.se*, 10 December 2014, www.expressen.se/nyheter/har-ar-svenskarna-som-strider-i-ukraina-1.

⁹³ B. MacDonald, "The true story of Mark Paslawsky, the 'only' American fighter with Kiev forces," *rt.com*, 29 August 2014, <http://rt.com/op-edge/183796-mark-paslawsky-us-ukraine>.

recruiter and alleged mercenary permanently residing in Croatia, publicises the fight by nationalistic and anti-Russian foreign fighters on the Ukrainian side and vets volunteers for the Azov Regiment.⁹⁴ Simultaneously, Victor Alfonso Lenta, a former member of the French military plays a role of a mobiliser on the separatist side, attracting Western European volunteers to the forces of the DNR via Unité Continentale—a “geopolitical and continental” network of individuals who are “Sparta [...] and like Sparta [...] [they] will triumph over the Anglo-Saxon globalism, Atlanticism and the decadent West.”⁹⁵

The most basic understanding of foreign fighter motivations on the pro-separatist side as offered by separatist officials amounts to: “Serbs came to help their Orthodox Christian brothers; socialists from France and Italy came as part of their struggle against capitalism; and the multinationals [...] Most of the foreign volunteers are idealists [...] These guys have come a long way to help us fight against fascism,”⁹⁶ or American imperialism.⁹⁷ Alternatively, the foreign fighters, like those present in Syria, stress a humanitarian motivation behind their trek to Donbass, i.e., their keenness on helping the suffering population of eastern Ukraine which was attacked by the Ukrainian armed forces.⁹⁸

The biggest form of international political support for the separatists, however, comes from political figures, parties and associations that espouse the ideology of “Eurasianism” or Alexander Dugin’s “Fourth Political Theory.”⁹⁹ Their views and comments are consciously or accidentally also utilised by the separatist foreign fighters.¹⁰⁰ Eurasianism, originally a solely Russian political movement/thought, has spread internationally and is a vehemently anti-Western, anti-European and anti-Euroatlantic political construct.¹⁰¹ It opposes globalisation and sees Europe as an element of “Eurasia,” a political entity opposing the West under the leadership of Russia. Seen in this light, the Ukraine conflict is a struggle between “Atlanticists” (the Ukrainian government and proponents of the country’s integration with the EU) and “Eurasianists” (the separatists and their international backers), who oppose the eastward march of “Atlanticism” into the territories of the so-called “heartland,” i.e., Russia.¹⁰² Such an approach allows the “Eurasianists” to rally other anti-U.S. and anti-EU radicals (both far-left and far-right) to their colours, and mobilise some of them for the purpose of the war in Ukraine.

Some of the fighters are joining the separatists because of their desire to oppose the alleged hegemonic and expansionist drive of the European Union, which is seen as an instigator of the crisis in Ukraine¹⁰³ and a failed internationalist project that reduces new Member States to mere colonies.¹⁰⁴ Seen in this light, denying Ukraine a chance for integration with the EU and sparing it “colony” status is actually an internationalist service. Nonetheless, the role of the conflict’s greatest villain is reserved for the U.S., which is said to conduct a war on Russia from the east of Ukraine,¹⁰⁵ and for NATO, with such evidence as Polish bread found in abandoned Ukrainian positions in Debaltseve as proof of the support Ukraine is receiving from the Alliance.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁴ See: www.google.pl/imgres?imgurl=www.globalresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/azov-besson-add.jpg&imgrefurl=www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-french-military-adviser-gaston-besson-in-charge-of-foreign-fighters-in-the-neo-nazi-national-guard-azov-battalion/5401900&h=300&w=400&tbnid=IbpUu_L4LBIq4M:&zoom=1&docid=RfURPRt6OJp2KM&ei=iVwjVYv2L8LpUqm_g7AD&tbm=isch&ved=0CCAQMygBMAE.

⁹⁵ See: https://www.facebook.com/unite.continentale/info?tab=page_info.

⁹⁶ A. Litoy, “Putin’s International Brigades,” *Johnson’s Russia List*, 2 October 2014, <http://russialist.org/putins-international-brigades>.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ See: “Spain: Spanish volunteers went to Ukraine to fight ‘fascism,’” *Ruptly TV*, 1 March 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2phabPULiCQ>.

⁹⁹ See: “The Fourth Political Theory,” <http://4pt.su/en/topics/eurasianism>.

¹⁰⁰ See: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=840821385960334&id=752238441485296.

¹⁰¹ G. Vona, “Uwagi o stworzeniu intelektualnego eurazjatyizmu,” *xportal.pl*, <http://xportal.pl/?p=13769>.

¹⁰² A. Dugin, “Eurasia in the War of Networks,” *The Fourth Political Theory*, <http://4pt.su/en/content/eurasia-war-networks>.

¹⁰³ V. Snidl, “Medzi ozbrojencami v Donecku sa mihla slovenská vlajka,” *Dennik*, 17 February 2015, <https://dennik.sk/52030/medzi-ozbrojencami-v-donecku-sa-mihla-slovenska-vlajka>.

¹⁰⁴ Y. Polukhina, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ D. Hudziec, “Dariusz Lemański...,” *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ D. Hudziec, “Polski chleb pod Debalcewem,” *Novorossia Today*, 11 March 2015, <http://novorossia.today/polski-chleb-pod-debalcewem>.

Another popular theme for motivation of combat against Ukraine is also the alleged illegal nature of the government in Kyiv, which came into power on the back of a so-called “coup.” Thus, the American volunteer spoke of that “Kiev junta [...] they don’t consider the popular opinion of the people of Donbass.”¹⁰⁷ Apparently, this “opinion” is for south-eastern Ukraine’s merger with Russia—a sentiment expressed by the Russian nationalist volunteers who support the separatists.¹⁰⁸ However, such a nationalistic viewpoint on the conflict (not essentially as a war of liberation but rather of unification of Donbass with Russia) stands in stark contrast with the opinions of the high-profile Spanish members of the “Donbass International Brigades” who repeat their dedication to “internationalist ideals” from the time of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly enough, they also stress their repudiation of the rising “fascist” or “neo-Nazi” threat and that again puts them on a rhetorical collision course with their Russian brothers in arms who “stand alongside our nation” in its fight with the “sisterly but different” Ukrainian nation.¹¹⁰ This dichotomy of views and motivations seems not to bother the members of the “brigades,” as one of them explained after coming back from eastern Ukraine that his unit had a 50-50 ideological make-up (“half of them are communists and the other half are Nazis”), but this did not stop its members from fighting “together, communists and Nazis alike.”¹¹¹ Such unison of attitude allows the “brigades” to either oppose Ukrainian nationalism (for the left-leaning international volunteers) or Ukrainian expansionism and/or imperialism (for nationalist volunteers).¹¹²

This clash of motivations, however, will not, in the medium and long terms, be easy to sidestep, as some of the separatist foreign fighters espouse anti-Semitic views related to a “future struggle against Israel” and an “anti-Zionist” outreach into “Arabian countries and in[to] Europe.”¹¹³ Such sentiments seem to be in line with anti-Semitic comments by Alexander Zakharchenko, leader of the self-proclaimed DNR.¹¹⁴ His attitude does not stop delegations from allegedly “far-left” European political parties, e.g., the German Die Linke, from visiting DNR on “humanitarian missions.”¹¹⁵

Interestingly enough, some of the pro-Ukraine foreign fighters profess similar motivations behind their decision to join the fight. One is able to track down a high dose of anti-Atlanticism, akin to that of “Eurasianists,” and opposition to “Global Jewry.”¹¹⁶ Consequently, one should not assume that such volunteers fight for “a democratic Ukraine” but rather for “a fascist dictatorship”¹¹⁷ that would be anti-communist, Russophobic, anti-NATO, anti-EU, economically socialist but anti-Marxist, Christian and nationalist.

Simultaneously, there is also talk of the need to oppose the “non-Russian regime of Putin”¹¹⁸ and to combat the “multi-racial, cultural trashcan which hides behind the acronym RF (Russian Federation).”¹¹⁹ Alternatively, there exists a desire to combat “an imperialist superpower” (another parallel with the separatist motivations), a “worry about Putin” and his “plan for Europe and Ukraine.” A few of the Azov Regiment members stress their pre-war links with Ukraine and the fact of being slowly drawn into the

¹⁰⁷ K. Radia, “American fighting with Ukraine rebels urges others to join him,” *abcnews*, 22 September 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/09/american-fighting-with-ukraine-rebels-urges-others-to-join-him>.

¹⁰⁸ “Oddział Rusicz: to my jesteśmy nacjonalistami,” *xportal.pl*, 2 October 2014, <http://xportal.pl/?p=16787&>.

¹⁰⁹ “Ispaniets vstupit v ryady opolcheniya, chtoby voyevat c VSU,” *Life News*, 15 October 2014, <http://lifenews.ru/news/142853>.

¹¹⁰ “Oddział Rusicz: to my jesteśmy nacjonalistami,” *op. cit.*

¹¹¹ P. Ortega Dolz, *op. cit.*

¹¹² D. Hudziec, “Dariusz Lemański...,” *op. cit.*

¹¹³ See: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=840821385960334&id=752238441485296.

¹¹⁴ “Ukraine run by miserable Jews, says rebel chief,” *Ynetnews*, 2 February 2015, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4622200,00.html.

¹¹⁵ A. Shekhovtsov, “German Die Linke delegation visits right-wing terrorists in Eastern Ukraine,” *Anton Shekhovtsov’s blog*, 19 February 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2015/02/german-die-linke-delegation-visits.html>.

¹¹⁶ Cledun, “Novorussia, Atlanticists, and Ukrainian Nationalists,” *The Right Stuff*, 3 March 2015, <http://therightstuff.biz/2015/03/03/novorussia-atlanticists-and-ukrainian-nationalists/>

¹¹⁷ “Swedish neo-Nazis join fight in Ukraine,” *The Local*, 30 July 2014, www.thelocal.se/20140730/swedish-neo-nazis-threaten-ukraine-democracy.

¹¹⁸ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWYFWyq4C2U>.

¹¹⁹ “Rosjanie i Polacy w pułku ‘Azow’. Dowódca o europejskich ochotnikach: To elita,” *Nacjonalista*, 13 September 2014, www.nacjonalista.pl/2014/09/13/rosjanie-w-batalionie-azow-dowodca-o-europejskich-ochotnikach-to-elita.

conflict while “defending Europe from becoming like Russia.”¹²⁰ Many of the foreign volunteers on the Ukrainian side actually speak of a “reconquest” of European land from national-bolshevism/neo-Sovietism or outright communism.¹²¹ They are allegedly involved in a “crusade” while defending “the last outpost of Europe” against the “hordes” from Asia.¹²² This is to be a cathartic experience for the whole of the “right-wing world,” which will then embark upon a revival of Europe.¹²³

More specifically, such groups as the Swedish fighters, prominent in the Azov Regiment, refer to the “legacy of the Caroleans,” i.e., the 17th and 18th century Swedish soldiers who fought Russia, in their motivations.¹²⁴ The single Dutch volunteer apparently wants to avenge the taking down of the MH17 plane in which 193 Dutch people perished.¹²⁵ For the pro-Ukraine Croat volunteers, “this war with Russia reminds them of how the Serbs handled their war in the Balkans. The Croats are nationalists and help other nationalists to fight a common enemy.”¹²⁶ Of course, the presence of Serb volunteers in the separatist ranks only strengthens the Croatian motivations for joining in the conflict, and vice versa.¹²⁷ On top of that, the Serbs stress their cultural and historical affinity with Russia as the reason for their support of the separatists. The perception of Ukraine as a fake, buffer, Kosovo-lite state that only exists to prevent Russian expansion and greatness, common amongst the Eurasianists, is also a potential mobilising factor for the Serbs.¹²⁸ On the other hand, the anti-Serbian Albanians, allegedly present on the Ukrainian side, could be motivated by their desire to prove both Russia and Serbia wrong while supporting viable, pro-Western Ukraine.

Northern European volunteers, i.e., the Swedes but also Finns,¹²⁹ and also inhabitants of the Baltic states, are motivated by “some historical connections [to Russia and Ukraine], [they] also fought many wars with Russia [in the past] and the Ukrainians can understand this.”¹³⁰ Thus, this is seen as a fight against a common enemy. The same can be said about the Georgians¹³¹ or Belarussians, who use the imagery of “Pahonia,” Belarus’ coat of arms between 1991 and 1995 (abolished by President Alexander Lukashenko and now used as an unofficial emblem of the opposition in the country) as their emblem.¹³² This suggests that such individuals see their fight in Ukraine as their continuation of a struggle against post-Soviet and pro-Russian political regimes.

Foreign Fighters—a Threat to Be Monitored

There is not a “NATO’s foreign legion” nor “Donbass International Brigades” in the fight in Ukraine. This is, of course, a heavily internationalised affair, but in no way does it resemble the situation in Syria. In fact, it is one nationality, the Russians, who, due to the fact that most of them are soldiers, cannot be counted as genuine foreign fighters, that is overly present in the fighting. The numbers for all the other participants do not even come close to that of the Russian military involved on the ground in eastern Ukraine.

Nonetheless, the EU Member States should be concerned with the fate of Ukraine-based or bound foreign fighters, especially after their return to their host countries. Some completely reject the reality they will encounter back at home and might involve themselves in violent activities aimed at their host countries—

¹²⁰ “Här är svenskarna som strider i Ukraina,” *op. cit.*

¹²¹ “Ultras in ATO,” *Misanthropic*, <http://misanthropic.info/gallery/album/6117105707576339521/#!/prettyPhoto>.

¹²² “Ukraine is the last outpost of Europe,” *Ukrainian Crusade*, 8 February 2015, <http://ukrainiancrusade.blogspot.ca/2015/02/ukraine-is-last-outpost-of-europe.html>.

¹²³ See: http://vk.com/azov_rus?w=wall-68585012_4141.

¹²⁴ See: <https://www.facebook.com/svenskaurainafrivilliga/photos/a.1387810954777126.1073741828.1387673804790841/1486381624920058/?type=1&theater>.

¹²⁵ T. den Hartog, S. Huijboom, *op. cit.*

¹²⁶ See: note 5.

¹²⁷ A. Pawlak, “Serbscy czetnicy walczą u boku separatystów,” *DW*, 17 August 2014, www.dw.de/serbscy-czetnicy-walcz%C4%85-u-boku-separatyst%C3%B3w/a-17859369.

¹²⁸ R. Lasecki, “Wywiad portalu konserwatyzm.pl z Aleksandrem Duginem na temat Ukrainy,” *Konserwatyzm.pl*, 6 May 2014, www.konserwatyzm.pl/arttykul/12084/wywiad-portal-u-konserwatyzm-pl-z-aleksandrem-duginem-na-temat.

¹²⁹ P. Jackson, “Ukraine war pulls in foreign fighter,” *BBC*, 31 August 2014, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28951324.

¹³⁰ See: note 5.

¹³¹ “Georgians in Ukraine...,” *op. cit.*

¹³² V. Smok, *op. cit.*

while others already profess a desire to stay in Ukraine after the war.¹³³ They are representatives of wider extreme and anti-systemic political milieus that are vehemently anti-Atlanticist, anti-European, anti-liberal, nationalist and quite often pro-Russian. Through violent acts they might attempt to emulate the creation of their preferred Ukraine or a “Donbass” in their host countries—entities dictatorial and repressive in nature, heavily ideological and involved in some titanic struggles with external enemies, which would be fuelled by past, real or imaginary grievances. Unfortunately, they are more than likely to find many followers amongst the radicals of Europe who decided not to join the conflict in Ukraine. These radicals will, however, lionise their foreign fighter colleagues and perhaps attempt to copy their deeds somewhere in Europe. According to the motivations of many of the foreign volunteers in the conflict in Ukraine, they will find many tempting targets to strike. This could be the drastic fallout from this war.

Of course, such risk must be put into context, as the numbers of foreign fighters returning from Ukraine are more than likely to be low. Moreover, some of those who went there could become so consumed in fighting their individual and local battles in a real combat situation and fantasising about the completion of their seemingly non-realizable political goals that they will never constitute any meaningful threat to anyone outside Ukraine. Most of them will not even be penalised if they ever decide to return to their host countries. The failure to constitute “NATO’s foreign legion” or the “Donbass International brigades” does not mean, however, that some of their alleged members should not be a cause for concern to those who look after European security.

¹³³ See: note 5.