

# What is the German army doing in Slavyansk?

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Eight military inspectors have been detained by pro-Russian activists in the eastern Ukrainian city of Slavyansk since April 25. The group of inspectors consists of three German army (Bundeswehr) officers, a German interpreter, plus one Czech, one Polish, one Danish and one Swedish military inspector. The Swede has since been released for health reasons.

The German media has consistently described the detainees as OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) observers. This is incorrect. The only connection between the OSCE and the detainees is that the presence of the latter in Ukraine is justified by the so-called Vienna Document agreed on by the 57 member states of the OSCE in 1992, and which has since been renewed on a number of occasions.

But the activities of the group in Ukraine have not been approved by the OSCE, nor are they under OSCE control. Instead, the military inspectors were instructed to intervene in Ukraine by the regime in Kiev and are under the direct control of their respective national defence ministries.

This has been confirmed by the deputy director of the OSCE crisis prevention centre, Claus Neukirch. He has stated that the group is involved in a bilateral mission, headed by the army and at the invitation of the Ukrainian government. Such inspections can be agreed on between individual OSCE member states.

In particular, the detained military observers have nothing to do with the OSCE observer mission agreed on March 21 by OSCE member states, including Russia. This mission consists of 500 civilian observers, commissioned to follow the situation in Ukraine for the next six months and report directly to the OSCE. So far, however, only around 100 members of this group are on the ground.

Two aims lie behind the confusion over the mission of the Slavyansk detainees that has been deliberately entertained by the German press. Firstly, their detention is being used to step up war-mongering against Russia. By claiming that pro-Russian forces were holding an internationally agreed observer mission, it is claimed that Moscow had violated international agreements and treaties.

In addition, there are indications that the Vienna Document of the OSCE was deliberately misused in this case by the administrations in Kiev and Berlin, thereby giving some justification to accusations of anti-government protesters in Slavyansk that the group were operating as spies.

The Vienna Document is regarded as a confidence-building measure. It is designed to give members of the OSCE, in particular neighbouring states, the opportunity to observe the armed forces of other countries and so reduce the risk of military confrontation. The document does not permit the observation of enemy forces in an internal conflict, and certainly not if the country requesting the mission is actively involved in the conflict—as is the case in Ukraine.

In an interview with Bavarian Radio on April 23, the head of the detained group, Colonel Axel Schneider, stressed that his group wanted merely to “get an idea” of the state of the “regular, forces state armed forces” in Ukraine—i.e., its official army. He excluded any observation of anti-government insurgents: “We focus on the security forces of Ukraine.”

On the basis of this argument, however, it is not possible to explain why his group then drove to Slavyansk, which was in the hands of insurgents and was being besieged by the Ukrainian army. The most likely is that the group was commissioned to acquire

information about the insurgents being targeted by the Western-backed regime in Kiev.

Even if Schneider were to be telling the truth, this would suggest that his group's role is to monitor the crackdown being mounted by the Ukrainian army, many units of which have refused to fire on the pro-Russian activists in eastern Ukraine. In either case, what is being exposed is the role of German and European forces in the Kiev regime's crackdown. Colonel Schneider, who is attached to the Verification Centre of the Armed Forces and is officially subordinate to the Defence Ministry, declared in the interview that he coordinated his work "very closely with the Foreign Office", headed by Franz-Walter Steinmeier, who played a key role in the coup in Ukraine and has fully supported the Kiev regime.

Many of the details of the events in Slavyansk remain unclear, but one thing is certain: the Bundeswehr is far more active in Ukraine than is publicly admitted.



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