

Mass graves reveal torture and executions in eastern Ukraine

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Following the withdrawal of the Ukrainian army from areas of eastern Ukraine, there have been a number of reports of mass graves in which right-wing Ukrainian militias buried the bodies of their opponents.

The evidence of torture and executions show the extent of the brutality employed by the Kiev regime in its campaign against pro-Russian separatists and workers across the country.

Early last week, reports emerged of three mass graves reportedly containing the corpses of dozens of executed separatists and civilians in the eastern Ukrainian village of Nizhnaya Krynka. The village, located to the northeast of Donetsk, was for a long period under the control of the Ukrainian National Guard and the notorious Ajdar Battalion, before troops withdrew two weeks ago.

On Wednesday, OSCE observers monitoring the ceasefire between the Ukrainian army and the separatist forces in the region confirmed the existence of two of the graves. Two graves were allegedly found on the grounds of the Komunar coal mine and another in the village itself.

Two corpses already in the process of decay were exhumed from the tombs at the mine in the presence of observers. In addition, OSCE observers found eight 9 mm shell casings about five meters from the graves. In the village itself, the inspectors found a burial mound on which a plaque was placed, naming five people and their date of death—27/08/2014. The text “Died for Putin’s lies” was written on the back of the plaque.

The spokesman of the Ukraine mission of the OSCE, Michael Bociurkiw, told the WSWS that the condition of the bodies did not allow immediate identification of the sex or other characteristics of the victims. He also declared that the precarious security situation meant that the inspectors had little time for their investigation.

In addition, no forensic specialists were on site.

There are conflicting reports about the dead bodies found at the mine. The state radio station *Voice of Russia* reported on Wednesday that four bodies had been found—a man and three women, one of whom was probably pregnant. All of the corpses were wearing civilian clothes. Their hands were tied behind their backs, and gunshot wounds to the backs of their heads were visible. In addition there was evidence of torture.

On Monday, Russia’s state-owned *Russian Television* quoted the senior physician of the investigation group of the rebels, Konstantin Gerasimenko, who spoke of four male corpses with multiple gunshot wounds. Some had been wearing only underwear. He also spoke of their hands being tied.

The station also interviewed a local resident of the village, who testified that she had identified one of the dead bodies as her son Nikita. He had been arrested by members of the Ukrainian National Guard. The militiamen had told the mother that her son was being held for a prisoner exchange.

This information has so far not been independently confirmed. It is also unclear how many bodies are still in the graves. The rebel leader Aleksander Zakharchenko reported that at least 40 bodies had been previously exhumed. In addition, the separatists claimed on Sunday to have found a fourth grave near the others.

The OSCE and the Russian Foreign Ministry have called for an international investigation from the EU and others. There has been no response so far to this demand. Instead, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Anne Brasseur, announced she planned to make her own assessment of the situation due to the “great deal of shocking information”.

Although some questions remain open, the information so far confirmed points to the brutality employed by Ukrainian organizations against suspected separatists and the population in eastern Ukraine. There are many indications that the Ukrainian militias carried out mass executions of unarmed separatists and possibly civilians. Such activities fit into a broader framework. There is a wealth of documentation regarding the torture and murders carried out by Ukrainian organizations.

In July there were reports of mass graves in the city of Sloviansk after people had been captured by government forces. On September 10, the human rights organization Amnesty International published a report charging that the Ajdar battalion, which was also deployed in Nizhnaya Krynka, had committed serious abuses and war crimes in the region of Luhansk. Workers suspected of links to the separatists were abducted, robbed and tortured. Shortly afterwards, the rebels in Luhansk reported finding dozens of corpses with signs of torture and execution.

In its offensive against the separatists in the east of the country the Ukrainian government relied heavily on such battalions after large numbers of regular soldiers refused to fight against their compatriots in the east. These battalions are funded by pro-Western oligarchs and often cooperate openly with the fascist and extreme right-wing forces that played a key role in the coup against President Viktor Yanukovich in February this year.

The fascist methods employed by the Ukrainian government and the reign of terror it has established throughout the country make clear its rule never had anything to do with democracy or human rights. Brought to power in a coup orchestrated by the West, the Kiev regime represents the interests of ruthless oligarchs, who, in alliance with the US and the EU, hope to establish even more favorable conditions for the exploitation of the Ukrainian working class.

The brutal crackdown against the separatists in the east of the country is therefore closely connected with the imposition of authoritarian forms of rule throughout Ukraine. In the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkov, a peace demonstration called by the Moscow-oriented Communist Party was banned at short notice on the weekend. When people gathered to protest against the war, 23 people were arrested.

One day later, fascist gangs and pro-Western protesters pulled down and destroyed the massive Lenin statue in the center of Kharkiv, in the northeast of the country. The response by the head of the regional administration, Igor Baluta, was to enact a law that legalized vandalism. For his part, the Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Awakov welcomed the toppling of the “bloody communist idol”.

According to reports, the Ukrainian government announced last week plans to introduce a national labor service. As a result, workers, self-employed, unemployed, students, trainees, and farmers can be deployed against their will to perform “socially useful work” such as repairs at state boundaries, airfields, and fortifications.

President Petro Poroshenko is using dictatorial measures and fascist terror to smash the social rights of the population and thereby prepare the country for membership in the European Union. On Thursday, Poroshenko announced in Kiev that his country would submit “an application for membership of the European Union in six years time”. Already the Association Agreement signed by the Kiev regime with the EU involves massive attacks on Ukrainian workers.



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