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‘The Nemtsov report’: a collection of evidence of Russia’s participation in the war in Ukraine

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12 May saw the presentation of the report ‘Putin. War’, dedicated to the participation of Russia in the war in Ukraine, in the offices of the Parnas opposition party. The report is based on information previously available in articles, reports and information from social networks. It also assembles testimonies from Russian soldiers who took part in military action in Ukraine. Much space is devoted to the participation of Russian mercenaries and the role of Chechen troops in the conflict. It also presents evidence that the separatists have been supported by the Kremlin with supplies of military equipment. The report also attempts to estimate the financial losses associated with Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its participation in the hostilities. According to the authors’ calculations, the costs of operations in the Donbas over 10 months of fighting amounted to more than $1 billion, in connection with the payment of mercenaries and expenses on military equipment, and more than $1.5 billion to help the refugees. In addition, Russian’s losses associated with rising inflation are estimated at about $55 billion.

Commentary

- The originator of the report was the opposition activist Boris Nemtsov, who was assassinated on 27 February before the text was finalised. The assassination was political in nature, and commentators pointed out that the work on the report, which raised a subject which the government was touchy about, could have been one of the motives. After Nemtsov’s death, law enforcement agencies seized hard drives while searching his apartment and offices, as they could have contained working materials for the report. However, the publication was completed by a team of opposition activists, independent experts and journalists.
- The report summarises previous publications on the presence in Ukraine of regular units of the Russian army, mercenaries paid by Russia and Russian military equipment. The authors have challenged the Kremlin’s official rhetoric, and accuse President Putin and his entourage of exposing the public to enormous social and financial costs resulting from the war. The report is aimed at the public in Russia also, where the Russian army’s participation in the conflict in Ukraine remains a taboo subject.
- The aim of the report is to discredit President Putin and his entourage and put the blame on it for the cost of the conflict in Ukraine and the deteriorating economic situation in

Russia. The report's authors emphasise that the annexation of Crimea and Russia's involvement in the Donbas conflict were primarily dictated by the desire to improve the president's flagging poll ratings. However, these have entailed many sacrifices (the report refers to least 220 deaths among the Russian military), as well as enormous economic costs resulting from Western sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions, Russia's political isolation, and the rupture of ties with Ukrainian society.

- It can be assumed that the publication of the report will not generate much interest among the general public, nor cause a tidal wave of criticism of the Kremlin. While the majority of Russians oppose Russian participation in any war, the annexation of Crimea and the involvement in the Donbas conflict have resulted in a significant increase in support for President Putin, which persists despite the deteriorating socio-economic situation.