

## **Ukraine and EU losing the souls of the inhabitants of Eastern Ukraine**

HRWF (30.09.2016) - On 16-24 May and 3-9 June 2016, members of the well-known human rights organization *Memorial* visited the territories beyond the control of the Ukrainian authorities. They collected information on the consequences of the hostilities, the restoration of destroyed objects, and the conditions of the civil population.

The participants in the mission worked

- in the districts of Donetsk, which had suffered bombing in 2014-2016: Kuibyshevskiy, Petrovskiy, Kirovskiy districts;
- in the villages of Trudovskie, I-ya ploshchadka, Oktiabrskiy);
- in the towns of Dokuchaevsk, Horlovka, Makeevka, Snezhnoe, Uhlehorsk, Debaltsevo and Inakievo;
- in the villages of Novosvetlovka and Krashchevatoe, and Nikishyno.

Previously, in 2014, representatives of Memorial visited some of these population centers and published a long detailed report illustrated with many pictures: See <http://memohrc.org/sites/default/files/old/files/1658.pdf>

Their new report (59 pages) was distributed during the OSCE/ ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. Here are the main conclusions and recommendations published at the end of their mission in May-June 2016.

It is obvious that the local leaders and Russia are winning the souls of the local populations Ukraine is losing that battle as it hardly provides any humanitarian assistance to the people of its eastern regions that are beyond its control. The self-proclaimed DNR and LNR have their own government and their own currency. The Ukrainian language has almost totally disappeared from schools and has been replaced by the Russian language. Reconstruction of schools and residential buildings is taking place with the help of Russia. Apparently, only the Czech NGO People in Need is active in this area. The EU is also losing the souls of the populations of these territories.

### **Human rights situation in territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (DNR & LNR) close to the demarcation line**

The territories of the self-proclaimed DNR and LNR in the East of Ukraine have governing bodies that *de facto* exercise government functions. The conditions created on these territories make it significantly more difficult for NGOs to monitor the situation on human rights, international humanitarian legislation abidance and social-economic conditions of civil population.

Thanks to significant financial allocations from the Russian budget, the social-economic situation in the self-proclaimed DNR and LNR regions got noticeably better since spring-summer 2015 and is no longer close to the level of humanitarian disaster. Nevertheless, the social-economic situation of the majority of the people remains quite difficult; some populations only survive on the humanitarian aid provided from Ukraine and Russia.

Large scale reconstruction works are taking place in the territories of self-proclaimed DNR and LNR, targeting both multi-compartment buildings and the most damaged private houses. No doubt this became possible only because the main reconstruction work is performed with the help of Russian aid. Nevertheless, sadly, the scale of devastation in the aforementioned territories are so high that even if the current speed of reconstruction remains the same, in the most optimistic scenario, it would take over

five years to fully recover all damaged private sector housing in DNR. Building new houses, instead of attempting to save those beyond repair, could take over twelve years.

Even though many school buildings have been more or less damaged from artillery fire during the conflict, school education resumed at the earliest opportunity. A priority was made to repair the most damaged school buildings.

Currently, Russian textbooks brought in from Russia, as needed, are mostly being used. No complaints were registered concerning a possible lack of teachers and teachers receive their salaries in time. In addition, it is sad to say that DNR schools prohibit almost all Ukrainian language education. In 2015, the Ministry of Education of DNR accepted a new school education program, which included a significant cut-back in weekly hours given in Ukrainian language and literature. Even Ukrainian classes have more Russian hours than Ukrainian. The preschool education system of DNR totally prohibits the Ukrainian language.

- It is considered that the responsible government in this most difficult situation currently in place in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions should primarily focus on fulfilling their duties to the most vulnerable parts of their population, in particular retirees. The authorities of Ukraine were responsible for providing the possibility to get pension payments by those who are supposed to get those payments on the territories controlled by them (as legal authorities), without any additional terms. This would soften the acuity of the question, at least for those retirees who have pension cards.
- The existing order of crossing through few access points by foot or in vehicles determined by the Ukrainian side as well as the existing equipment and the qualification of staff at these access points cause massive queues with almost no living conditions. This situation inevitably causes complaints towards the Ukrainian authorities, no matter the political views of the individuals complaining. It also provokes corruption among Ukrainian enforcement officers.
- After visiting some of the access points on the borderline in Satnica Luhaskaya, Zolotoe, Marjinka, Zaicevo, and Hnutovo, members of the monitoring mission reported that the conditions of passage through the access points and passage itself significantly differ and require improvements almost everywhere. The logistics of the access points require obvious upgrades to minimize the waiting time to pass the border. Such upgrades include: increasing the number of customs officers, reacting to queue build-up by increasing access capacities, and creating normal conditions for people waiting in queues. The reasons for complaints from those crossing the borderline in and out of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions need to be clear for both of those who live in the aforementioned regions and on the territories controlled by Ukrainian authorities. Only Hnutovo access point has a well organized process of crossing the borderline by foot or in vehicles: it takes up to one hour for those driving vehicles and 20-30 minutes for those travelling on foot. Hnutovo access point can serve as a positive example of a correctly organized logistics system. Apart from that, it is needed to eliminate unjustified harsh restrictions of carrying food supplies and other consumable objects over the borderline, as the current situation inevitably leads to corruption.
- Even though the problem of the people who were forced to flee their homes because of the large scale hostilities, the self-proclaimed DNR did not implement any program for the forced immigrants or IDPs that would allow them to receive social payments and benefits. The issue of social support for this population requires analysis and solution.

- It is obvious that even after signing the Minsk Agreements, heavy artillery shelling continues from both sides of the conflict. Though civil objects are not targeted by these hits, quite often they suffer the biggest damage. Population centers should not be targets of shelling.