

Ukraine

The Ruslan Kotsaba story

New trial against Ukrainian journalists and conscientious objector

Attacks by right-wing radicals



"I know that the mobilization is declared under martial law. I would rather go to prison than go into civil war now and kill my compatriots who live in the East. Don't argue with conscription. I will not take part in this fratricidal war".

This was declared by Ruslan Kotsaba to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on January 23, 2015 in a post on YouTube. A few weeks later he was arrested and charged with "treason" and "obstruction of the legitimate activities of the armed forces of Ukraine". After 16 months of pre-trial detention under inhumane conditions, the court in Ivano-Frankivsk sentenced him to 3.5 years in prison. The court of appeal acquitted him shortly afterwards.

However, the public prosecutor's office requested that the trial be reopened, which the Supreme Court followed in June 2017. The next hearing of the trial will be held at the court in Kolomyja on September 20, 2021. On the occasion of previous hearings Ruslan Kotsaba was attacked by neo-Nazis two times and seriously wounded.

Amnesty International had already recognized Ruslan Kotsaba as a political prisoner in 2015. *Connection e.V.*, *War Resisters' International*, *European Bureau for Conscientious Objection*, *German Peace Society - United Antimilitarists* and other organisations repeatedly called for the acquittal from 2016 to be confirmed and for the criminal proceedings to be stopped.

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The Ruslan Kotsaba story, last updated: August 26, 2021

Ukraine: the Ruslan Kotsaba story

Chronology

January 23, 2015: Ruslan Kotsaba, originally a supporter of the Maidan protests, uploads a video on *YouTube* to voice his opposition to Ukraine's warfare in the eastern part of the country. In a statement addressed to president Petro Poroshenko, the freelance journalist announces that he will refuse to be called up, calling on his fellow countrymen to do likewise and make a stand against conscription. In his address, he stresses his view that the ongoing conscription at that time in Ukraine is unlawful since the Ukrainian government has not declared war.¹ He goes on to stress that as a Christian he feels committed to upholding God's Commandment "Thou shalt not kill".²

February 7, 2015: Ruslan Kotsaba is arrested on charges of "high treason" and "obstructing the lawful activities of the Ukraine military".

From February 2015: Ukraine's public prosecutor names around 60 witnesses who, over time, are summoned to appear at the monthly court sessions. However, many of them simply don't show up, pointlessly stretching the court case out over many months. Prison conditions during Ruslan Kotsaba's detention are degrading.

February 5, 2016: A full year on from his arrest, Ruslan Kotsaba is given his first opportunity to speak out before court on the charges brought against him. He uses his two-hour testimony to affirm his antimilitaristic stance and his refusal to take up arms. He also speaks at length about the case brought against him, emphasising that he upholds and practises the democratic rules of journalism.

May 12, 2016: The court in Ivano-Frankivsk announces Ruslan Kotsaba's sentence of 3½ years (42 months) in prison. It dismisses the charge of "high treason", stating that the evidence presented by the prosecution, including the wiretapping records, fails to prove that Mr Kotsaba, in his public appearances, wilfully and directly aided a foreign country by engaging in subversive practices against Ukraine. Ukraine's Constitution, the court continues, upholds his freedom of opinion, rendering Ruslan Kotsaba's remarks constitutional.

The court does, however, find him guilty of "obstructing the lawful activities of the Ukraine military", stating that his remarks were not based on precise facts but had instead encouraged the general public to avoid conscription and the duty to defend the country. The court makes no reference to Ruslan Kotsaba's defence that conscription is unlawful since Ukraine has not actually formally declared war.

The court also decrees that in light of the tough prison conditions during detention, his time spent in custody would be counted twice towards his overall prison term pursuant to Article 72.5.

July 14, 2016: After an appeal against the verdict the Court of Appeal discontinues the proceedings and orders the release of Ruslan Kotsaba after more than 16 months in prison.

June 1, 2017: The Supreme Court of Civil and Criminal Matters of Ukraine annuls the verdict of the Court of Appeal on the grounds that the Code of Criminal Procedure was not complied with. In particular, the evidence submitted by the prosecutor's office had not been fully reviewed by the Court of Appeal.

November 3, 2020: The case is retried before the court in Kolomyja. The charge is again "treason" and "obstruction of the legitimate activities of the armed forces of Ukraine".

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv-FpSztm5g>

² Ruslan Kotsaba to the Ivano-Frankivsk eparchy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

January 22, 2021: The second hearing of trial took place. Ruslan Kotsaba and his lawyer Tatjana Montian were attacked by right-wing extremists in front of the courthouse with the content of a fire extinguisher. The police intervened after the attack but didn't arrest any of the attackers.

June 25, 2021: Ruslan Kotsaba was attacked by a neo-Nazi gang at the Ivano-Frankivsk railway station. Later he underwent surgery to save his sight due to a burn in his retina with the chemical brilliant green or "zelenka". The attack was likely to be related to the court hearing against Ruslan Kotsaba June 29.

September 20, 2021: The next hearing of the trial is scheduled at the court in Kolomyja.

Political persecution of antimilitarists

Summary

Connection e.V. and the *German Peace Society - United Antimilitarists (DFG-VK)* see the criminal prosecution of Ruslan Kotsaba as a case of political persecution. Ruslan Kotsaba appears to have been accused of taking a public stance against Ukrainian government policy and of calling for an end to the “fratricidal war” and for negotiations to be begun with the separatists in the east of the country. That’s the only possible explanation why the Ukrainian authorities are cracking down on him so harshly and why he has been sentenced to a number of years in prison.

It is particularly worth noting the public prosecutor’s attempt, on the basis of extremely flimsy evidence, to have the journalist found guilty of “high treason”. At the same time, this should be seen as a threat aimed at silencing any further criticism of the conflict, since anyone doing so can expect to be prosecuted in a similar fashion and the court, it seems, would be prepared to hear such cases.

What is more, by summoning more than 60 witnesses, the public prosecutor managed to stretch the court case out over many months, forcing Ruslan Kotsaba to languish in degrading conditions in custody. The court confirms as much (indirectly) in its verdict by counting his period in detention twice towards his overall sentence. This should be condemned as punishment without trial and should not, under any circumstances, be legitimised. For Ruslan Kotsaba, the period in custody became a form of punishment in itself.

With the reopening of the trial, Ruslan Kotsaba is threatened with being arrested and sentenced again. For the second time, he is subject to persecution that violates human rights. Furthermore the reopening of the trial gives a sign and legitimation to right-wing radicals to attack Ruslan Kotsaba as it happened in January and in June 2021.

Connection e.V. and *DFG-VK* also consider Ruslan Kotsaba’s call on fellow Ukrainians to refuse to be conscripted to be legitimate. The right to refuse conscription is very limited at best in Ukraine and falls short of the standards stated by the European Court of Human Rights, amongst others. Only members of roughly a dozen religious organizations are permitted to avoid military service. Furthermore, army reservists are prohibited from refusing the draft. Moreover, as Ruslan Kotsaba himself notes, calling up conscripts without actually declaring war is a questionable thing to do. Sentencing Ruslan Kotsaba to 42 months in prison for calling on fellow Ukrainians to refuse to be drafted should be condemned in the strongest-possible manner and regarded as political persecution.

Some background information

Amnesty International: political prisoner of conscience

Amnesty International has adopted Ruslan Kotsaba as its first prisoner of conscience in Ukraine in five years, writing: "Members of the media are suffering harassment at the hands of the authorities. Among them is the journalist and prominent blogger Ruslan Kotsaba – recently named as Amnesty International's first Ukrainian prisoner of conscience in five years. He could face more than a decade in prison on the charge of 'high treason' and for his views on the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Ruslan Kotsaba was arrested on 7 February in Ivano-Frankivsk, 130 km south-east of Lviv, after he posted a video describing the conflict as "the Donbas fratricidal civil war". He also expressed opposition to military conscription of Ukrainians to take part in the conflict.

After being formally charged on 31 March with 'high treason', he faces up to 15 years in prison, as well as up to an eight-year sentence on a further charge of 'hindering the legitimate activities of the armed forces'. Amnesty International has called for his immediate and unconditional release, and we see his treatment as a brazen restriction on the right to freedom of expression".³

EBCO: Attacks against Ruslan Kotsaba⁴

On 25 June 2021 the President of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement Ruslan Kotsaba was attacked by a neo-Nazi gang at the Ivano-Frankivsk railway station. Later he underwent surgery to save his sight due to a burn in his retina with the chemical brilliant green or "zelenka". The doctors diagnosed a corneal burn on one eye and he is now undergoing ophthalmological treatment. The attack is likely to be related to the court hearing against Ruslan Kotsaba scheduled for Tuesday, June 29.

EBCO joins the call of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement which urges the police to investigate the vile and savage act of political violence of right-wing radicals who even openly brag about their crime in social networks.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time that Ruslan Kotsaba was attacked. Already at his trial on 22/01/2021, Ruslan, his lawyer and his mother had been attacked on their way to the court by an extreme right-wing mob, which formed a "corridor of shame" through which Ruslan had to walk. He was sprayed with a fire extinguisher with the mob chanting "Death to enemies! Ukraine above all!"

"EBCO is shocked by the new attack as well as by the impunity of the criminals who attacked Ruslan Kotsaba, his mother and lawyer near the Kolomyia City District Court on the day of his retrial, on January 22nd 2021, placing again his life under threat. We urge the Ukrainian authorities to ensure that inciters of hatred and violence are arrested and held accountable without further delay", Alexia Tsouni, EBCO President stated.

³ Amnesty International: Ukraine's spate of suspicious deaths must be followed by credible investigations.

17 April 2015. www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/ukraine-suspicious-deaths-need-credible-investigations

⁴ EBCO: Press statement June 28, 2021. Excerpts. <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/505>

Conscription and Conscientious Objection⁵

Conscription		Yes	Reintroduced in 2014 (earlier suspended in 2012).
Conscientious objection:		1991	First recognised in the Law of Ukraine “On Alternative (Non-Military) Service”.
Service	Military:	18	12 months for males of higher education.
	Civilian:	27	18 months for males of higher education.
Minimum	Conscription:	18	Quasi-voluntary with summoning in the age of 18-19, compulsory in the age of 20-27.
	Voluntary enlistment:	17	Under 18 for military schools: 17 for cadets

16,460 conscripts were drafted during the spring military draft in May-July 2020 (it was postponed due to COVID-19 for a month) and 13,570 conscripts were drafted during the autumn military draft in October-December 2020. So, the total number of young people coercively sent to military service in 2020 was 30,030, corresponding to 88,5% of the 2019 draft (33,952). The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine informs that 4,166 conscripts who served their 18-month term and 300 conscripts who served 12-month term were released from military service in 2020.

According to the information provided by the local state administrations to the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, in 2020 approximately 1,538 conscientious objectors conduct alternative service, nearly 95% of them in 27-month term. Previous years, about 20% of applications for alternative service were refused for untimeliness, nearly 2% for the absence of proof of religious beliefs (such as a certificate of church membership), and near 1% for non-appearance of an applicant before the local state administration’s body administering alternative service; such bodies usually include an officer of military commissariat and consist mostly of civil servants, some of whom may be military reservists.

Alternative service is accessible only for religious objectors belonging to religious organizations of 10 denominations listed in the 1999 governmental decree. Servicemen who develop a conscientious objection have no legal way to have their objection recognized, and voluntary dismissal from military service is usually unavailable. This also applies to conscripts transported to military units against their will.

The widespread corruption in Ukraine still serves as an almost only way for many young people to avoid military service. According to numerous press releases of police, tens of officers of military commissariats and military medics were arrested in 2020 for taking bribes from draft evaders in sums from \$500 to \$2700. Also, in May 2020 the director of the division of professional adaptation of participants of anti-terrorist operation, joint forces operation, and alternative service of the Khmelnytskyi Oblast State Administration was arrested for extortion of \$1000 bribe, a box of candies and coffee for retroactive registration of late application for alternative service and ensuring approval of the application.

Three cases of suicide of conscript servicemen in Kyiv and Zhytomyr Oblast were reported by the media in 2020. Psychotherapist Mikhailo Matiash in his article in Dzerkalo Tyzhnia newspaper informed that a survey of contract and conscript servicemen who participated in armed conflict in

⁵ Report by European Bureau for Conscientious Objection: Annual Report. Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2020

Eastern Ukraine revealed a high inclination to suicide; this expert statement is particularly interesting because the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine still claims that conscripts never participate in the Donbass armed conflict, despite this claim was publicly disputed several times.

3361 criminal proceedings against evaders from military service were registered in January-November 2020 by the Articles 335-337, 407-409 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, including 18 cases of self-harm. For similar offenses, 190 draft dodgers and deserters were jailed, 117 arrested, 24 held in disciplinary battalions, 380 were fined by courts in 2019.

In 2020 Ukrainian journalist, pacifist, and conscientious objector Ruslan Kotsaba was put under trial again in Kolomyia City District Court of Ivano-Frankivsk Region because he published in 2015 a video blog calling to boycott mobilization for armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. For his expression of antiwar thoughts, he is accused of treason and obstructing military operations. Kotsaba already spent 524 days under arrest and was duly acquitted in 2016. His current retrial is a result of politically motivated prosecution and far-right pressure on justice. Prosecutor asks the court to sentence him to 13 years of imprisonment with confiscation of property, which is a clearly disproportionate punishment. EBCO called for the immediate and unconditional end of the criminal prosecution against Kotsaba,⁶ also, War Resisters' International, Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto, Connection e.V., DFG-VK, and others expressed their solidarity with Ruslan Kotsaba.

In July 2020 master's students Igor Drozd and Georgy Veshapidze were transported against their will from Desniansky district military commissariat of Kyiv to a military unit and illegally detained despite they had a right for postponement of conscription to obtain higher education. Their story was covered by the media, an assistant to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (UPCHR) examined the military commissariat and found this and other violations, such as non-voluntary enlistment of conscripts under the age of 20. The boys were released.

In August 2020, the Office of UPCHR reported that a Telegram bot published a list of 6,907 servicemen who abandoned their military units, using personal data without permission.

In several regions of Ukraine coronavirus testing of conscripts was introduced. On 16 December 2020, Medical Force Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported 3,186 people in the Armed Forces of Ukraine had acute respiratory illness COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus; for 31 December, it reported 1,937 servicemen were ill and in total, during the pandemic, there were 38 fatalities and 12,026 servicemen were recovered.

On 8 April 2020, replying to the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement's petition to cancel conscription for the time of COVID-19 pandemic, the UPCHR's representative in matters of protection of servicemen Oleh Chuiko informed that the Commissioner raised a question of prevention a spread of COVID-19 among servicemen. Also, he informed that in 2019 the Commissioner received more than 50 complaints from draftees and their relatives, describing more than 100 violations of human rights by officers of military commissariats, and the Commissioner took necessary measures to stop the violations and prevent them in the future.

In a 2019 submission to the UN Human Rights Committee, the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses informed that Dnipropetrovsk Regional State Administration has made a practice of dismissing all applications for alternative civilian service by Jehovah's Witnesses because the law demands that application for alternative civilian service must be filed not later than two months prior to the beginning of a conscription period determined by the Presidential Decree, which in recent years usually issued later than two months before the conscription.⁷ In 2020, the decree was

⁶ Brussels 8-12-2020 - OPEN LETTER to Court - EBCO calls for the dropping of all charges against Ruslan Kotsaba. Available at: <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/478>

⁷ European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee, Ukraine, 23/09/2019. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/UKR/INT_CCPR_ICO_UKR_36874_E.pdf

issued three months before the conscription period. According to statistics provided by the Dnipropetrovsk Regional State Administration to the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, 68 conscientious objectors were granted alternative service in 2015-2020, among them 50 Jehovah's Witnesses; 30 applications were refused, 6 of them for untimeliness, 4 because of the absence of evidence proving genuineness of religious beliefs, and 10 because of evasion from alternative service work.

On 16/03/2020 EBCO's President Mr. Friedhelm Schneider sent a letter to the Council of Europe Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe - Monitoring Committee (Ms. Dzheha Grozdanova and Mr. Alfred Heer) for the draft report under preparation: "The honouring of obligations and commitments by Ukraine", also attaching the EBCO Annual Report Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2019.

On 1 October 2020 at the 31st Meeting of the 45th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) expressed concern about the current violations of the right to conscientious objection to military service in Ukraine, observed a disproportionate length of the alternative service and a lack of access to employment for those who do not have military registration, and emphasized that a constitutionally enshrined duty to protect the territorial integrity of the country does not override the internationally protected right to conscientious objection; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is a non-derogable right and it continues to apply regardless of a situation of armed conflict. IFOR urged Ukraine to include the full implementation of the right to conscientious objection to military service in the new Human Rights Action Plan.

Also, on 18 December 2020 at the Human Rights Council meeting IFOR made a statement that alternative service in Ukraine has a punitive and discriminatory character and it is hardly accessible; mentioned a situation with 24 Pentecostals, conscientious objectors in Hoshcha Raion of Rivne Oblast who are unable to start alternative service because there is not available employment suitable to restrictive legal regulations of alternative service. IFOR expressed concern about the adoption of human rights violating Bill 3553 by the parliament in the first reading and continuation of the trial of pacifist Ruslan Kotsaba for his 2015 video expressing opposition to the military mobilization for armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Bill 3553 "On the amendments to several legislative acts of Ukraine concerning improvement in some aspects of conducting military service and military registration" proposed by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky was adopted by the parliament in the first reading. Along with reorganization of the system of military commissariats into "Territorial Centers for Recruitment And Social Support" (TCRSS), it introduces the next measures:

- mandatory military registration for employment;
- more vague definitions of punishable administrative offenses against compulsory military registration/service and high fines (increased in 50-100 times to current fines), TCRSS's power to impose such fines;
- arrests and coercive transportation of administrative offenders to TCRSSs, which seems like the legalization of the current informal practice of hunting for conscripts at the streets by police and officers of military commissariats, and arbitrary detention of conscripts, reported, among others, by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine;⁸
- criminal punishments for evading of military registration, military training gatherings, and conscription "in special period" (declared after the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014) from high fines up to 5 years imprisonment, with focus on punishment of reservists evading from mandatory gatherings and mobilization/draft, which may imply further coercive militarization of male population, since conscripts served their term of com-

⁸ Human Rights Council document A/HRC/42/CRP.7 "Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2019," 24th September 2019, para. 6, 49. Available at:

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/ReportUkraine16May-15Aug2019_EN.pdf

- pulsory military service are count as reservists, 40% of them reportedly persuaded to sign contracts for military service;
- mandatory "military registration" of conscientious objectors after release from alternative service (for now, it called just "registration");
 - power of the President of Ukraine as Commander-in-Chief to mobilize reservists for compulsory military service with a term up to 6 months in a "special period";
 - personal data of people can be included without their consent into the Unified State Register of Draftees, Subjects to Military Duty, and Reservists; in particular, the data will be automatically transferred from the Unified State Demographic Register (which means that all the male population of 17 years age and older can be automatically included into a military register for conscription purposes);
 - students can be drafted in a "special period" (currently they have a right to deferral);
 - discrimination of conscientious objectors in access to public service, introduced by "special investigation of attitude towards military service" for all candidates to public offices and demands to provide military ID for seeking a job in public service.

The main scientific expert directorate of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine warned that adoption of the Bill 3553 may have a negative impact on the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Ukrainian Pacifist Movement's call to withdraw Bill 3553 was rejected, an open letter to the President⁹ was readdressed from the President's Office to the Ministry of Defence which wrote the bill should be adopted. Verkhovna Rada's Committee on Defense refused the request of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement to present objections to the Bill 3553.

Proposals of Ukrainian Pacifist Movement and International Fellowship of Reconciliation to include protection of the human right to conscientious objection against military service into the National Human Rights Strategy of Ukraine and Action Plan for 2021-2023 years were rejected too, although UN Human Rights Committee in 2013 expressed its concern that no measures appear to have been taken to extend the right of conscientious objection against mandatory military service to persons who hold non-religious beliefs grounded in conscience, as well as beliefs grounded in all religions, and stressed that alternative service arrangements should be accessible to all conscientious objectors without discrimination as to the nature of the beliefs (religious or non-religious beliefs grounded in conscience) justifying the objection, and should be neither punitive nor discriminatory in nature or duration by comparison with military service.¹⁰ On 23 October 2020 UPCHR's representative for foreign affairs Natalia Fedorovych stated in her official letter that the Human Rights Committee's recommendations to Ukraine on alternative service are not realized and the Commissioner believes that the Law of Ukraine "On alternative (Non-Military) Service" should be thoroughly updated and improved in accordance to the Article 35 of Constitution of Ukraine.

On 25 December 2020 President Zelensky said in an interview with Focus magazine that in a case of big war with Russia he plans total mobilization, men and women would be drafted into the active army. Major General Serhii Kryvonos criticized Zelensky's plan as unrealistic, emphasized that people don't want to fight, and said that "military service of conscripts is slavery in the most of cases"; quickly after the statement, Zelensky fired Kryvonos from the post of deputy secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine.

⁹ Statement by Ukrainian Pacifist Movement: Bill № 3553 on Zelensky's military dictatorship should be withdrawn. Available at: <https://wri-irg.org/en/story/2020/statement-ukrainian-pacifist-movement-bill-no-3553-zelenskys-military-dictatorship>

¹⁰ Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Ukraine (CCPR/C/UKR/CO/7) of 22 August 2013, para. 19. Available at: <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/UKR/CO/7>

A 2019 poll on 3e! News Telegram channel (87% of 1370 voters against conscription) and 2020 Kyiv KRT TV phone poll (91% of 578 participants agreed that military service in Ukraine should be voluntary) showed that conscription is highly unpopular in Ukraine. But at the parliamentary session on 17 July 2020 Minister of Defense Andriy Taran said that conscription in Ukraine will continue in the foreseeable future, disavowing the statement of his predecessor Andriy Zahorodniuk about a possible cancellation of conscription.

In November 2020, the law was adopted exempting personnel of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine from the military draft.

During the ongoing illegal occupation of Ukrainian territories, in 2020 the Russian Armed Forces announced conscription of 3,000 Crimean residents in violation of Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the UN General Assembly resolutions. The European Union condemned this attempt of the military draft and has called on Russia to stop all violations of Human Rights and international law in the Crimean Peninsula.¹¹ Since the beginning of the occupation, the Russian Federation has already conducted eleven conscription campaigns, during which about 25,000 people were illegally drafted into the Russian armed forces. Human Rights Watch reviewed dozens of judgments from Crimean courts on criminal draft evasion cases and identified 71 criminal draft evasion cases and 63 guilty verdicts between 2017 and 2019. The true number of such cases is most likely higher, as not all cases and judgments have been made public. In most cases, defendants were fined between 5,000 and 60,000 rubles (\$77 to \$1,000).¹²

Conscientious objectors in Russian-occupied Crimea can apply to military commissariats for alternative civil service in state-owned enterprises, but the military has full discretion to recognize or not recognize the "authenticity" of their beliefs; refusal can be challenged in the courts, but with little chance of winning. Conscientious objectors meet severe obstacles to the recognition of their objection including procedural barriers and discriminatory mistreatment on religious, political, and other grounds. For example, it became known that the Bakhchysarai military commissar demanded that a Jehovah's Witness change his faith to ask for alternative service since the Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Russia. Alexander Sedov, the Crimean Human Rights Group expert, in 2020 said at Radio Liberty that military commissariats prevent people from applying to alternative service and criminalize complaints about insufferable, punitive conditions of it, such as service in other regions very distant from home and unsanitary conditions of temporary residence, treating such complaints as criminally punished evasion from the alternative service.

At the territories of Donbass in Eastern Ukraine where the government does not exercise effective control, separatist forces of Russia-backed "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR; estimated strength of armed forces 20,000) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LPR; estimated strength 14,000) imposed a regime of military registration of all males in the age 17 and summoning men to compulsory military gatherings, that include field training in military units or camps for ten days; evaders are threatened by punishment. In September 2020 leader of DPR Denis Pushilin announced conscription in the future without any concrete details. The media informs that military commissariats in LPR will organize conscription into the Russian army in 2021, especially for males 18 years and older with Russian passports, massively issued to the people in the region. Announcements of future introduction of conscription to separatist and Russian occupational armed forces in Donbass does not mention whether the human right to conscientious objection against military service will be respected.

¹¹ EU statement on illegal conscription in occupied Crimea, 13 April 2020. Available at: <https://wri-irg.org/en/story/2020/eu-statement-illegal-conscription-occupied-crimea>

¹² Human Rights Watch, "Crimea: Conscription Violates International Law". Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/01/crimea-conscription-violates-international-law>