

Russian Fiction the Sequel: 10 More False Claims About Ukraine

Fact Sheet

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“No amount of propaganda can make right something that the world knows is wrong.”

– President Obama, March 26

Russia continues to spin a false and dangerous narrative to justify its illegal actions in Ukraine. The Russian propaganda machine continues to promote hate speech and incite violence by creating a false threat in Ukraine that does not exist. We would not be seeing the violence and sad events that we've witnessed this weekend without this relentless stream of disinformation and Russian provocateurs fostering unrest in eastern Ukraine. Here are 10 more false claims Russia is using to justify intervention in Ukraine, with the facts that these assertions ignore or distort.

1. Russia Claims: Russian agents are not active in Ukraine.

Fact: The Ukrainian Government has arrested more than a dozen suspected Russian intelligence agents in recent weeks, many of whom were armed at the time of arrest. In the first week of April 2014, the Government of Ukraine had information that Russian GRU officers were providing individuals in Kharkiv and Donetsk with advice and instructions on conducting protests, capturing and holding government buildings, seizing weapons from the government buildings' armories, and redeploying for other violent actions. On April 12, armed pro-Russian militants seized government buildings in a coordinated and professional operation conducted in six cities in eastern Ukraine. Many were outfitted in bullet-proof vests, camouflage uniforms with insignia removed, and carrying Russian-designed weapons like AK-74s and Dragunovs. These armed units, some wearing black and orange St. George's ribbons associated with Russian Victory Day celebrations, raised Russian and separatist flags over seized buildings and have called for referendums on secession and union with Russia. These operations are strikingly similar to those used against Ukrainian facilities during Russia's illegal military intervention in Crimea in late February and its subsequent occupation.

2. Russia Claims: Pro-Russia demonstrations are comprised exclusively of Ukrainian citizens acting of their own volition, like the Maidan movement in Kyiv.

Fact: This is not the grassroots Ukrainian civic activism of the EuroMaidan movement, which grew from a handful of student protestors to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians from all parts of the country and all walks of life. Russian internet sites openly are recruiting volunteers to travel from Russia to Ukraine and incite violence. There is evidence that many of these so-called “protesters” are paid for their participation in the violence and unrest. It is clear that these incidents are not spontaneous events, but rather part of a well-orchestrated Russian campaign of incitement, separatism, and sabotage of the Ukrainian state. Ukrainian authorities continue to arrest highly trained and well-equipped Russian provocateurs operating across the region.

3. Russia Claims: Separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine enjoy broad popular support.

Fact: The recent demonstrations in eastern Ukraine are not organic and lack wide support in the region. A large majority of Donetsk residents (65.7 percent) want to live in a united Ukraine and reject unification with Russia, according to public opinion polls conducted at the end of March by the Donetsk-based Institute of Social Research and Policy Analysis. Pro-Russian demonstrations in eastern Ukraine have been modest in size, especially compared with Maidan protests in these same cities in December, and they have gotten smaller as time has progressed.

4. Russia Claims: The situation in eastern Ukraine risks spiraling into civil war.

Fact: What is going on in eastern Ukraine would not be happening without Russian disinformation and provocateurs fostering unrest. It would not be happening if a large Russian military force were not massed on the border, destabilizing the situation through their overtly threatening presence. There simply have not been large-scale protests in the region. A small number of separatists have seized several government buildings in eastern cities like Donetsk, Luhansk, and Slovyansk, but they have failed to attract any significant popular support. Ukrainian authorities have shown remarkable restraint in their efforts to resolve the situation and only acted when provoked by armed militants and public safety was put at risk. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers have reported that these incidents are very localized.

5. Russia Claims: Ukrainians in Donetsk rejected the illegitimate authorities in Kyiv and established the independent “People’s Republic of Donetsk.”

Fact: A broad and representative collection of civil society and non-governmental organizations in Donetsk categorically rejected the declaration of a “People’s Republic of Donetsk” by the small number of separatists occupying the regional administration building. These same organizations confirmed their support for the interim government and for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

6. Russia Claims: Russia ordered a “partial drawdown” of troops from the Ukrainian border.

Fact: No evidence shows significant movement of Russian forces away from the Ukrainian border. One battalion is not enough. An estimated 35,000-40,000 Russian troops remain massed along the border, in addition to approximately 25,000 troops currently in Crimea.

7. Russia Claims: Ethnic Russians in Ukraine are under threat.

Fact: There are no credible reports of ethnic Russians facing threats in Ukraine. An International Republican Institute poll released April 5 found that 74 percent of the Russian-speaking population in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine said they “were not under pressure or threat because of their language.” Meanwhile, in Crimea, the OSCE has raised urgent concerns for the safety of minority populations, especially ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and others. Sadly, the ethnic Russians most at risk are those who live in Russia and who oppose the authoritarian Putin regime. These Russians are harassed constantly and face years of imprisonment for speaking out against Putin’s regular abuses of power.

8. Russia Claims: Ukraine’s new government is led by radical nationalists and fascists.

Fact: The Ukrainian parliament (Rada) did not change in February. It is the same Rada that was elected by all Ukrainians, comprising all of the parties that existed prior to February’s events, including former president Yanukovich’s Party of Regions. The new government, approved by an overwhelming majority in the parliament -- including many

members of Yanukovych's former party -- is committed to protecting the rights of all Ukrainians, including those in Crimea.

9. Russia Claims: Ethnic minorities face persecution in Ukraine from the "fascist" government in Kyiv.

Fact: Leaders of Ukraine's Jewish as well as German, Czech, and Hungarian communities have all publicly expressed their sense of safety under the new authorities in Kyiv. Moreover, many minority groups expressed fear of persecution in Russian-occupied Crimea, a concern OSCE observers in Ukraine have substantiated.

10. Russia Claims: Russia is not using energy and trade as weapons against Ukraine.

Fact: Following Russia's illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea, Russia raised the price Ukraine pays for natural gas by 80 percent in the past two weeks. In addition, it is seeking more than \$11 billion in back payments following its abrogation of the 2010 Kharkiv accords. Russia's moves threaten to increase severely the economic pain faced by Ukrainian citizens and businesses. Additionally, Russia continues to restrict Ukrainian exports to Russia, which constitute a significant portion of Ukraine's export economy.