

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	573
Land:	Ukraine
Kilde:	Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, Regional Center for Human Rights og Human Rights Center Viasna
Titel:	Stolen Childhood: How the Belarusian Regime is Erasing Ukrainian Children's Identity through Displacement, Re-education, and Militarization
Udgivet:	4. oktober 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	30. november 2025



October 2024

Stolen Childhood: How the Belarusian Regime is Erasing Ukrainian Children's Identity through Displacement, Re-education, and Militarization

Acknowledgements

This report was jointly prepared by Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights, and Human Rights Center Viasna.

The Association of Law Enforcers of Belarus (BELPOL) provided confidential data regarding Ukrainian children displaced to Belarus.

The methodology was prepared by Human Rights Centre ZMINA and the Regional Center for Human Rights.

Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights, and Human Rights Center Viasna conducted the open-source investigation and verification.

The research, investigation, and advocacy efforts were coordinated by Freedom House.

The cover photo: Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk with Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus.
Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

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ПАТРОТЫ
БЕЛАДУСЬ

WHAT'S UP?

Executive Summary

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian military invasion in February 2022, Russian authorities have intensified their policy of displacing Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. However, the role of the Belarusian regime in aiding and abetting this policy has not received adequate attention. This report seeks to address this oversight by detailing how the Belarusian regime displaces, indoctrinates, reeducates, and militarizes Ukrainian children in the service of the broader Russian state policy of eradicating Ukrainian national and cultural identity.

The report's key findings are that:

1. Aleksandr Lukashenko personally laid the foundation for the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarusian territory.¹
2. The Belarusian regime is actively implementing the Russian state policy of destroying Ukrainian identity through systematic indoctrination and reeducation of children.
3. The Belarusian regime is complicit in the Russian militarization of Ukrainian children.
4. The Union State of Russia and Belarus plays a critical role in financing and organizing the displacement, indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.
5. Government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs) play an essential role in the Belarusian regime's implementation of Russian policy.
6. The Belarusian and Russian regimes are exploiting Ukrainian children for propaganda purposes.

The report exhorts foreign governments, the Ukrainian government, the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, international donors, and civil society to:

- Call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to launch an investigation into the displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children by the Belarusian regime, and to issue arrest warrants for
 - Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko;
 - the secretary of state of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, Russian politician Dmitry Mezentshev;
 - the Union State's Council of Ministers chair, Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin; and
 - Aliaksei Talai, the Belarusian paralympic athlete and head of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation, which has been central to the project of displacing Ukrainian children to Belarus.
- Work together to create a single international mechanism to facilitate the return of Ukrainian children to Ukraine from Belarusian territory.
- Advocate for and adopt sanctions against officials of the Belarusian regime and Union State of Russia and Belarus specifically in response to their crimes against Ukrainian children.

The report will be accompanied by a submission to the ICC calling for the issue of arrest warrants for the four above-mentioned individuals.

Note on key abbreviations and terminology

The authors use the following recurring abbreviations:

- “Russia” for “Russian Federation”
- “Crimea” for the “Autonomous Republic of Crimea”
- “Belarus” for the “Republic of Belarus”
- “Union State” for the “Union State of Russia and Belarus”

The authors use the terms “indoctrination” and “re-education” interchangeably throughout the report.

The authors use the following key terms, defining them as follows:

- **Displacement:** According to Rule 129 of the Customary International Humanitarian Law “displacement” refers to the removal of civilians for reasons related to an armed conflict, whether within or outside the bounds of national territory.² Footnote 13 in the Elements of Crimes of the International Criminal Court indicates that the terms “forcibly displaced” and “forcibly deported or transferred” are interchangeable. Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights (RCHR), and Viasna deliberately use the word “displacement” rather than “deportation” or “transfer” as the latter two crimes require higher thresholds of evidence and definitive proof of the nonconsensual nature of the process. The term “displacement” allows for the numerous gray areas regarding consent. As elucidated in the body of the report, the provision and/or validity of parental or guardian consent in the removal of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories is often difficult to establish. The use of “displacement” rather than “deportation” or “transfer” also contributes

to the authors’ emphasis on what happens to Ukrainian children once in Belarus, as opposed to the legality of their movement in and of itself.

- **GONGOS:** “Government-organized nongovernmental organizations.” This seemingly paradoxical term denotes organizations created or sponsored by governments to promote their interests and bolster their legitimacy domestically and internationally. They are designed to look like real nongovernmental organizations but remain under the ultimate control of the government.
- **Russkiy Mir (“Russian World”):** This concept refers to a colonial ideology, supported by Russian president Vladimir Putin and embedded in Soviet and later Russian state policy, of Russian dominance based on a view that Ukrainians, Belarusians, and some other ethnic groups in the region are themselves Russian regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, or how they identify themselves. The Kremlin bases this concept on Russian as a common language, and Russian culture as a common culture and superior to others. The concept also refers to Russian economic dominance over these independent states.
- **The Union State of Russia and Belarus (Union State):** Established in 1999 by Lukashenko and former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, the Union State is a supranational body consisting of Russia and Belarus. Its official purpose is to deepen economic and defense cooperation between the two countries, and, ultimately, unify them. It is governed by a Supreme State Council, headed by Lukashenko since 2000. Currently, its secretary of state is Russian politician Dmitry Mezentsev, and the chairman of its Council of Ministers is Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin.

Introduction

Since the beginning of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has intensified its state policy of forcibly displacing Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Russia began this practice in 2014 after the illegal annexation and occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.³

The forcible displacement of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories to Russia is part of the Kremlin's policy of eradicating Ukrainian national and cultural identity.⁴ However, the role of the Belarusian regime and of the Union State of Russia and Belarus in aiding and abetting this policy on Belarusian territory has not received adequate attention. With this report, Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights (RCHR), Viasna, and the Association of Former Law Enforcement Officials in Belarus (BEPOL) seek to bring to light the complicity of the Belarusian regime and Union State's top leadership. Drawing on hundreds of open-source materials and a significant quantity of data acquired by BEPOL and shared exclusively with Freedom House, the authors conclude that these entities are actively involved in implementing Russia's policy of erasure through the systematic displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children on Belarusian territory. While these actions take place on Belarusian territory, they benefit current Russian state policy by instilling Russian propaganda narratives.

The findings are the result of eight months of extensive research using open- and closed-source materials conducted by Ukrainian and independent Belarusian civil society organizations, coordinated by Freedom House. While there have been several investigations into the displacement of Ukrainian children, this report is the first to result from structured cooperation between Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent exiled Belarusian CSOs. This cooperation is crucial for developing a truly holistic understanding of the Belarusian regime's complicity and its impact on the Ukrainian children. This report is also the first to draw upon data regarding the identities of displaced Ukrainian children leaked to BEPOL by its contacts within the Belarusian regime.

The report is among the first to trace the itineraries of displaced children and describe in detail what happened

to them during their displacement. Establishing these itineraries is crucial for developing a detailed understanding of the Belarusian regime's involvement. While the authors were able to determine the names of some children, identifying all those affected requires further research. The occupying authorities in Ukraine, the Belarusian regime, the Union State, and the government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs) acting on these entities' behalf deliberately conceal information that would allow for the identification of children.

The report's findings represent a breakthrough in our understanding of the impact of displacement on Ukrainian children, and how this policy of displacement is connected to other crimes the Russian and the Belarusian regimes are committing against Ukrainians. The treatment of Ukrainian children during their displacement, including their indoctrination and militarization, constitutes evidence for the crime of persecution on discriminatory grounds as defined in the Rome Statute of the ICC given the clear aim of eradicating Ukrainian national identity.

The report contains four chapters. Chapter One provides a brief chronology, illustrating how the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus changed after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Chapter Two details how the Belarusian regime is implementing Russia's system of indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization. Chapter Three uncovers the actors responsible for the financing and organization of the Belarusian regime's displacement and indoctrination of Ukrainian children. Chapter Four describes the legal conclusions of the report's findings, including the international crimes committed. The report concludes by calling on the ICC to issue arrest warrants for Aleksandr Lukashenko, Dmitry Mezentshev, Mikhail Mishustin, and Aliaksei Talai. It also provides recommendations for foreign governments, the government of Ukraine, international donors, civil society, and the ICC on ways to hold Belarusian and Russian authorities accountable.

The report is accompanied by a submission to the ICC by Freedom House, RCHR, and ZMINA, calling on the body to launch an investigation into the complicity of the Belarusian regime and the Union State, as well as to issue arrest warrants for their key officials.

Methodology

Freedom House, ZMINA, and RCHR, developed a research methodology to accurately and efficiently search for, collect, and store information on cases of the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus. The methodology draws upon two pillars: confidential data provided exclusively to Freedom House by BELPOL, and open-source materials identified by the report authors. Engagement with these materials drew substantially upon the Berkeley Protocol on Open-Source Investigations, including detailed steps on documenting from open sources, proper recording, sharing, and storing of information.⁵

BELPOL is an independent Belarusian civil society organization based outside of Belarus to avoid political persecution. It was founded in 2020 by former members of the country's law enforcement bodies who defected from their respective agencies in protest of the mass political repression launched by the regime following mass demonstrations against the year's rigged presidential election, which saw Aleksandr Lukashenko reassert his hold on power. The organization maintains contacts who provide them with confidential information that would otherwise be inaccessible. For this report, these contacts provided documents containing data such as the names of children displaced from the temporarily occupied territories to Belarus between 2022 and 2023, along with corroborating documents such as train tickets, internal correspondence, and other information that could help identify Ukrainian children. BELPOL shared a significant portion of this data exclusively with Freedom House.

Researchers drew upon open-source materials in order to, firstly, verify the data from BELPOL and, secondly, establish the itineraries of displaced

children and the treatment to which the Belarusian regime subjected them. These open-source materials include approximately 200 websites and media outlets, as well as the social media pages of representatives of the Russian, Belarusian, and occupying administrations. Researchers selected these sources based on their accessibility, the level of detail they provided, and their clear connections to the Belarusian regime. They also sought to reference media outlets better known to international audiences. Researchers additionally monitored the social media accounts of individuals, NGOs, foundations, displaced children, and their families. Crucially, researchers used the Mnemonic software, which allows the archiving of metadata so that it can be accessed even if the authors of the content delete it. These archiving efforts have been particularly important given the Russian and Belarusian regimes' attempts to hide or delete information that could lead to the identification and location of displaced Ukrainian children.

Freedom House, ZMINA, RCHR, and Viasna structured their research around two international legal frameworks: the Geneva Convention IV (1949) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Geneva Convention contains protocols on the protection of civilians during war and the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates signatory states to uphold children's rights to identity, education, development, and protection from harmful practices. Ukraine and Russia are parties to both conventions. These frameworks provide the basis for legal conclusions on the displacement, political indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus.

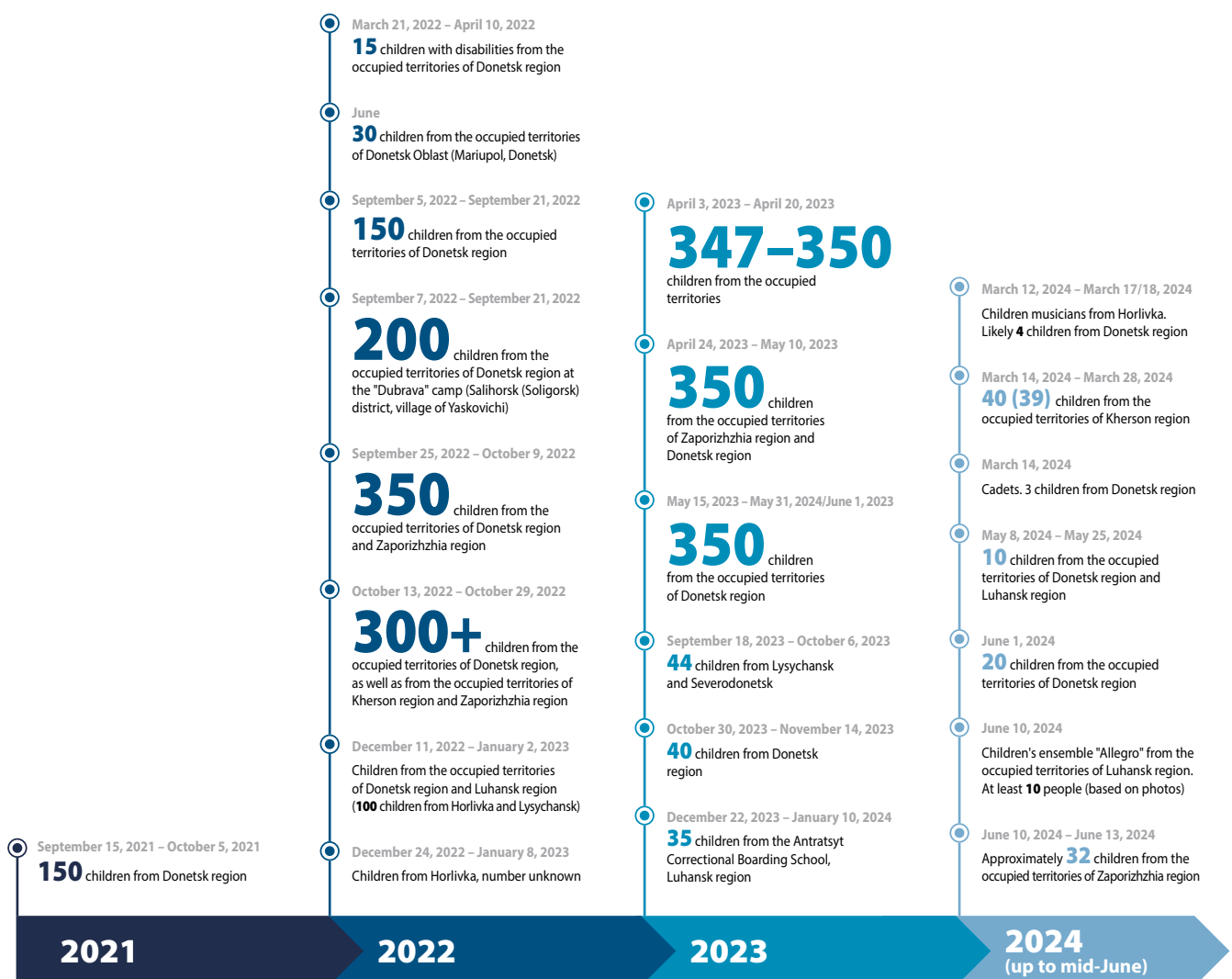
Key Findings

- 1 Aleksandr Lukashenko personally laid the foundation for the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarusian territory.** A 2021 order on the “organizing recreation and health improvement for children from Donbas” signed by Lukashenko set the precedent for the Belarusian regime’s active involvement in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.⁶ Beyond the 2021 order, the authoritarian, personalized nature of the regime means that none of the actions outlined in this report can occur without Lukashenko’s explicit approval. The process has intensified during Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The researchers of this report have identified 2,219 children as having been displaced to Belarus since 2021. Due to the efforts of the complicit entities and individuals to hide the locations and identities of children, it is not yet known how many of the children have returned to the occupied areas of Ukraine.
- 2 The Belarusian regime is actively implementing a Russian state policy of destroying Ukrainian identity through the systematic indoctrination of children.** Experts have frequently highlighted this narrative of de-Ukrainization (that Ukrainians are “really” Russian) as part of Moscow’s broader genocidal incitement and actions, as this narrative denies the existence of Ukrainian national identity and frequently occurs alongside Russian atrocities targeting Ukrainian identity.⁷ The regime enrolls Ukrainian children in Belarusian educational institutions where the language of instruction is Russian, and the curriculum promotes the “Russian World” (Russkiy Mir) and other Russian propaganda narratives. These narratives include hatred of other nationalities, including Ukrainians. The regime furthers the indoctrination process through so-called cultural programs, in which political, religious, and cultural figures tell Ukrainian children that they are, in fact, Russian. In several of the open-source materials referenced by researchers, representatives of the Belarusian regime refer to these children as “young Russians” or “children of Donbas,” but never “Ukrainian children.”⁸
- 3 The Belarusian regime is complicit in Russia’s militarization of Ukrainian children.** The country’s authorities force Ukrainian children to visit law enforcement agencies and military units, as well as to meet with representatives of Belarusian military and youth military organizations. While the curriculums followed by Belarusian children are pro-regime and involve some military elements, the programs to which the Belarusian regime subjects Ukrainian children are distinct because of their emphasis on erasing Ukrainian children’s national identity.
- 4 The Union State of Russia and Belarus plays a critical role in financing and organizing the displacement, indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.** The Union State’s secretary of state, Dmitry Mezentsev, and the chairman of its council of ministers, Mikhail Mishustin, have both repeatedly referred to the provision of “humanitarian aid” to children from Donbas. As detailed in Chapter Three, this “humanitarian aid,” in fact, refers to the displacement of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine. In 2022 and 2023, the Union State allocated over \$300,000 for this purpose.
- 5 GONGOs play an essential role in the Belarusian regime’s implementation of Russian policy.** The most prominent of these organizations is the Aliaksei Talai Foundation, founded by the Belarusian paralympic athlete of the same name. Without GONGOs and the funding, connections, and infrastructure they provide, the Belarusian regime would not be able to implement its policy of displacement, indoctrination, and militarization on such an extensive scale.
- 6 The Belarusian and Russian regimes are exploiting Ukrainian children for propaganda purposes.** Belarusian authorities force Ukrainian children to appear in photos and video footage broadcast on state media in both countries with the aim of justifying and legitimizing their displacement, indoctrination, and militarization. Authorities force children to appear in such content without regard for their best interests, privacy, or the potential for re-traumatization.

Chapter 1

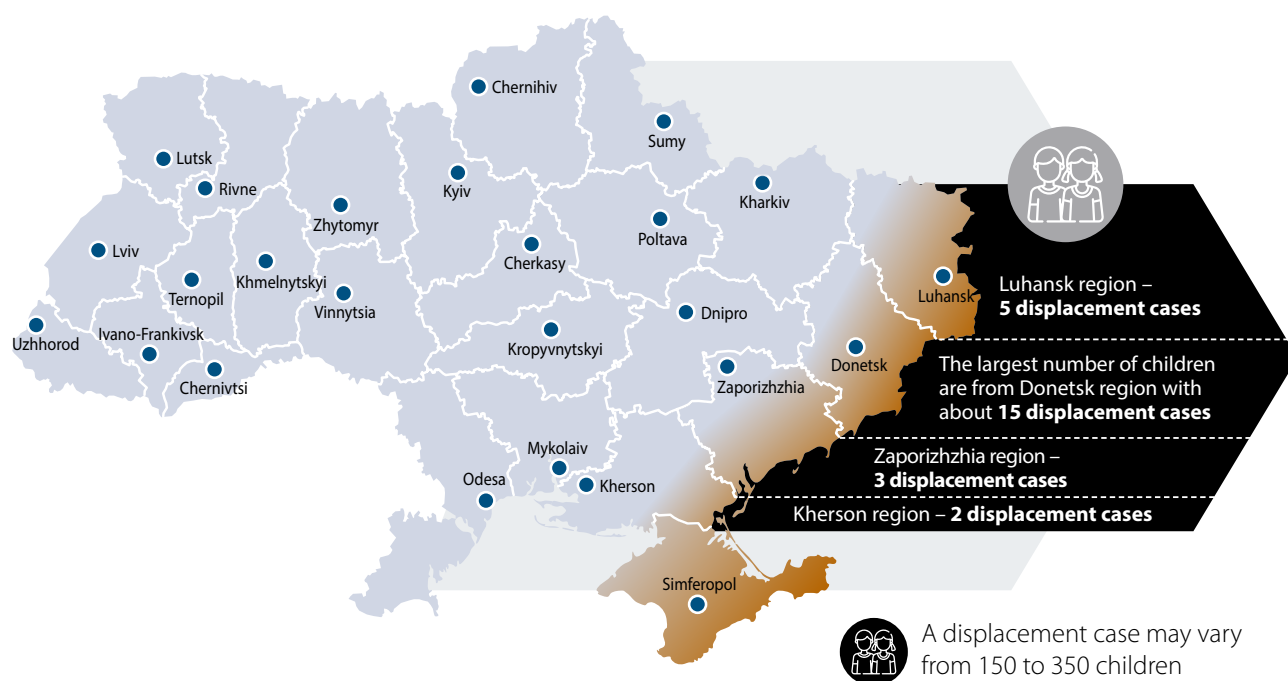
Chronology of displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus: before and after the full-scale invasion

Figure 1. Chronology of Displacements



The investigation has revealed that the Belarusian regime displaced 2,219 Ukrainian children to Belarus from 2021 to June 2024 through the pathways described below. Report researchers confirmed that, as part of the Kremlin's system of indoctrinating Ukrainian children, at least 27 of the 2,219 displaced children were taken not only to Belarus but also to Russia. For the remaining children, either the displacement was limited to Belarus, or insufficient information is available

to make a definitive conclusion as to whether they were transported beyond Belarus. Nevertheless, this information is significant, as it shows how the Russian and Belarusian systems are connected. Twelve-year-old Leda Maiorova from Makiivka in the Donetsk Region, for example, was in the Dubrava camp in Belarus in September 2022. In January 2023, she visited the Kremlin Christmas tree, and in August 2023 she was in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, more than

Figure 2. Affected Regions / Number of Displacement cases

three thousand kilometers from home, for “medical treatment.”⁹ There are many cases like Leda’s. However, as most of these children come from the occupied territories, which are difficult to access, it is difficult to verify these cases.

Brief overview of key instances:

2021: After the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, which was widely recognized as neither free nor fair, Lukashenko signed a decree on the “Rehabilitation of a group of children from Donetsk region” at the Zubronak Children’s Educational and Recreational Center.¹⁰ The Belarusian regime displaced 150 Ukrainian children to Belarus between September 15 and October 5, 2021, most of whom were children from orphanages in Donetsk, a city in Ukraine occupied by Russia since 2014.¹¹ Children from the same institution were among the first to be deported to Russia a few days before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.¹² Aliaksei Talai launched a fundraising campaign, ostensibly for the rehabilitation of children with disabilities from Donbas in Belarus.¹³

2022: With the launch of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Belarusian regime escalated displacement of Ukrainian children from previously and newly occupied territories.¹⁴ Aliaksei Talai and Olha Volkova, the head of the Donetsk-based GONGO Dolphins,

became key implementers of this process of moving children to locations in Belarus. In March, individuals working on behalf of the Belarusian regime displaced 15 children with disabilities to the Astrashytski Haradok Rehabilitation Center. In June, they displaced 30 children to the Volma sanatorium. In September, they displaced 650 to the Dubrava camp.¹⁵ They also displaced 52 children aged 8 to 13 from Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko for Ukrainian children in occupied Ukrainian territory to Dubrava camp.¹⁶ Sources reveal that another 600 Ukrainian children – including 16 cadets – were in the same camp in October.¹⁷ In December, the Belarusian regime displaced 40 children to Zalatya Piaski sanatorium and another 43 children (including those whose parents were killed during the war) to the Belarus Hotel in Navapolatsk (Novopolotsk).¹⁸ The year concluded with the displacement of another group of children, though the precise number could not be determined from the source photo that Belarusian pro-governmental blogger posted on Telegram.¹⁹

2023: In April, the Belarusian regime displaced 700 Ukrainian children – including 30 orphans aged 5 to 15 years old from the Antratsyt correctional boarding school.²⁰ The parents of a number of these orphans had been killed during the war. Olha Telychko, the school principal, facilitated this displacement, obeying the order of the Luhansk occupation authorities’ education ministry.²¹ Talai and Volkova orchestrated the displacement of another 350 children to Dubrava,



Image 1. Aliaksei Talai (left) in occupied Donetsk city.

Date: May 2022 | Source: [Nasha Niva](#)

and 11 children with disabilities to the Astrashytski Haradok center.²² In May, 350 children were sent to the Dubrava camp, travelling via Rostov-on-Don in Russia.²³ In September, 44 children were sent to Belarus and attended local schools there with the support of the town-forming enterprises: the Palimir and Naftan plants.²⁴ In October, 40 children were sent to the Kolas Rehabilitation and Health Center in the Kobrynski (Kobrynsky) district of Brest region.²⁵ In November, 40 children, including 10 children from a family-type orphanage (a model of care for orphan children that simulates family environment and rarely accommodates more than a dozen of children) who were accompanied by their legal guardian, were located in the Kolas Rehabilitation and Health Center.²⁶ In December, 35 children were sent to Dubrovenka in the Mahiliou (Mogilev) district to celebrate the New Year and Christmas.²⁷ During their stay in the sanatorium, the adults responsible forced the children to undergo an intrusive and unnecessary “medical examination.”²⁸

2024: In March, the Belarusian regime displaced 40 children from the Kherson Region to Lesnaia Poliana Rehabilitation and Health Center, billing it as “reward for excellent students and activists.”²⁹ The displacement took place with the support of the head of the occupation administration of the Kherson Region, Volodymyr Saldo, and the head of the occupation

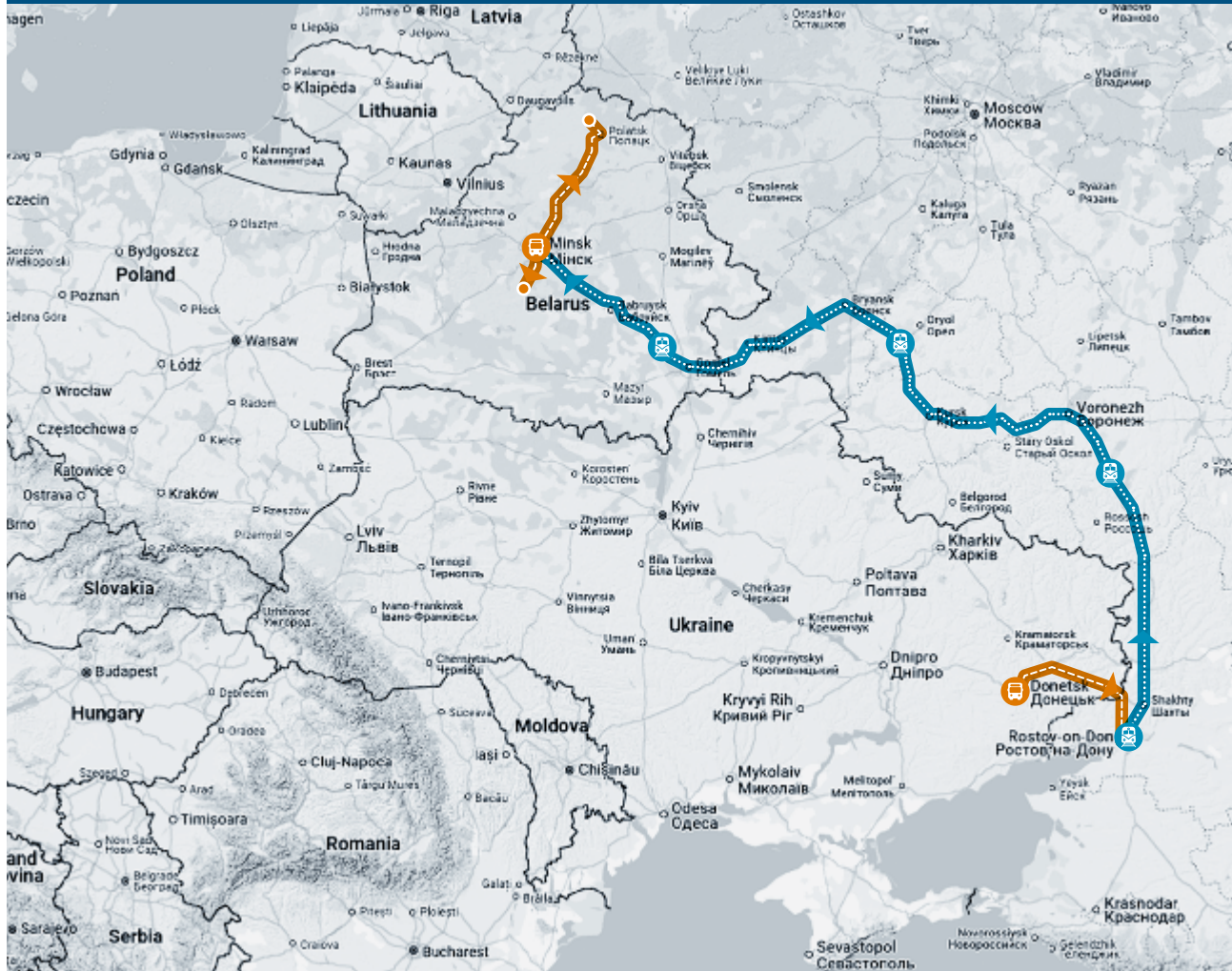
authorities’ Department for Work with Evacuees, Tetiana Kuzmich.³⁰ In May, Eleonora Fedorenko, the adviser to the head of the occupation Donetsk People’s Republic’s office for children’s rights, accompanied another group to the Dubrovenka sanatorium, including six children with disabilities who had suffered injuries from explosives.³¹ The Russian Embassy in Belarus supported the displacement of 32 more children in June.³²

At least 2,219 Ukrainian children were displaced to Belarus between 2021 and June 2024, a pattern that reflects a large-scale, systematic transfer orchestrated by the Belarusian and Russian regimes. This consistent movement of children, even prior to Russian authorities’ escalation of the war, signals a deliberate and organized effort to indoctrinate and uproot them. Of these children, at least 27 were taken not only to Belarus but also to Russia, further underscoring the scope of this coordinated operation. Moreover, the Belarusian regime was more active in the displacement of Ukrainian children to its territory during the school years of 2022 and 2023 than during the summers those same years, suggesting that it is using the school system to indoctrinate, reeducate, and militarize Ukrainian children. It also contradicts the proclaimed “recreational” purpose of the displacement, which would be more typical during the summer.

Chapter 2

Re-education and militarization: Belarus as part of the Russian system

Figure 3. Routes of Children's Displacement



Train 302S Adler-Minsk:

Primorskaya Station (Rostov-on-Don) 04:08 (24.09.2022) – Minsk-Passenger Station 18:59 (25.09.2022) Dubrava



Train 302S Adler-Minsk:

Primorskaya Station (Rostov-on-Don) 04:08 (24.09.2022) – Minsk-Passenger Station 18:59 (25.09.2022) Novopolotsk

The Belarusian regime reproduces the measures implemented by Russian authorities in occupied regions of Ukraine and in Russia to systematically displace, indoctrinate, and militarize Ukrainian children. Belarusian authorities publicly justify the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus as “rehabilitation” and “recreation,” replicating word-for-word the Russian justification for the

children’s displacement and deportation. As is the case in Russia, this campaign not only places children in camps or sanatoriums, but also enrolls them in local schools, all the while implementing a “cultural program” that reproduces the narratives promoted by the Kremlin aimed at the Russification of the children and erasure of their Ukrainian identity.

2.1 Re-education camps: propaganda in the curriculum and recreation activities

Though Belarusian authorities publicly justify the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus as “rehabilitation” and “recreation,” the largest groups of children are transported during the autumn and spring when school is in session, rather than in the summer. As in Russia, they are enrolled in local educational institutions.

At least two groups of children who were in Navapolatsk in December 2022 and September 2023 attended classes in local Belarusian schools.³³ This education is in the Russian language and includes, among other things, the promotion of “Russian World” narratives about the nature and course of World War II, and incitement to hatred of other nations, including Ukraine. A vivid example is the “Genocide of the Belarusian people” law and associated course, which attributes atrocities orchestrated by the Nazi German regime to Ukrainians and others and constitutes a part

of the curriculum starting from primary school.³⁴ It also conflates Ukrainian desires for self-determination with the actions of groups and individuals who collaborated with the Nazis.

Moreover, the immersion of Ukrainian children into these Russian regime sponsored narratives also takes place outside of the classroom. For example, the Belarusian state identifies Ukrainian children in Belarus as “Russians” and recognizes the Russian citizenship that was imposed on them.³⁵ Belarus’s state-controlled media refers to them as “young and new citizens of Russia,” as do organizers of visits to Belarus, including Aliaksei Talai.³⁶ This practice denies the Ukrainian children their identity and nationality. Belarusian authorities and organizers of the visits systematically persuade Ukrainian children that Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories belong to Russia.

Belarusian public figures and officials who promote anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian world ideology often speak to Ukrainian children from the occupied territories during events. For example, on April 13, 2023, the Dubrava camp held a meeting between the children and political



"Train hard, fight easy" is a famous maxim attributed to Aleksandr Suvorov, a general of the Russian Empire, and is currently used by Russian propaganda and in military schools. Tadeusz Kościuszko, a US and Polish statesman and military leader, characterized Suvorov's military actions as "What Suvorov called victory was a slaughter of innocents, a display of unchecked cruelty that no soldier with honor could condone."

Image 2. Cadets of the 6th platoon (grade) of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko, occupied Donetsk city.

Date: Month not stated in source, 2024 | Source: [Profile of RBOU 'School No. 4 – Zakharchenko Cadet Corps' on the 'Gosuslugi' portal](#)



Image 3. Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk, Minsk, Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit.
Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

commentator Aliaksandr Shpakouski and First Secretary of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union Aliaksandr Lukyanau.³⁷ Shpakouski is on the Ukrainian sanctions list for supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the idea of stationing nuclear weapons in Belarus, while the Belarusian Republican Youth Union that Lukyanau heads is a youth-focused GONGO affiliated with Lukashenko.

In another example, singers Valiantsina Lukuts-Hruzdzeva and Aliaksandra Kuzniatsova-Hruzdova, during their performance at a concert at the Dubrava camp, said in a speech to the children that they wished for the presidents of United States and Ukraine to die, and for Russia to occupy the entirety of Ukraine.³⁸ Representatives of the Communist Party of Belarus also met with children from the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, reportedly talking to them about “the new regions of Russia.”³⁹

Children from the occupied territories are also included in propaganda events promoting the Kremlin's version of World War II. These include Kremlin-approved celebrations of May 9, Victory Day, an occasion Putin has used as a tool to promote his own leadership and military objectives.⁴⁰ Victory Day and other World War II-related events are used by the Russian and Belarusian regimes as justification for the war in Ukraine, claiming that the full-scale invasion is a modern-day version of the Soviet battle against the Nazis. Teaching the children these narratives is part of the broader Russification of the children and the efforts to erase their Ukrainian identity.

2.2 Exploitation of Ukrainian children in propaganda

Ukrainian children become propaganda tools during their stay in Belarus, which subjects them to retraumatization.

In the stories produced by Belarusian media, children tell the camera about the shelling and injuries they or their relatives suffered. The journalists primarily ask leading questions related to traumatic topics: shelling, children's feelings in the context of hostilities, whether “broken windows” are the norm, among other topics.⁴¹ The journalists' persistent questioning, requiring detailed recollection and reenactment of traumatic events, repeatedly brings children to tears.⁴²

In addition to presenting “children's stories,” the authorities and organizers use children to broadcast propaganda narratives. On Belarusian television, children use Russian propaganda terms, such as referring to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation.” They similarly claim that “Ukrainian militants are shelling the city randomly,” “Mariupol is beginning to revive,” and “Russia is saving us.” The children also present themselves as “Russian children.” In one of the stories, the interviewer directly asks a Ukrainian boy on camera whether he would go to war if he were older. The boy answers that he would, because “Ukraine came to my land and is killing people like me.”⁴³

The filming of children for propaganda is done with absolute disregard for their privacy. In some reports, the videos mention and caption the child's real name and surname, as well as other personal data such as the city where the child came from and their age. Sometimes other material is pictured that can be used to easily identify a particular child.⁴⁴

2.3 Militarization: training new Russian soldiers

A characteristic feature of the Russian occupation of the territory of Ukraine and the transfer of Ukrainian children to the territory of Russia is the involvement of Ukrainian children in militarized youth organizations and propaganda of service in the Russian Armed Forces.⁴⁵ Given that militarization is aimed at preparing and recruiting children for future service in Russian military organizations, militarization during the children's stay in Belarus is mainly manifested in excursions and meetings with law enforcement agencies, the military, or militarized youth organizations in Belarus.

For example, a cultural program for children from Donetsk and Mariupol who stayed at the Volma sanatorium in Belarus in June 2022 included a visit to the Khatyn Memorial Complex for Belarusians who died during World War II and a visit to the Interior Ministry's military unit 3214. During the visit, military officials organized a tour of the unit and a parade ground concert, and military academy cadets demonstrated elements of hand-to-hand combat. In photos of the event, children are holding weapons, and one boy in the group is wearing a t-shirt with the Latin letter "Z," a symbol used widely by the Kremlin to drum up support for the invasion of Ukraine.⁴⁶

In April 2023, the children from occupied regions of Ukraine met with members of the Salihorsk (Soligorsk) military-patriotic club Rodnik, at the Dubrava camp.⁴⁷ Representatives of the club were dressed in stylized Soviet military uniforms from World War II, another example of the use of the World War II narratives in Russian-Belarusian propaganda.

In June 2024, the Personnel Training Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Belarus held a concert for children from the Donetsk Region

who were undergoing rehabilitation in Astrashytski Haradok.⁴⁸

It is common for children to meet with representatives of Belarusian law enforcement agencies – for example, the Juvenile Inspectorate of the District Department of Internal Affairs and the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption – and military members from the Interior Ministry's 3214 unit.⁴⁹ The program during such events is usually very similar: officials give children a tour, show them weapons, and teach them how to use the weapons.

Belarusian authorities arrange meetings with representatives of military units or military departments of higher education institutions whenever possible. Children from Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, who were returning to their homes in occupied Ukraine in October 2023, met with cadets of the military transport faculty of the Belarusian State University of Transport at the railway station in Homel.⁵⁰

Forced participation in militarized propaganda, which is implemented by Belarusian authorities in Belarus according to the Russian system, also includes children in areas of occupied Ukraine. Occupation authorities record videos, for example, with children from Horlivka "thanking" the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the video, children imitate military gestures and chant lines from a propaganda song.⁵¹

Groups of children in Belarus also include those that Russian authorities have already subjected to militarization. For example, from September to October 2022, fifteen-year-old Zelkovska Sofiia from Donetsk Region, who had become a member of Russia's national youth military movement, was in the Dubrava camp. In 2023, she attended the Fakel camp near Smolensk in Russia. In another case, seventeen-year-old Myroslava Zaporozhets, who had become a member of the Movement of the First, another Russian youth movement, was in Navapolatsk from September to October 2023 and actively participated in propaganda stories.

It is likely that such travel opportunities are used as forms of incentives or rewards for already-militarized children in facilities in occupied Ukraine. When they go on these trips, these already-militarized children may serve as an additional factor of influence on the children they join in Belarus.

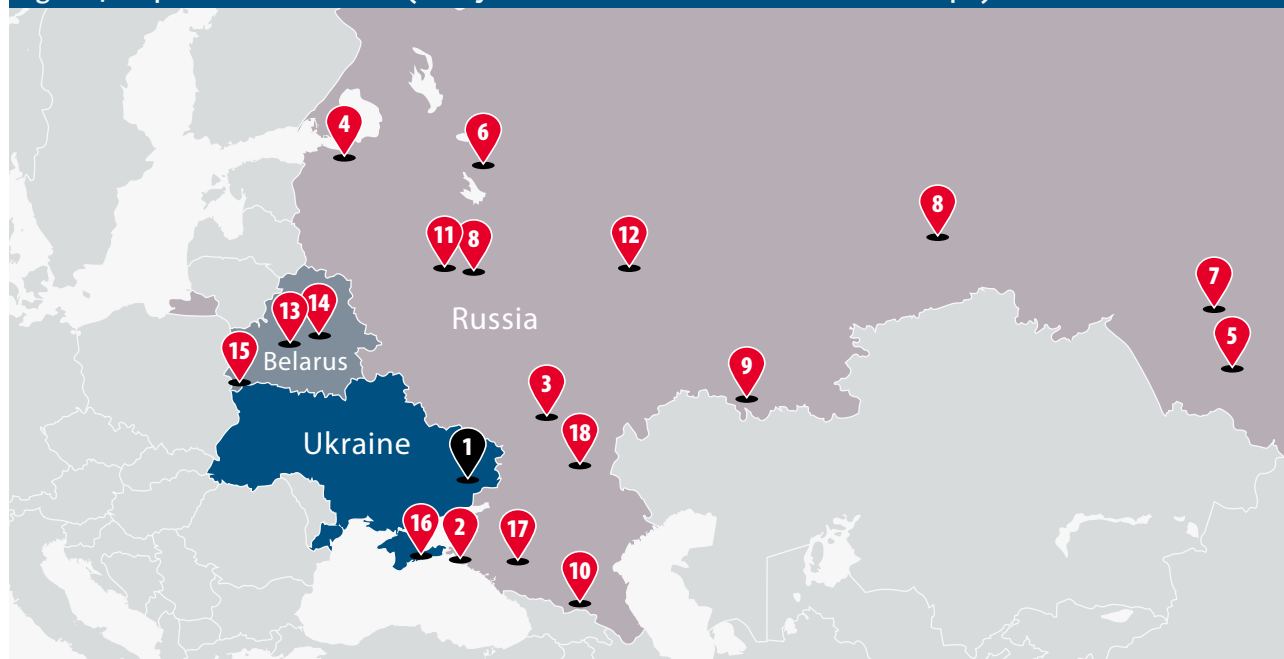
2.4 Model of militarization: Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko

One of the most vivid examples of the militarization of Ukrainian children is the Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko, which has ties with the government of Belarus and the Aliaksei Talai Foundation.⁵²

Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko (hereafter, “Cadet Corps”) was established in Donetsk in 2017, during the lifetime of the Oleksandr Zakharchenko, the first leader of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and on his personal initiative.⁵³ According to Cadet Corps director Oksana Tselikovska, the purpose of the Cadet Corps was to “bring children back to school.”⁵⁴ Thus, militarization objectives were established for children from occupied areas in Donetsk region even before the 2022 full-scale invasion.

Occupation authorities use the Cadet Corps to create an illusion of an elite education system. As of 2024, the Corps included around 200 children, both male and female, some as young as first graders.⁵⁵ According to the director, the authority of the Cadet Corps is created by “the high quality of education and the level of patriotic education.”⁵⁶ Children studying in the first through fourth grades are called *prokadets* and wear military dress uniforms.⁵⁷ Tselikovska notes that while only boys study in lyceums and military schools, boys and girls may be cadets.⁵⁸ Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that the “the Occupying Power may not compel protected persons to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces.”⁵⁹ Placing Ukrainian children from the occupied territories in military institutions such as the Cadet Corps may constitute a violation of Article 51 since could be aimed at preparing them for future enlistment in the Russian or Belarusian military.

Figure 4. Displacement of Children (mainly cadets from the Zakharchenko Cadet Corps.) across Belarus and Russia



1. **Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko** in Donetsk;
2. **Vocational Training Camp “Smena”** near Anapa;
3. **Festival “Cadet Symphony”** – Uvarovo, Tambov region, Russia;
4. **Naval School** in St. Petersburg;
5. **Camp “Kristal”** in Barnaul;
6. **Vocational Summer School** in Vologda. In the morning, both the Russian and Belarusian flags were raised;
7. **Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko** – Novosibirsk;
8. **Military-Patriotic Congress “Meshcherskie Zori”** – Vladimir Oblast, Russia;
9. **Travel across Russia as part of the “Heroes from Our Yard!” project** – specifically, Tyumen;
10. **Climbing Mount Elbrus**;
11. **ANO “School of Contemporary Art”** in Moscow Oblast;
12. **Chuvash Cadet Corps** – Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic;
13. **20th Spartakiad of the Union State** in Minsk, Republic of Belarus;
14. **Meeting with members of Belarusian youth military-patriotic organizations** – Minsk;
15. **Visit to Brest Hero-Fortress** – Brest, Republic of Belarus;
16. **Suvorov all-Russian Sports Festival** – Crimea, Alushta;
17. **Military-Patriotic Festival “Post No. 1”** – Krasnodar;
18. **Victory Parade** – Volgograd.

Efforts to militarize children and shape them ideologically through the Cadet Corps are present not only in schoolwork, but in extracurricular activities. The cadets participate in many events dedicated to commemorating the Russian narrative about World War II and the participation of the Soviet Union in the war. For several years, the cadets have been holding a thematic mural competition, “Drawing Victory Together,” and have participated in events dedicated to the day the war began in the Soviet Union and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Donbas. They have also participated in the Ribbon of Saint George campaign, a World War II commemoration that the Kremlin has leveraged to boost support for the Ukraine invasion,⁶⁰ and have been standing guard on the Day of Unified Action in memory of the victims of crimes against the Soviet people committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, an occasion the Kremlin has used similarly.

Cadet trips to Belarus also played a role in ideological indoctrination and militarization. In Belarus, the cadets visited another place significant for the context of the Great Patriotic War – the Brest Fortress.⁶¹ The Aliaksei Talai Foundation built the monument as part of the “Living Memory of Grateful Generations” project, other locations of which the cadets also visited.⁶² These visits fit into the same narrative of militarization.

The cadets also meet with people who took part in combat operations on the side of Russia or the USSR

in various wars: a demobilized student from Donetsk region, Novosibirsk Cossacks fighting in Donbas, the mother of a “Hero of Russia” who died near Kherson, members of the organizations Combat Brotherhood and Officers of Russia.⁶³

Cadet Corps students are surrounded by many ideological markers during their studies and extracurricular activities meant to emphasize that they are Russians and at the same time citizens of the so-called DPR. The Cadet Corps celebrates the so-called Day of the DPR’s Return to Russia, and the ceremonial raising of the Russian flag.⁶⁴ During the initiation into the Cadet Corps, children say, “I serve the Russian Federation and the Cadet Corps.”⁶⁵ The ceremonial event “I am a future cadet” takes place against the background of a banner reading, “Russian All-Military Union.”⁶⁶

At the same time, the cadets honor the “heroes of Donbas,” celebrate the 10th anniversary of the formation of the DPR, write a dictation, “Memory of Donbas since 2014,” and take part in a photo shoot with DPR fighters.⁶⁷

Children have appeared on Russian television and social media repeating the narratives imposed on them. One child composed a poem entitled, “The FSB is our reliable bulwark.” Others express a desire to “become special forces” and sing ideological songs.⁶⁸



Image 4. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko with servicemen of the 345th Separate Guards Airborne Regiment of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Uvarovo (Tambov region, Russian Federation). Date: May 2023 | Source: [Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko](#)



Image 5. Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk with Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus. Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

The ideological processing received during their studies also influences their life choices. Oleh Kriuchenkov, a 2023 Cadet Corps graduate who chose a career in the Russian army, took part in the Victory Parade in Moscow on Red Square in 2024.⁶⁹ Another 2023 graduate of the Cadet Corps, Danyil Olmezov, took part in the Victory Parade in Volgograd in 2024.⁷⁰

The Cadet Corps and Aliaksei Talai are united not only by ideology, but also by ties within the occupation administration of the Donetsk region. For example, they cooperate closely with Olha Volkova's Dolphins (*Delfini*) organization.⁷¹ Children from Dolphins and cadets took part in a joint ideological flash mob on Victory Day in 2023, and the Cadet Corps' official Telegram channel regularly reposts from Volkova's channel.⁷² The Cadet Corps' administration and the Aliaksei Talai Foundation have a long history of cooperation. The walls of the Cadet Corps building display the symbols of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation.⁷³ The official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps reposts material from Talai's page.⁷⁴

The cadets and their teachers have also been participating in trips to Belarus under the leadership of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation since 2021. Alona Levytska, then a Cadet Corps teacher, accompanied the children on their first trip to Belarus that year to the Zubronak camp.⁷⁵ Since then, she has taken cadets to Belarus several times a year.⁷⁶ As of 2024, Levytska is no longer a teacher at the Cadet Corps, but an advisor

to the Donetsk occupation government's director of education,⁷⁷ tasked with indoctrinating students with the described pro-Kremlin ideology.⁷⁸ Several other Cadet Corps members, including teacher-librarian Inna Kosarytska, regularly accompany the children to Belarus.⁷⁹

These cadets are often not only the objects of militarization and ideological indoctrination, but also its actors. For example, the cadets were featured in a video by pro-Putin singer Yulia Chicherina.⁸⁰ During the cadets' visit to Belarus, they met with members of Belarusian military, patriotic clubs, and Belarusian cadets.⁸¹ Occupation authorities broadcast the cadets' statements, which align with the Russian ideological narrative about the "horrors of war that Ukraine brought to Donbas."⁸²

Cadets who frequently visited Belarus and Russia have appeared in the media making passionate ideological statements that suggest that indoctrination efforts have been successful. Anastasiia Khaunova, who visited Belarus and Russia as a cadet, heads the volunteer cadet brigade Edynychka, which sends aid to the Russian military.⁸³ In one video, she gives an ideological speech about her activities and calls Russia "our great Motherland."⁸⁴ In another video, Rafik Sultanov, a 2024 graduate who has been to Belarus several times and studied for six months at the Novosibirsk Cadet Corps, reads Alexander Pushkin's poem "To the Slanderers of Russia," which is commonly used by the modern Russian Federation to justify the wars it launches.⁸⁵

Chapter 3

How the Belarusian regime organizes and finances the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian Children

To understand the role and place of Belarusian authorities in the system of displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children, it is necessary to identify the main organizers of the process, their connections with each other, and sources of funding.

The occupation administrations play a crucial role in the displacement of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories. Aliaksei Talai has highlighted their role, confirming that he acts in cooperation with these entities.⁸⁶

One example of a representative of an occupation administration official facilitating this process is Mykhailo Krushakov, the Donetsk occupation authorities' so-called first deputy minister of education and science. In a formal letter, Krushakov writes about the "departure of children of privileged categories" for "recreation"

to the Dubrava camp in Belarus and asks the director of school No. 4, Oksana Tselikovska, to compile lists of children aged six to fifteen to be sent on this trip.⁸⁷

The head of occupied Melitopol, Volodymyr Rohov, does not hide his involvement in the transfer of children, stating in a Telegram post that 100 children were sent from the Zaporizhzhia region to Belarus.⁸⁸

The director of the Antratsyt correctional school, Olha Telychko, stressed that the children traveled with her "by order of the Ministry of Education of the Luhansk People's Republic."⁸⁹

On June 3, 2024, Talai met for the first time with the head of the occupation administration of the Donetsk region, Denys Pushylin, promising to continue "improving the health of Donbas children."⁹⁰



Image 6. Aliaksei Talai meeting children from occupied Donetsk city at the Astrashytski Haradok Rehabilitation Center in Minsk region, Belarus.

Date: August 1, 2023 | Source: [Malanka Media](#)

Figure 5. Five Categories of Complicit Actors





Image 7. Russian President Vladimir Putin awarding Aliaksei Talai the Order of Friendship in the Kremlin, Moscow.
Date: May 2024 | Source: [Official website of the President of the Russian Federation](#)



Image 8. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko participating in a lesson "dedicated to the 106th anniversary of the Donbas State Security Agencies" in occupied Donetsk.
Date: May 2024 | Source: [Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko](#)

3.1 The displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus

The Belarusian authorities fully support the transfer of children from occupied Ukraine to the territory of Belarus. This is evidenced not only by the documents signed at the level of the Union State, which will be discussed below, but also by the infrastructure used to organize the arrival, stay, and ideological indoctrination of the children. Belarusian state authorities, ranging from Lukashenko to representatives of regional authorities and state institutions, are involved in organizing the process of displacement, reeducation, and militarization.

In August 2023, during a visit to Minsk airport and Minsk Civil Aviation Plant No. 407, Lukashenko said that support and "rehabilitation" of the "children of Donbas" would continue. He also confirmed an agreement with Vladimir Putin to finance this campaign from the Union State's budget.⁹¹ At the same time, he emphasized that Aliaksei Talai is handling the issue of Ukrainian children. In October 2023, Talai himself once again stressed the support of Lukashenko for his activities.⁹²

State-owned enterprises own all camps and sanatoriums where the children stay. JSC Belaruskali, the state mining company, owns the Dubrava children's health camp.⁹³ The Volma sanatorium is a departmental sanatorium of the state transportation enterprise Minsktrans.⁹⁴ OJSC Homelprambud, construction company, owns the Zalatya Piaski sanatorium.⁹⁵ The Republican Children's Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation in Astrashytski Haradok is a state medical institution.

Belarusian police officers, from the juvenile affairs inspectorate to internal troops, take part in the activities with children at these and other locations.⁹⁶ Participation by the police also indicates state sponsorship of indoctrination activities.

Local Belarusian officials are also actively engaged with children from occupied territories of Ukraine. The Navapolatsk city authorities authorized and coordinated the stay of children from Lysychansk in Navapolatsk from November to December 2023. The deputy head of the Navapolatsk executive committee for social issues, Andrei Adzinokhin, the head of the Navapolatsk city council of deputies, Aleh Buyevich, and the head of the Navapolatsk executive committee, Dzmitry Dziauidau, were

involved in this case.⁹⁷ In addition, the principal of the Navapolatsk gymnasium No. 2, Tatsiana Lubinskaya, was involved, as the children studied in this educational institution during their stay in Belarus. Among the state-owned companies that sponsored the children's visit was Naftan, an oil refiner, which has been under renewed European sanctions since July 3, 2022.⁹⁸ It is likely that of the Navapolatsk hotel complex director Natallia Poliakova, who appeared in a media story about the children's stay in Belarus, is also a collaborator.⁹⁹

In another case, Vitali Utkin, a member of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus, met the children from Horlivka, who were traveling to a March 2023 music festival in Minsk, at the train platform in Homel.¹⁰⁰ The Minsk City Executive Committee also supported the visit of children from Horlivka to military unit 3214.¹⁰¹

On October 6, 2023, Utkin, representatives of JV OJSC Spartak, a confectionary; machinery firm Saleo-Homel; the branch of the public transportation network in Homel (Bus Park No. 6); students at the Belarusian State University of Transport; and members of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union accompanied 40 children from Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk to various locations.¹⁰²

The governor of Mahiliou Region, Anatoli Isachanka, has expressed support for the idea of “rehabilitating Donbas children in Belarus,” by inviting a group of children to travel to Mahiliou.¹⁰³

The deputy chairman of the Brest regional executive committee, Vadzim Krauchuk, and the chairman of the executive committee, Yury Shuleika, met children who arrived in the Brest Region on October 30, 2023, from Dokuchaevsk and Mariupol.¹⁰⁴ Shuleika handed the children sweets.

In December 2023, the Homel and Mahiliou executive committees, including the deputy chairman of the Homel executive committee, Dzmitry Aleinikau, met children from the Antratsyt correctional boarding school at the railway station in Homel.¹⁰⁵ The deputy chairman of the Mahiliou executive committee, Valery Malashko, welcomed the children at the sanatorium where they lived during their stay in Belarus.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the governor of the Mahiliou Region, Talai also mentioned the Belarusian Railways and the Standing Committee of the Union State as other contributors to the group's arrival.¹⁰⁷

Oleg Gaydukevich, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus and a member of



Image 9. Ukrainian children from Horlivka, occupied Donetsk, visiting Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus.

Date: December 2022 | Source: [Official Telegram channel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus](#)

Belarus's House of Representatives, also publicly expressed support for Talai's initiatives.¹⁰⁸ It is also worth paying attention to the support of Talai and his activities by the Belarusian State Concern for Oil and Chemistry (Belneftekhim). The Talai Foundation gave recognition to Belneftekhim for its support and financial assistance in implementing the foundation's "charitable projects."¹⁰⁹

Belarusian state media also carries adulatory coverage of these visits, another indication of the government's full support for the removal of children from the occupied regions of Ukraine. State-owned outlets such as the BelTA Information Agency, ATN: News of Belarus and the World, the National State Television and Radio Company of the Republic of Belarus (Belteleradio), and the ONT TV channel regularly published propaganda photos and videos about the "recreation and rehabilitation" of children from the occupied territories. In addition, the Sputnik Belarus news agency is part of the Russian multimedia group Sputnik 15, and broadcasts similar material.¹¹⁰

3.2 The connection and contribution of the Belarusian regime to Russia's broader policy of displacement, reeducation, and militarization

A critical actor in the joint campaign of the Russian and Belarusian states to displace and reeducate children from the occupied territories of Ukraine is Aliaksei Talai, and his Aliaksei Talai Foundation. Based in Belarus, Talai is actively involved in taking children to camps in the country, organizing a "cultural program" for them, and financing the process.

Talai has been involved in the creation of the Russian state narrative about purported crimes of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the east of Ukraine, including through activities at the parliamentary commission of the Russian Duma.¹¹¹ He frequently gives voice to these narratives, including on October 27, 2023, during his participation in the "Faith, Hope, Love" forum and festival of family dynasties in the Russian city of Suzdal, where Talai referred to the "criminal Kyiv regime" and "new regions of the Russian Federation."¹¹²

BIO: Aliaksei Talai is a Belarusian paralympian and founder of the Talai Foundation (wetogether.by). The foundation's stated aim is to help people with disabilities and children without parents or deprived of parental care. Talai is an avid supporter of Lukashenko's regime in Belarus, as well as Putin's regime in Russia. He holds close personal and business relationships with representatives of Belarusian and Russian governments, as well as their regional representatives. Talai is one of the central actors in the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus and in ensuring their participation in reeducation and militarization programs.

Aliaksei Talai calls Russian ambassador to Belarus Borys Hryzlov a "great friend" and in October 2023 presented him with an award from his foundation for supporting the implementation and development of the humanitarian aid project "With Love from Belarus to Donbas Families."¹¹³ Hryzlov in October 2023 voiced support for the transfer of children to Belarus, and condemned "Western diplomats" for refusing to join a propaganda meeting in Belarus between representatives of diplomatic missions of Western countries and Ukrainian children from the occupied territories.¹¹⁴

On November 8, 2023, President Putin signed a decree awarding Aliaksei Talai the Order of Friendship "for merits in strengthening friendship and cooperation between peoples, fruitful activities for rapprochement, and mutual enrichment of cultures of nations and peoples." On May 30, 2024, Talai received the order directly from Putin's hands.¹¹⁵

On October 12, 2023, Talai took part in a forum at Belarus's national library called "History for the Future: Russia and Belarus." During his speech, he delivered Russkiy Mir propaganda narratives about the "united Fatherland."¹¹⁶ It was at this forum that Aliaksei Talai and his foundation initiated cooperative activities with the Russian House in Homel, a state-funded Russian organization based in Belarus.¹¹⁷

Talai has also established connections with Russian local authorities, participating in municipal activities and shoring up support for his foundation. On November 20, 2023, the Ministry of Social Policy of Russia organized a meeting between Talai and local youth, cadets, and veterans in Nizhny Novgorod.¹¹⁸ On November 21, 2023, Talai met with the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region, Hlieb Nikitnyi. On his Telegram channel, the governor wrote that



Image 10. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko in Amvrosiivka Rehabilitation Center, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation.

Date: December 2023 | Source: [Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko](#)

he had donated a car to the Talai Foundation to transport humanitarian goods.¹¹⁹ Talai also visited the Business Cooperation Council of Belarus and the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia and held several motivational meetings, including with military personnel who had participated in the invasion of Ukraine.¹²⁰ In December 2023, Talai took part in a press conference on cooperation on patriotic education between Belarus and Nizhny Novgorod.¹²¹

Talai's initiatives to "rescue children taken from the war zone" are supported by Yuliia Lozanova (Vitiazieva), co-owner of occupied Crimea's NewsFront media company, which has been sanctioned by the United States, Australia, Ukraine and others for propaganda.¹²² In November 2023, a Ukrainian court sentenced Lozanova (Vitiazieva) to 11 years' imprisonment in absentia for collaborating with Russia and justifying Russian aggression.¹²³

Representatives of the Russian state have also expressed direct support for the transfer of children

to Belarus. In particular, the staff of the Consulate General of Russia in Hrodna (Belarus), including Consul General Yuri Solomin, attended a meeting with children from the occupied territories of Kherson Region who visited Belarus in March 2024.¹²⁴ The vice consul also recorded a separate video supporting the children's trip to Belarus.¹²⁵ According to Belarusian media, the chair of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, Natalya Kochanova, and the speaker of the Federation Council of Russia, Valentina Matvienko, supported the "rehabilitation" of a group of children who arrived in Homel on May 8, 2024, from occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.¹²⁶ Earlier, Belarus's ONT TV news channel reported that the project was supported by the Union State and Lukashenko.¹²⁷

It is also noteworthy that on November 17, 2023, Talai was a scheduled speaker in Yugra in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region of the Russian Federation at the forum "Civil Initiatives of the 60th Parallel Regions."¹²⁸ The region's governor, Tamara Komarova, who is

currently under Ukrainian sanctions, organizes the alleged deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children to Yugra and the Khanty-Mansi Regions, making the region one of the major hubs in Russia for this activity.¹²⁹

3.3 The role of the Union State in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children

The direct involvement of the Union State in displacing and reeducating Ukrainian children began in 2022 and has continued into 2024. The apparatus of the Standing Committee of the Union State has provided consistent financial and organizational support for the initiative at various levels. This is evidenced, among other things, by a March 2023 letter from the secretary of state of the Standing Committee, Dmitry Mezentsev, to the Chairman of Russian Railways, Oleg Belozyorov. Mezentsev not only asks Belozyorov to organize the passage of children from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine to Belarus, but also refers to the fact that Russian Railways had already done so in 2022. It further refers to the decision of the presidents of Russia and Belarus to systematically provide humanitarian aid to children of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics.¹³⁰ Mezentsev, in a September 2022 statement, referred to a decision by Mikhail Mishustin, who serves as both head of the government of the Russian Federation and as the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State of Belarus. In his statement, Mezentsev said that Mishustin had approved the use of Russian Railways for the purpose of rehabilitation of children in Belarusian sanatoriums.¹³¹ The material confirms the systematic practice of taking Ukrainian children to the territory of Belarus, which Lukashenko had called for in a September 2021 order.¹³²

The Union State's budget uses the term "humanitarian aid" to describe spending for the

transfer of children from occupied Ukrainian territory to the Republic of Belarus. According to the resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the Union State and the Supreme State Council of the Union State, up to 29,000,000 Russian rubles (\$334,000) were allocated for this activity in 2022, and up to 20,000,000 (\$230,400) Russian rubles in 2023.¹³³ At the meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State in January 2024, the issue of financing "humanitarian aid" was one of the main issues.¹³⁴ In June 2024, Dmitry Mezentsev stated that assistance to the Donbas republics from the Union State will be continued.¹³⁵

In October 2022, a story by the progovernment Russia 1 TV also channel confirmed that the Union State's budget provided for the funding of the transportation and stay of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine.¹³⁶

As of early November 2023, renovation preparations were underway at the Romanov estate in the Minsk region, which the Belarusian authorities transferred to the Aliaksei Talai Foundation for the creation of a rehabilitation center for children injured in the war.¹³⁷ Talai calls his project a unique union program for the rehabilitation of children and claims that its first group will include children from Ukraine and Belarus.¹³⁸ On November 14, 2023, the Union State's website published an article about the new rehabilitation center, reflecting its support.¹³⁹ In January 2024, Talai met with the Union State's deputy state secretary, Elena Bogdan, Belarusian education minister Andrei Ivanets and his deputy Alexander Kadlubay, as well as the chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus Vladimir Gusakov, to discuss the center.¹⁴⁰

Additionally, on December 6, 2023, Talai took part in the media forum "Youth for the Union State," during which participants discussed the upbringing of youth according to Russian narratives, integration, and the syncing of educational programs in Russia and Belarus. The forum was attended by officials from both countries.¹⁴¹

Chapter 4

Legal conclusions

The transfer, reeducation, political indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children taken to Belarus violates fundamental rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Among other things, the political indoctrination and reeducation of Ukrainian children and coercion of Ukrainian children to renounce their identity, homeland, culture, and language reach the threshold of inhuman treatment and mental torture. It violates the best interest of the child.

The Belarusian state, as a party to both the CRC and the ICCPR, bears state responsibility for these grave violations. In parallel, Belarusian and Union State officials bear individual criminal responsibility.

The long-term negative consequences of the Russian state policy aimed at eradicating Ukrainian national identity and the scale and systematic nature of the perpetrators' actions constitute several international crimes under the Rome Statute. Belarusian and Union State officials act as accomplices to the main perpetrators: officials of Russia and Russian occupation administrations. These crimes, committed and directed by top Belarusian and Union State officials when it comes to transferring Ukrainian children to Belarus, should be prosecuted by the ICC, specifically through proving its linkage to the **crime of persecution** on discriminatory grounds as outlined in the Rome Statute. In order to prove that the crime of persecution was committed, it is necessary to demonstrate its connection with other crimes enumerated in the Rome Statute of the ICC, which include, *inter alia*, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide. This allows for a determination of the crime of persecution while allowing the continuing linkage to a variety of other crimes as collected by other documenters under this same umbrella crime.

Given the factual circumstances, the evidence collected by this report's documenters, and the initial conclusions of psychologists working with returned Ukrainian children and their assessment of the children's psychological state, it can be asserted that there are elements of the **crime of genocide** (causing serious bodily or mental harm, forcibly transferring children

of the group to another group), **crimes against humanity** (torture, other inhumane acts causing great suffering or physical or mental injury), and a number of **war crimes** (torture or inhuman treatment, great suffering, unlawful deportation or transfer).¹⁴² While qualifying such crimes will be possible on a case-by-case basis, the report's authors argue that there has been the crime of discriminatory persecution committed in the context of the indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children and which can be linked back to a number of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide listed above.

4.1 Violation of fundamental rights and freedoms of the child in terms of Belarusian state responsibility under UN mechanisms

The reeducation of Ukrainian children on the territory of Belarus is based on indirect discrimination, which is prohibited at the universal level in accordance with Article 2 of the CRC and Article 26 of the ICCPR.¹⁴³ The Belarusian authorities, media, and members of the organizations involved insist that the Ukrainian children are treated the same as Belarusian children, despite the fact that they live under different conditions and have different legal statuses. Ukrainian children have guarantees as civilians from the occupied territory and foreign citizens, which afford them additional rights. Therefore, while Belarusian children can preserve their national identity, as provided for in Article 8 of the CRC, Ukrainian children are deliberately and purposefully deprived of this right to identity, "which is a prerequisite for the realization of all other child rights."¹⁴⁴

In each case of the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, along with a violation of Article 8 of the CRC, there is also a violation of Article 30 of the CRC, namely the right to enjoy one's own culture, language, religion, to be protected from interference with one's identity, and to have a progressive upbringing sustainable not only in terms of its permanence but also taking into account ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background.¹⁴⁵

Political indoctrination and militarization, which are part of the “recreation activities” for Ukrainian children in institutions in Belarus, are also a violation of the child’s right to freedom of thought and to education.¹⁴⁶

The explicit or implicit coercion of Ukrainian children to renounce their identity, homeland, culture, and language causes significant moral suffering that may be unconscious or only partially understood by the child. We argue that propaganda aimed at convincing Ukrainian children that their knowledge about Ukraine, its history, and politics reaches the threshold of inhuman treatment and mental torture, which is prohibited by Article 7 of the ICCPR, Article 37 of the CRC, and Article 2 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).¹⁴⁷

Considering the Russification and indoctrination of Ukrainian children in Belarus, which causes significant damage to the identity of minors, there are signs of a violation of the principle of the best interests of the child and, accordingly, Article 3 of the CRC. This circumstance makes not only the Russification and indoctrination of underage Ukrainian citizens illegal, but also their transfer to the territory of Belarus. This is even more relevant for orphans and children deprived of parental care. The Belarusian state, as a party to the CRC, the ICCPR, and the CAT bears state responsibility for these severe violations of children’s rights on its territory.

4.2 Elements of international crimes in the reeducation of Ukrainian children under the Rome Statute and individual criminal responsibility

The reeducation of Ukrainian children in camps in Belarus has elements of persecution as a crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute.¹⁴⁸ This article refers to perpetrators targeting a “group or collectivity as such”, a phenomenon identifiable in the way that the perpetrators enumerated in this report targeted a group of Ukrainian children – namely those from the occupied territories – on the basis of age, national identity, place of residence, and belonging to a particularly vulnerable category (orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, children from

families in difficult life circumstances due to Russian aggression).

The transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, which aims to politically indoctrinate and militarize them, is part of Russia’s large-scale attack on Ukrainian national identity in the occupied territories Ukraine. This attack, targeting both adults and children, is accompanied by the imposition of Russian citizenship, imposition of Russian curriculum in schools, intimidation, enforced disappearances, persecution of civilians disloyal to the occupying state, deportations, and displacement.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the reeducation of Ukrainian children taken to Belarus has resulted in the violation of a number of fundamental rights and freedoms of the child (to identity, humane treatment, education, culture, language, religion, freedom of thought, etc.), the combined negative effect of which amounts to discriminatory persecution as a crime against humanity.

Transfers of orphans and children deprived of parental care indicate the possibility of forcible transfer and deportation – war crimes under the Rome Statute. In addition, the prohibition on expression of Ukrainian identity and speaking the Ukrainian language and the political indoctrination and militarization of children’s education may be considered evidence of Russian and Belarusian officials’ actions to destroy in part the Ukrainian national group, which is protected under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). As discussed in the original UN Sixth Committee debates on the Genocide Convention, forcibly transferring children to a group where they will receive an education different from that of their own group, with new customs, a new religion, and possibly a new language, is in practice equal to the destruction of their group, whose future depends on that generation of children. This is reflected in Article 6(e) on forcibly transferring children from one group to another as one of the defined acts of the crime of genocide in the Rome Statute and in the Article 2(e) of the Genocide Convention.¹⁵⁰

Considering the political indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus through the prism of international crimes, one should consider the role of the state officials in the implementation of the unified policy of Russia to eliminate Ukrainian identity. As accomplices, individual Belarusians, if all the key elements are present, may also be responsible for a number of war crimes: deportation (Articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute), attacks against civilians (Article 8(2)(b)(i) of the Rome

Statute), involvement of children in the activities of armed groups or forces of the opposing party (Article 8(2)(a)(v) of the Rome Statute), and ill-treatment (Article 8(2)(a)(ii)).¹⁵¹

The issue of consent

The issue of consent for displacing children to reeducation camps in Belarus requires careful examination. In some cases, parents or other legal representatives signed consent forms for their children to attend institutions presented exclusively as rehabilitation or vacation camps. These parents often sought to protect their children temporarily from the detrimental effects of hostilities, such as aerial shelling, food deprivation, and artillery fire, compounded by limited evacuation options in front-line areas. Parents generally stipulated even to propaganda media that consent was given only for a temporary stay and vacation, not for political indoctrination and militarization. With limited access to the occupied territories, it is challenging to determine whether each instance of consent was truly voluntary and informed, particularly given the parents' understanding of the program's content and its politicized components. Considering that, in other instances, the transfer of children to pro-Russian reeducation camps occurred under threats and duress, the validity of parental consent is questionable. The context of ongoing armed conflict, restricted access to information, and the deceptive nature of this displacement – often described as temporary “rest” periods – further undermines the legitimacy of parental consent.¹⁵²

Cases when parents knowingly consented to their children being politically indoctrinated and militarized in Belarusian camps raise serious concerns about whether such consent aligns with the best interests of the child. According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 17, while the CRC recognizes the vital role of parents in child-rearing, the state must intervene in situations where a child's best interests are compromised, particularly in cases of abuse or neglect.¹⁵³ In the context of deportation and discriminatory persecution, parental consent cannot legitimize actions that lead to the commission of international crimes against Ukrainian children.

Belarusian officials as an accomplice to international crimes

Representatives of Belarus and officials of the Union State do not commit international crimes

against Ukrainian children on their own. They act as accomplices to the main perpetrators: officials of Russia and the occupation administrations, who initiated the development and implementation of the policy of eliminating Ukrainian identity by reeducating young Ukrainians from occupied territories in a network of special institutions in Russia, Belarus, and occupied Crimea.

Aiding and abetting a principal perpetrator is a sufficient basis for criminal liability under Article 25(3)(c) of the Rome Statute. It expressly provides for a typical form of such complicity by providing the means to commit an international crime. The removal of Ukrainian children for political indoctrination and militarization in camps and other institutions in Belarus, and the organization of their movement and stay are sufficient “means” to have a significant impact on the realization of the purpose of discriminatory persecution of Ukrainian children, namely, to turn them into patriots of Russia and representatives of the “Russian world” ideology, which the Belarusian regime also promotes.

In addition, the actions of Belarusian agents constitute support and encouragement of the commission of the crime by the main perpetrators.¹⁵⁴ Representatives of Belarus and officials of the Union State have repeatedly taken the initiative to reeducate Ukrainian children, approved the relevant Russian policy, and spread Russian narratives among the deported children. For this, Belarusian agents were personally rewarded by Vladimir Putin, against whom the ICC issued an arrest warrant on March 17, 2023, for deporting Ukrainian children with the intention of leaving them under Russian control forever.¹⁵⁵

In light of the ICC charge against Putin and Lvova-Belova, Belarusian agents and representatives of the Union State acting as aiders and abettors are probably aware that their behavior is considered under international treaties to violate the fundamental rights and constitute crimes against Ukrainian children. It is highly likely that they are aware of the essential elements of these crimes, such as forcible displacement of Ukrainian and their re-education, which have been condemned by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.¹⁵⁶ In addition, some of the accomplices have already been formally put on notice and are on sanctions lists for their activities related to the deportation and militarized reeducation of Ukrainian children.¹⁵⁷

Conclusions

The Belarusian regime is complicit in the Russian policy of displacement, indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children through the transfer of Ukrainian children from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine to Belarus, starting in 2021, and perpetrating the Russian model of reeducation and militarization in the territory of Belarus. This is confirmed by several factors.

1. Evidence supports the conclusion that the Belarusian regime has copied the Russian government's systematic approach to displacing Ukrainian children with the goal of erasing their national identity. When analyzing cases of children deprived of parental care, researchers identified at least three among this group whose displacement to Belarus qualifies as deportation.
2. The system of education and "recreation" that Ukrainian children in Belarus are placed into is focused on spreading Russian propaganda narratives that aim to demonize certain nations, including Ukraine. Activities are conducted in Russian, and Ukrainian children are persistently identified as "Russians" or "citizens of Russia" within the system and in Belarusian and Russian state-owned media, as well as public communications by Belarusian GONGOs.
3. Along with reeducation, militarization of Ukrainian children is a clear goal of the displacement. Ukrainian children in Belarusian facilities are routinely subjected to content that promotes service in the Russian Armed Forces and glorifies the Soviet role in World War II, drawing parallels between that effort and the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. Ukrainian children that have joined Russian militarized youth organizations in the occupied territories, while transferred to Belarus, also serve as propaganda actors themselves.
4. There are five categories of people who are complicit in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children: Belarusian officials, Russian officials, officials of the Union State, occupying authorities in Ukraine, and Belarusian GONGO representatives.
 - a. Belarusian officials, both at the central and regional levels, authorize and support the policy, allocate budgetary funds for and ensure that children stay in state institutions, as well as study in local educational institutions and participate in propaganda "cultural" events.
 - b. Russian officials, apart from perpetrating the policy in Russia, support and endorse the engagement of the Belarusian regime in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus.
 - c. Officials of the Union State, composed of officials who also hold positions in the Belarusian and Russian regimes, authorize and finance the policy.
 - d. Occupying authorities in Ukraine ensure the recruitment of groups of Ukrainian children and the dissemination of propaganda about the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of those children.
 - e. Representatives of Belarusian GONGOs and foundations that initiate, organize, and campaign to finance the displacement and reeducation of Ukrainian children.
5. The role of Belarusian GONGOs and foundations cannot be understated. They operate at the behest of and are loyal to Belarusian state authorities and/or the Russian authorities, including in occupied Ukraine, and will not take actions that would contradict state policy. Moreover, their activities related to the displacement and indoctrination of Ukrainian children are widely supported by Belarusian government officials and/or the Russian and occupation authorities, and funded, among other things, by Belarus's state-affiliated enterprises, which link their activities to the state policy.
6. In view of this, the actions of the representatives of Belarus and the Union State demonstrate that they aid and abet Russia, the main perpetrator, in the form of providing the means to commit the crime, which is a sufficient basis for criminal liability.
7. The political indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus violates fundamental rights and freedoms of the child, including the right to freedom of thought, the right to education, the right to assimilate one's culture, to practice one's religion and use one's language, and to be protected from interference with one's identity. In addition, the reeducation of Ukrainian children on the territory of Belarus, in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, qualifies as discriminatory persecution, which is a crime against humanity.

Recommendations

It is imperative that the international community work together to address the coordinated, systematic effort by Belarusian and Russian authorities to displace, reeducate, and militarize Ukrainian children. The atrocities against Ukrainian children enumerated in this report are further evidence of the Russian Federation's actions to eradicate Ukrainian national identity, with the Lukashenko regime's complicity as documented in this report. As such, Freedom House, ZMINA Human Rights Center, Regional Center for Human Rights, Viasna, and BELPOL make the following recommendations for foreign governments, the government of Ukraine, as well as international donors and civil society partners.

Foreign governments should:

- Seek accountability for the ongoing displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied regions of Ukraine by:
 - Urging the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open a preliminary examination into the Russian and Belarusian regimes' coordinated system of reeducation and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied territory of Ukraine. State parties to the Rome Statute should refer the situation to the ICC, or the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor should independently (*proprio motu*) open an additional investigation, to collect further evidence of Belarusian and Russian authorities' efforts to destroy Ukrainian children's national identity. In accordance with such an investigation, **the ICC should issue arrest warrants for Aleksandr Lukashenko, Dmitriy Mezentsev, Mikhail Mishustin, and Aliaksei Talai**, for their role in the reeducation and militarization of Ukrainian children in addition to revising the arrest warrants already issued for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova. Governments should also support the ICC's investigations through intelligence and data sharing.
 - Imposing targeted sanctions against Russian and Belarusian individuals and entities specifically in response to their role in the displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children. These sanctions should be coordinated across democratic governments for maximum effectiveness. Governments should also partner with civil society partners to develop and maintain a comprehensive list of perpetrating individuals and entities, to include representatives of the Union State as well as Ukrainian collaborators in occupied territories of Ukraine. Where gaps in intelligence exist, further investigate the staffing structure and funding of the Union State as a mechanism of autocratic collaboration and the systematization of crimes against Ukrainian children. In the United States, Russian and Belarusian officials should be sanctioned under relevant mechanisms, including Section 7031(c) of the annual Appropriations Act and Section 212(a)(3)(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.¹⁵⁸
 - Harmonizing sectoral sanctions against Russia and Belarus, given the Lukashenko regime's complicity and participation in Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. As the European Union did with the adoption of its [14th sanctions package against Russia](#) in July 2024, governments should mitigate opportunities for either state to circumvent sanctions against Russia. Relatedly, Lukashenko should be prosecuted alongside Putin for the crime of aggression against Ukraine through a special international tribunal. Indeed, the displacement and reeducation of Ukrainian children only became possible due to the aggression of Russia against Ukraine.

The International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children should:

- Clarify its mandate and action items and:
 - Establish a regular cadence of meeting with international and Ukrainian civil society partners actively investigating this issue to facilitate information sharing and greater coordination.
 - Pool funding to support civil society and investigative journalists engaged in this area.

- Continue to publicly reaffirm the principles behind the fourth point of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy's [Peace Formula](#), which calls for the release of all prisoners and deportees from Ukraine.
 - Accelerate efforts to expand upon the coalition's [40 member states](#) to include additional governments in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. These efforts would increase global pressure on the Russian Federation and Belarus to return all displaced Ukrainian children. Specifically, the coalition should seek to engage the governments of Brazil, Namibia, the Republic of Korea, Uruguay, South Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Mauritius, Botswana, Rwanda, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, and India, as well as any other countries that have relevant experience addressing the consequences of political indoctrination and the militarization of children.
 - Engaging in further back-channel diplomacy with administrations who could be engaged as intermediaries in a mechanism to return Ukrainian children, including Turkey and Gulf countries that have previously supported prisoner exchanges, as well as the Vatican.
 - Recognize the political indoctrination and militarization of children as the seventh grave violation against children during armed conflict. Pending the implementation of an appropriate mechanism at the level of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, governments should encourage the UN Human Rights Council to establish a special rapporteur, independent expert, or working group to document these abuses and recommend actions.
 - Urge the Russian Federation to implement the recommendation of the 1989 [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) to put an end to the politicization and militarization of schools as well as to prevent any attempt to rewrite school curricula and textbooks to reflect the political and military agenda of the current government.
- The government of Ukraine should:**
- Highlight the Russian and Belarusian regimes' systematic transfer of Ukrainian children—in particular, their specific goal of erasing their Ukrainian national identity through brainwashing, reeducation, and militarization—in diplomatic engagements and international forums. Such efforts would increase international pressure on the Russian and Belarusian regimes to return Ukrainian children.
 - Engage additional government members and support for the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.
 - Together with international partners, pursue the establishment of a formal international mechanism, whether through the United Nations or another international body, to systematically return Ukrainian children. The commendable efforts of the Ukrainian authorities and CSOs are currently resulting in the return of a few hundred children per year, while many times more are being displaced by the actors specified in this report. An international mechanism is required to meet the scale of the problem.
 - Coordinate the intragovernmental response and communicate with external stakeholders such as relatives, civil society partners, media, and international governments through the work of the Bring Kids Back initiative and other bodies. Additionally, the Ukrainian government should:
 - Consult with civil society on the development of, or approval of existing, reliable and secure databases for all reported cases of deported Ukrainian children in partnership with Ukrainian civil society, local authorities, and media.
 - More proactively seek information from the Ukrainian public on cases of missing children and raise awareness of existing reporting structures.
 - Leverage evidence collected with nongovernmental partners and open criminal cases through the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office against Ukrainian collaborators from the occupied territories who are involved in displacing, reeducating, and militarizing Ukrainian children with Belarus.
 - Consistently communicate that legal consent, as it relates to the displacement of Ukrainian parentless children or children in orphanages in occupied territories, can only be given by the national authorities of Ukraine.

- Work with civil society and relevant international donors to provide training on working with minors and victims of violent crime for the branches of government and law enforcement who will interface with returned Ukrainian children, such as the State Border Guards.
- In partnership with Ukrainian civil society, local communities, and donors, continue to develop a system of rehabilitation and reintegration for returned Ukrainian children. This system should take into account the impact of reeducation and militarization. Ukrainian authorities should engage partners to provide the affected children with all necessary humanitarian, medical, psychological assistance, and unbiased educational resources, with the goal of restoring their health and well-being. To the extent possible, the Ukrainian government should also unite Ukrainian children with families or place them in family-based care settings.
- Intensify cooperation with Ukrainian civil society on efforts to prevent the displacement of Ukrainian children. Such efforts would include the Ukrainian government's current attempts to evacuate children from at-risk regions, digitizing the records of children residing in children's institutions, and supporting programs aimed at bringing families from the temporarily occupied territories to Ukrainian government-controlled territories.

International donors and civil society should:

- Support Ukrainian civil society and like-minded partners to expand the coalitions working to investigate, return, and rehabilitate Ukrainian children as well as hold perpetrators accountable.

The following specific interventions are recommended:

- Dedicate additional resources to examining the role of the Russian and Belarusian regimes, as well as of the Union State, in the systematic displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children. This effort would require comprehensive stakeholder mapping to ensure the most efficient use of funds. Such efforts should focus on the interactions and direct linkages between Russian and Belarusian authorities in this regard.
- Increase engagement between Ukrainian civil society and stakeholders in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Such efforts would raise greater awareness of this issue and recruit additional state parties to the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and generate additional pressure on the Russian Federation and Belarus to return Ukrainian children.
- Support the creation of global awareness-raising campaigns to put pressure on the offending governments.
- In coordination with the government of Ukraine and local communities, support the continued development and institutionalization of a system to rehabilitate and reintegrate returned children. This system could draw lessons learned and experience from countries that have implemented disarmament, demobilization, deradicalization, and reintegration (DDR) programs for child soldiers, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. It could also draw on lessons learned from groups in Central and South America, such as Argentina, who have worked on establishing the identities, tracing blood relatives, and establishing court custody of children taken from their families.

Endnotes

- ¹ The report authors have chosen to use the Russian transliteration to reflect the way in which Lukashenko himself spells his name in official documents.
- ² <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule129>
- ³ https://ZMINA.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/deportation_ukr.pdf
- ⁴ Azarov, Denys, Dmytro Koval, Gaiane Nuridzhanian, and Volodymyr Venher (2023). "Understanding Russia's Actions in Ukraine as the Crime of Genocide." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 21, 2: 233-264; <https://newlinesinstitute.org/genocide/the-russian-federations-escalating-commission-of-genocide-in-ukraine-a-legal-analysis/>
- ⁵ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/OHCHR_BerkeleyProtocol.pdf
- ⁶ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/podpisano-rasporyazhenie-ob-organizacii-otdyha-i-ozdorovleniya-gruppy-detey-iz-doneckoy-oblasti-v-beloruskom-zubrenke>
- ⁷ <https://newlinesinstitute.org/genocide/the-russian-federations-escalating-commission-of-genocide-in-ukraine-a-legal-analysis/> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/02/kherson-torture-centres-were-planned-by-russian-state-say-lawyers> ; <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/report-independent-international-commission-inquiry-ukraine-ahrc5262enruuk-advance-unedited-version>
- ⁸ <https://belta.by/society/view/deti-donbassa-kotorye-poluchili-minno-vzryvnye-raneniya-priehali-na-ozdorovlenie-v-belarus-633175-2024/> ; <https://sputnik.by/20230719/detstvo-kotorogo-net-kak-vzroslyut-deti-donbassa-1077646402.html> ; <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/poseshchenie-nacionalnogo-aeroporta-minsk-i-minskogo-zavoda-grazhdanskoy-aviacii-no407>
- ⁹ https://vk.com/wall-195920155_3489
- ¹⁰ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/podpisano-rasporyazhenie-ob-organizacii-otdyha-i-ozdorovleniya-gruppy-detey-iz-doneckoy-oblasti-v-beloruskom-zubrenke>
- ¹¹ <https://youtu.be/ngVu14-qgOg>
- ¹² "Forcible transfer and deportation of children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation". Human Rights Information Centre ZMINA, April 2023, p.10; https://ZMINA.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/children_web_ukr.pdf
- ¹³ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/37901.html> ; <https://archive.ph/gMi6t>
- ¹⁴ <https://sputnik.by/20220930/v-santimetre-ot-sonnoy-arterii-deti-donbassa-o-raneniya-kh-i-mechtakh-o-mire-1067406444.html>
- ¹⁵ <https://t.me/ontnews/91916> ; https://t.me/alexey_talai/2117 ; <https://t.me/ontnews/92669>
- ¹⁶ The Cadet Corps is an elementary school with full board and military training. In the TOTs of Ukraine, Russia has organized both training in cadet corps and cadet classes, a military training program in general education institutions ; Closed sources.
- ¹⁷ Closed sources ; <https://sputnik.by/20221013/ocherednaya-gruppa-detey-iz-donbassa-pribyla-v-belarus---video-1067946881.html>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/talaj-na-vstreche-s-detmi-iz-donbassa-vse-belorusy-ochen-perezvivajut-za-vas-540102-2022/> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjpxzWiQLts>
- ¹⁹ https://t.me/belarusian_silovik/8380
- ²⁰ <https://sputnik.by/20230410/vzryvy-snaryadov--eto-norma-cto-govoryat-i-o-chem-mechtayut-deti-donbassa-1074219178.html>
- ²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORR0irTYFH4>
- ²² <https://t.me/minskctvby/16597> ; <https://t.me/sputnikby/66603>
- ²³ <https://t.me/sputnikby/66603>
- ²⁴ https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/12910 ; https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/13171
- ²⁵ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/smenit-obstanovku-otdohnut-i-zarjaditsya-emotsijami-detey-iz-donbassa-vstretili-v-brestskoj-oblasti-597184-2023/>
- ²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7EPgXuo3M> ; <https://belta.by/society/view/my-spokojno-spali-priemnaja-mama-s-donbassa-rasskazala-kak-oni-s-detmi-otdohnuli-v-belarusi-599524-2023/>
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- ²⁹ https://newsgomel.by/archive_news/society/v-gomele-vstretili-rebyat-iz-khersonskoy-oblasti-vpervye-priekhavshikh-v-belarus_169636.html
- ³⁰ <https://t.me/depobrherson/5641>
- ³¹ <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-gomele-teplo-vstretili-rebyat-iz-donbassa-pribyvshikh-v-belarus-na-ozdorovlenie.html>
- ³² <https://souyz.by/tpost/uvslrkxm11-molodezh-melitopolya-posetila-gorod-mins>
- ³³ <https://youtu.be/KjpxzWiQLts> ; https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/13171
- ³⁴ "The Genocide of the Belarusian people" law was adapted by the Belarusian regime in 2022 and seeks to punish those who deny the regime defined atrocities committed by the Nazis, their collaborators, and national movements of surrounding nations on the territory of present-day Belarus from 1941 to 1951. A course of the same name was introduced in Belarusian schools, covering the atrocities described in the law. <https://adu.by/images/2023/10/Genozid-bel-naroda-1-4-klass.pdf> ; <https://humanconstantia.org/en/on-the-genocide-of-belarusian-people-legal-overview-of-the-new-law/> ; A letter of the Ministry of Education of Belarus. <https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vSnakYbQKIMe6PUmkRI-74CzWyYqtJPKLX0OVegstg9pJRWUzQOC3Eyzlj39zg/pub> ; https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f-mjGkj_Ay0D5IhT_A_xOfjgW6pZqFW8/view
- ³⁵ <https://t.me/OstashkoNews/126013>
- ³⁶ <https://sputnik.by/20221014/shvayba-deti-iz-donbassa-mogut-poluchit-obrazovanie-v-belarusi-1067959141.html> ; https://t.me/alexey_talai/2163
- ³⁷ <https://t.me/belaruskali/12644>
- ³⁸ <https://youtu.be/2B6tcol4xM?t=1568>
- ³⁹ https://t.me/bondareva_bez_kupjur/18998
- ⁴⁰ <https://t.me/delfini2022/684> ; <https://gp.by/novosti/obshchestvo/news285709.html>
- ⁴¹ The "Great Patriotic War narrative" claims that World War II started only in 1941 instead of 1939, disregarding the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which included protocols related to the territorial division of Europe between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. It also refers to the idea that Russia played an exceptional role in the defense of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. This includes the sanctification of those who died during the war. In today's Russia, the Kremlin exploits the memory of the war to foster youth militarization as well as to justify Russian aggression against Ukraine by claiming that such aggression is "de-Nazification."
- ⁴² <https://youtu.be/C0-Z97Hm1do?t=1129>
- ⁴³ <https://t.me/ontnews/113743> ; <https://youtu.be/mM8Z00DLwFo>
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- 56 *Ibid.*, 54
- 57 https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/518 ; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/527
- 58 *Ibid.*, 54
- 59 Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/geneva-convention-relative-protection-civilian-persons-time-war>
- 60 Originally introduced to symbolize the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, Ribbons of St. George became a symbol of Russian nationalism and support for Putin. Since 2014, the ribbons are also associated with the support of Russia's war in Ukraine and Putin's false claims of Nazis in Ukraine. https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/45 ; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/1538 ; <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/7640> ; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/579 ; <https://paodkb.org/events/19-aprelya-den-pamyati-o-genotside> ; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/33
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