

“The First Casualty of War is the Truth”. What is Really Happening in Donbass

A Conversation with Christelle Neant of Donbass Insider on the War in Ukraine

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They say that the first casualty of war is the truth. Nevermore so was this the case in the current war in Ukraine. The mainstream media in the West have become stenographers for the new Cold War being pursued by American imperialism.

They refuse to critically examine the massive supplies of weapons by the West to Ukraine and refuse to acknowledge the many war crimes being committed by the Ukrainian armed forces on a daily basis. If you want to find out what is really going on in the war zone that is Eastern Ukraine then you have to talk to journalists with integrity who are actually based in the Donbass.

I have spoken with French journalist Christelle Neant who is co-founder of Donbass Insider and is based in Donetsk. She gives her views on many of the key issues regarding the current conflict in Ukraine.

Dr. Leon Tressell: Can you explain your motives in establishing [Donbass insider](#)? How long have you been covering the war in the Donbass?

Christelle Neant: I cover the Donbass war for six years. Donbass Insider was established to offer an independent platform to publish articles about the situation in the Donbass, in Ukraine, in Russia, and in some related countries like Syria, or Belarus. Here several journalists, authors, and volunteers, can publish their reports, articles or researches. The motives were to show the facts, that mainstream media hide about the Donbass war, for people in the West to better understand what is the real situation, and the origins of it.



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DLT: I recently communicated with Amnesty International regarding the abduction of Mikhail & Aleksander Kononovich who are leading members of the outlawed Leninist Communist Youth Union by the Ukrainian security services. In the ensuing email exchange, the representatives of Amnesty International stridently condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the many 'war crimes' it is alleged to have committed in Ukraine. Let me be clear I condemn attacks on civilians by military units of Russia or Ukraine. Having said this, there was no acknowledgement by the Amnesty representative of the war crimes committed by successive Ukrainian governments who are responsible for the artillery shelling of civilian settlements in Donetsk and Lugansk over the last 8 years. This is an issue that the Western media and political elites refuse to acknowledge, instead they hysterically denounce Russian aggression in Ukraine since late February of this year. In recent weeks the Ukrainian army has stepped up its shelling of Donetsk, often using Western supplied weaponry, leading to many civilian deaths. Why do you think that [Ukraine is stepping up its shelling of civilians in Donetsk](#)? Can you tell us about your own first hand experience of Ukrainian shelling of civilians in the Donbass?

CN: I think Ukraine is stepping up its shelling of civilians in Donetsk, but also in Gorlovka, Yasinovataya, and Stakhanov (in LPR) for several reasons :

1) They feel they are losing ground, and they understand the front will move, preventing them to continue such terror shelling. And they have a mentality of « If we cannot retake it, then nobody will have it ». So they shell while they still can to destroy what they cannot reconquer.

2) They know Russia will pay to rebuild infrastructures and housings destroyed during the war, so the more they destroy, the more the financial burden will be heavy for Russia.

3) They want to terrorise the population, to push them to demand authorities to take back units which are on other parts of the front, in order to protect them from shellings. The aim is to divert units which are currently more on the north, in Severodonetsk and near

Slavyansk, thus slowing the advance of Russian army, and DPR-LPR militias.

DLT: Western narratives regarding the current war in Ukraine include the claim that Ukraine is a democracy under attack from Russian imperialism. Part and parcel of this narrative, which is aimed at making Ukraine more palatable to Western audiences, is to dismissing out of hand the role of neo-Nazi military formations in the current conflict.

In a recent email to me a representative of Amnesty International stated that members of neo-Nazi battalions from the early period of the civil war have been disbanded and merged with regular Ukrainian army and that some of them were punished for their crimes.

The representative went on to assert that Russian propaganda attempts to portray these groups as “rogue, irregular forces based on extreme ideology and acting outside of official chains of command and control and committing gross human rights violations” is merely part of Moscow’s misinformation and disinformation campaign regarding Ukraine.

The Amnesty representative also dismissed Russian narratives which imply “that they remain paramilitaries outside of official chains of command and control, that they espouse fascist/Nazi/extremist ideology, terrorize Russian-speaking population in eastern and southern Ukraine, and enjoy full impunity for their crimes under a direct protection of the Ukrainian authorities.” This representative from Amnesty concluded their remarks on this issue by claiming that Russia is blaming its ‘numerous apparent war crimes’, on “Ukrainian Nazis.” Is the representative of Amnesty International giving an accurate portrayal of the role played by neo-Nazi military formations in the current conflict?

CN: What this Amnesty representative is saying is a pure lie. **The war crimes of the Azov regiment — alone — in Mariupol have been proven by hundreds of public testimonies of civilians to Russians, but also independent media. This regiment is part of the National Guard of Ukraine, which is under the direction of the Interior ministry !**

These units are not outside the official chain of commandment, they are inside it ! Even at the very top-level, as **Dmitro Yarosh**, a neo-nazi, a founder of one of these neo-Nazis battalions, was promoted as an adviser to the commander in chief of the Ukrainian army ! And Russia is not claiming these groups are not in the commandment chain.

Out from some commanders of the Tornado battalion, who were condemned because their crimes were too horrible to hide them, **all the other neo-Nazis criminals in Ukraine are free.** Even the ones who killed people in Odessa on 2 May 2014. Moreover, Zelensky liberated the condemned commanders of Tornado this year, to send them to fight the Russian army !

My colleague, [Laurent Brayard, who investigates these neo-Nazis battalions](#), just discovered there are more than 40 of these neo-Nazi battalions in Ukraine ! These people are real neo-Nazis and fascists. They use Nazi symbols, take their ideology from Stepan Bandera, a collaborator of the Nazis, and a real anti-Semitic person ! And they do not hide their Russophobia, calling to destroy everything Russian.



DLT: The United States and its European allies have sent billions of dollars worth of weaponry to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Western media portray these arms deliveries as essential aid to help Ukraine defend itself from Russian military aggression. Over the course of the last three months I have come across sources which claim that Ukraine is not using the weapons that have been supplied from the West to actually fight Russian Armed Forces. **Some of these sources claim that Ukraine is using the heavy weaponry it has been supplied with to attack civilian settlements in the Donbass.** Besides this, I have come across numerous claims that Western supplied weapons are being sold by corrupt Ukrainian officials on the dark net. In your opinion is there any evidence to substantiate any of these claims regarding Ukraine's use of Western supplied weaponry?

CN: Yes there are a lot of announcements on the darknet to sell Western weapons sent to Ukraine. Screenshots of a lot of them are circulating on the internet. Concerning the use of western weapons by Ukrainian army against civilians, it is proved by the fact that some 155 mm shells which Ukrainian soldiers fired on Donetsk, were found intact, or big parts have been found with **the marking indicating clearly it is 155 mm shells. This calibre is typical of NATO, and not used in the Russian army. The most recent ones are even French ! LU-211 shells, fired by Caesar canons provided by Paris to Kiev.** And these shells were fired on purely civilian areas, and killed innocent Donbass civilians.

DLT: The recent [increase in artillery shelling of Donetsk](#) is causing a lot of death and destruction. What actions have the DPR authorities taken to protect civilians? How are ordinary people coping with this increase in attacks?

CN: The aerial defence has been increased as well as counter-battery artillery, thus decreasing the length of such shellings against civilians. Ordinary people are used to shelling since eight years, so most of them just live their life normally, others are staying as much as possible at home.

DLT: It would appear that most political parties on the Left in the West refuse to acknowledge the suffering of civilians in Donetsk and Lugansk and merely focus on criticising Russia for its alleged war crimes. Take Germany for example where so called 'Left' groups such as the Greens/SPD fully support sanctions and sending weapons to arm Ukraine. Why do you think this is?

CN: The defence policy of the EU countries is defined by NATO. I think this is sufficient to explain why most of the parties (left or right) of EU countries are supporting the US-NATO policy. These parties are for the EU, thus for the NATO policy too.

DLT: The current war is causing great suffering to both Ukrainian and Russian speaking civilians. I hope it does not lead to lasting animosity between these two peoples who have a

long shared history together. Do you see any hope for the future that the ordinary people of both countries can peacefully coexist?

CN: I think this hope will be defined by decisions made in Washington. They are the ones who pushed these two people one against each other artificially, by supporting, and financing these far-right movements in Ukraine. As Russians say, hope is the last to die, but on this I am not really optimistic.

If you would like to help the journalists of Donbass Insider replace their car which was destroyed by Ukrainian army shelling, then click on this [link](#).

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Featured image: Car belonging to Donbass Insider after it was destroyed by Ukrainian artillery shelling in the district of Petrovski, in the west of Donetsk city on 4 June 2022. Picture source: [Donbass Insider](#)

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