

Reporting From Southern Ukrainian City of Henichesk along the Sea of Azov: “Russians Welcomed as Liberators”

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Global Research, March 27, 2022

[CovertAction Magazine](#) 25 March 2022

Region: [Europe, Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

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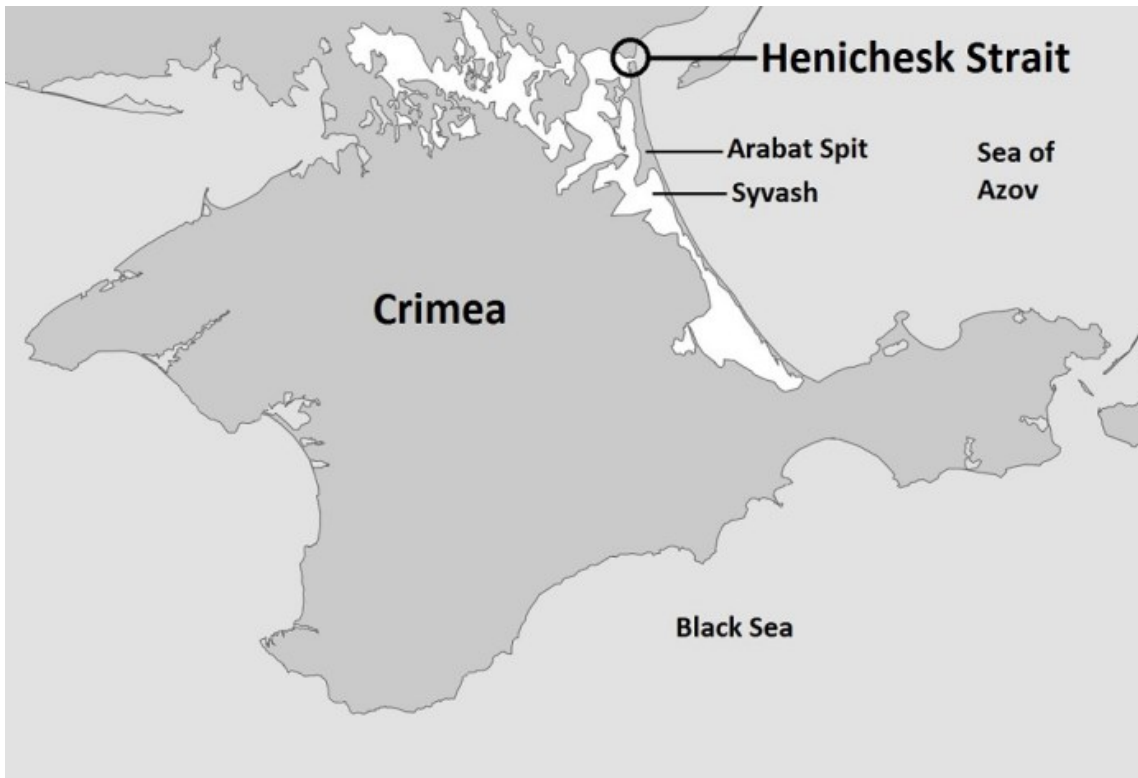
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Last week I was embedded with the Russian army and visited two towns in southeastern Ukraine. The first town was called Henichesk, a port city along the Sea of Azov in Kherson Oblast (province) of southern Ukraine, bordering on Crimea.

The Russian army, patrolling the city, went with us—the embedded journalists—for protection. But actually the protection was not really needed; the people in Henichesk, at least the majority with whom I spoke, were very happy that the Russian army was there.

The people that I spoke to all said the same thing: They felt protected from the criminal gangs, with their Nazi ideology, who raged the towns. They in turn hoped that Ukraine will prosper again.



Source: wikipedia.org

Since the coup d'état of 2014, the economy of Ukraine has become very bad, according to many citizens in Henichesk.

I could see that people were standing in line to get money from ATM machines outside the banks, money which was barely there.

At the market, the food was scarce. The Russian army is providing humanitarian aid, which they do in every village and town, liberated from these criminal gangs. This is how many Ukrainians call them.



Sonja Vandenende with Henichesk resident. [Photo courtesy of Sonja Vandenende]

Numerous villagers in Henichesk told me that, as the Russians entered their town, they left everything intact. I heard this stated many times. No damage, no dead, no wounded. Most people, they said, are happy that the Russians were there.

The town of Henichesk was undamaged after the Russian army came. People were rushing on the streets to do their shopping or just talking and socializing on the street. The population was very diverse. It included ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars. They have churches and mosques.

According to residents, before the 2014 coup d'état,^[1] the people lived in harmony. Many Tatars originating from Crimea live in Henichesk. They have been allowed to go back to Crimea since Vladimir Putin became Russia's president.



Photo courtesy of Sonja Vandenende

Propaganda has been spread on the Wikipedia page of Henichesk, stating the following:

“On 24 February 2022, Henichesk was captured by the Russian Army in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was where the famous incident occurred where an old woman confronted Russian soldiers and said ‘Put sunflower seeds in your pockets so they grow on Ukraine soil when you die,’ as well as the death of [Vitalii Shakun](#) blowing up a bridge to stop their advance.”

Indeed, Shakun tried to blow up the bridge connecting Crimea with southern Ukraine. But they neglect to say that he was not from southern Ukraine, but from Lviv, in the western part of Ukraine. He was also a combat engineer with the Ukrainian Army. The damage his explosives caused to the bridge was actually minor and the bridge is still passable. It is a pity generally that boys (Shakun was born in 1996) should die for a false ideology, by blowing up a bridge without success.

Fact Versus Fiction

Western propaganda claims that the Russian army is besieging towns and that the population is starving. From my observation, the latter was not true in Henichesk or in the next town called Melitopol, which I also visited (to be discussed in a future article).^[2]

The Western countries are [pouring in weapons](#), most of them old Soviet weapons into Ukraine to shoot at the “evil Russians,” and imposing sanctions. Nothing positive is being done to help the long suffering people of Ukraine.



Photo courtesy of Sonja Vandenende



Waiting for humanitarian aid being distributed by the Russian army. [Photo courtesy of Sonja Vandenende]

Ukraine is left by itself to bleed.

Western countries have no interest in its economy or people, because Ukrainian people have many similarities with their “brother” countries—Russia and Belarus—and would naturally be aligned with them.

They share the same culture, language, and history of being invaded by the Nazis in World War II.

The West is only interested in benefits to their own economies.

Many buildings and factories are left to “rot” away and money for infrastructure was never there. Ukraine has been “bleeding” since 2014 and no one in the West has cared.

Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe and the largest producer of sunflower oil, while Russia is the largest producer of fertilizer necessary for growing crops. However, with the war, production will be affected and the whole world economy may suffer. But the leaders in the West, who helped provoke the war, do not care—the Ukrainian people to them are pawns in a larger geopolitical game that will cause potential disaster for all humanity.

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Notes

1. In February 2014, the U.S. government supported an insurrection against the legally elected government of Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian leader who spurned an IMF structural adjustment program that would have been terrible for Ukraine. Victoria Nuland famously was photographed handing out cookies to the demonstrators, many of whom worshipped World War II Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. For more details on these events, see Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2019).
2. These observations correlate with other eyewitness accounts. The Grayzone Project recently ran [an important article](#) pointing to misinformation about the destruction of the Mariupol theater, showing how the Azov Battalion was likely responsible for the destruction.

Featured image: Russian troops in Henichesk. [Photo courtesy of Sonja Vandenende]

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