

# Ukraine

## CONFLICT UPDATE

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team  
February 22, 4:00 pm ET

**Russian President Vladimir Putin set information conditions for a military operation against Ukraine at a moment of his choosing on February 22.** Russia will likely commence military operations to seize additional territory in eastern Ukraine within the coming days. ISW published its [assessment of Russia's likely immediate course of action](#) at 1:00 pm ET on February 22.

This daily synthetic product covers key events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine and replaces ISW's previous "[Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus](#)," which we maintained from November 12, 2021, through February 17, 2022. That document is no longer updated.

### Key Takeaways February 22

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as covering the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (provinces) and secured unrestricted formal parliamentary authorization to deploy Russian forces abroad on February 22, setting conditions for a further offensive against Ukraine.**
- **The US and its European allies defined Putin's recognition of the DNR and LNR as an invasion of Ukraine and imposed a first round of sanctions.**
- **Ukraine called for further sanctions on Russia and Western military support, stressing its readiness to resist further Russian aggression.**
- **Russia's allies declined to immediately recognize the DNR and LNR and Russia faced widespread international condemnation.**
- **The Russian stock market and Rouble plummeted as the Kremlin sought to reassure Russia's population that Russia can weather Western sanctions.**
- **The US redeployed existing forces in Europe to support Eastern European allies.**

### Key Events February 21, 5:00 pm ET – February 22, 4:00 pm ET

#### Military Events

**The Kremlin likely continued to deploy forces to Donbas but has not yet announced overt deployments on February 22.** Reuters reported locating five unmarked tanks in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) on February 22.<sup>1</sup> Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov did not confirm the presence of Russian troops in Donbas but emphasized that all developments in Donbas would be

oriented around saving the lives of Russian citizens from Ukrainian aggression.<sup>2</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry stated Russia may establish military bases in Donbas under cooperation treaties with DNR and LNR.<sup>3</sup>

**Russian social media users observed an estimated two battalions, likely of the Russian 4th Tank Division, heading toward a likely assembly area near Golovchino, Belgorod, Russia, on February 21.**<sup>4</sup> Russian 1st Tank Army elements in Golovchino are likely postured against the Velyka Pysarivka-Okhtyrka axis and could support efforts to envelop Kharkiv or cut Ukrainian forces in southern and eastern Ukraine off from Kyiv. Russian social media users additionally observed that Russian vehicle formations near Ukraine's borders are using at least three different tactical markings as of February 22; vehicles are marked in paint with the letter "Z," circular markings, and triangular markings. These markers could indicate different task forces within a larger formation or echelon.<sup>5</sup>

## **Russian Activity**

**Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as covering the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (provinces) and secured unrestricted formal parliamentary authorization to deploy Russian forces abroad on February 22.**<sup>6</sup> Considerable parts of those oblasts remain in Ukrainian control with the heavily fortified "line of contact" running through both and Putin will need to seize them militarily to make good on his recognition of the DNR and LNR claims to them. Russia's Federation Council, the Russian senate, additionally approved an authorization for Putin to use Russian forces abroad.<sup>7</sup> The authorization stipulates no restrictions on the size, timing, duration, or purpose of Russian military operations abroad. Putin's speech and the Federation Council's authorization today significantly increases the likelihood of a Russian military operation into unoccupied eastern Ukraine.

Putin falsely claimed Ukraine abandoned the Minsk II Accords, and replaced the accord's demands of Ukraine with his own:

1. Recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea;
2. Formally renounce all aspirations to join NATO;
3. Enter peaceful negotiations with the LNR and DNR; and
4. "Demilitarize," with no set demands other than claiming Russia must monitor Ukraine's "nuclear ambitions."

Putin's demands and recognition of DNR and LNR claims to Ukrainian-held territory is a soft declaration of war against Ukraine. Putin will likely continue to phase his operations—gauging Ukrainian and Western responses to his February 22 speech before initiating his next course of action. Putin will likely seize the remainder of the Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, probably through a mechanized invasion accompanied by an air and missile campaign across unoccupied Ukraine as ISW has previously forecasted. He can choose various pretexts for such an attack depending on the informational conditions he can set in the coming hours and days.

**Senior Kremlin officials justified Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) as necessary to protect Russian citizens and falsely claimed Ukrainian aggression on February 22.** The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) stated that Russia recognized the DNR and LNR because Kyiv abandoned the Minsk II Accords and sought to solve the conflict in Donbas with force.<sup>8</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the West of "Russophobia" in not recognizing the DNR and LNR.<sup>9</sup> State Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Leonid Slutsky stated that recognition is necessary for preserving the "Russian World," Russian language, and Russian culture.<sup>10</sup> Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry

Medvedev said that Russia had “no right” to “abandon” the 800,000 Russian citizens living in Donbas.<sup>11</sup> Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya stated that Kyiv deployed 120,000 troops near Donbas and insinuated that Western security assistance to Ukraine threatened the population in Donbas.<sup>12</sup>

**The Kremlin sought to downplay the likely negative effects of Western sanctions to the Russian population and international markets on February 22.** The Moscow Exchange Index fell by 10.5 percent and the ruble plunged to 80 against the US dollar after Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics on February 21.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Central Bank announced measures to support Russian financial markets amid these ruble and Russian stock depreciations on February 22.<sup>14</sup> Russian state wire *TASS* misreported that Russian state-owned Sberbank’s share value increased on February 22, when Sberbank’s share value actually decreased.<sup>15</sup> Senior Kremlin officials issued nationalist rhetoric claiming that Russia is impervious to sanctions on February 22. Deputy Chairman of the Russian National Security Council Dmitry Medvedev posted a vitriolic tweet warning that Europeans will pay 2,000 euros per 1,000 cubic meters of gas after German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz announced that Germany will halt the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.<sup>16</sup> *TASS* reported that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko stated Russia is “not afraid of anything,” including what *TASS* called “anti-Russian sanctions.”<sup>17</sup> The Kremlin likely seeks to mitigate the domestic discontent likely to follow the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia.

**The Russian Foreign Ministry announced on February 22 it will evacuate Russia’s foreign missions in Ukraine “in the very near future” due to claimed Russophobia and nationalist threats; the evacuation is likely primarily driven by Russian plans for further military operations.**<sup>18</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry also announced it will establish diplomatic relations with Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.<sup>19</sup> Social media users also reported noticing Russian consulate staff burning documents in both Odesa and Kyiv.<sup>20</sup>

## Proxy Activity

**The Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) reiterated claims they should rightfully control all territory in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and continued to accuse Ukrainian forces of attacking Donbas on February 22.** DNR and LNR authorities reiterated 2014 claims that their polities should control the entire territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, respectively, on February 22.<sup>21</sup> A senior LNR official demanded Ukrainian troops withdraw from Ukrainian government-controlled Luhansk Oblast on February 22.<sup>22</sup> DNR officials accused Ukrainian forces of firing multiple launch rocket systems against the DNR for the first time since 2018 on February 22.<sup>23</sup> The LNR accused Ukrainian forces of killing one LNR serviceman with artillery on February 22.<sup>24</sup> DNR officials accused Ukrainian saboteurs of conducting a car bomb terrorist attack that killed three DNR citizens on February 22.<sup>25</sup> DNR authorities ordered the conscription of all eligible DNR citizens born from 1995-2004 who are not yet in the DNR’s reserve and began organizing “special formations” for unspecified combat missions on February 22.<sup>26</sup>

The Kremlin continued evacuating women and children from Donbas on February 22 to create the false narrative of a Ukrainian “genocide” against Donbas. Russian authorities claim Russia has accepted over 90,000 refugees from Donbas and that approximately 30 Russian provinces plan to host refugees as of February 22.<sup>27</sup> Russia’s Prosecutor General’s Office announced it formed mobile reception centers in eight Russian regions for evacuated DNR and LNR residents.<sup>28</sup> Rostov Oblast has become a major refugee hub in particular; Rostov’s regional government announced that DNR and LNR citizens in Rostov are eligible for “forced migrant” status or temporary asylum.<sup>29</sup>

**Russian allies did not recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 22 after Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decree for immediate recognition.** The Belarusian Foreign Ministry stated it “respected and understood” the Kremlin’s decision to recognize the independence of DNR and LNR given rising Western provocations in Eastern Europe but did not recognize the proxy republics.<sup>30</sup> Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry asserted its neutrality and did not recognize the territories but noted that Kazakhstan is currently developing its official position.<sup>31</sup> Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad claimed that Syria wants to recognize the DNR and LNR “as early as possible” through the Syrian parliament to strengthen long-standing relations with the republics.<sup>32</sup> Abkhazian officials praised DNR and LNR leadership for obtaining international recognition.<sup>33</sup> Other Russian proxy republics will likely recognize the DNR and LNR in the coming days.

## **Belarusian Activity**

N/A

## **Ukrainian Activity**

**Ukrainian officials decried Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR), called for immediate sanctions on Russia, and called for calm in Ukraine on February 21-22.** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that DNR and LNR recognition may create a legal basis for further Russian aggression against Ukraine but maintained that Russia will not conduct a full-scale invasion.<sup>34</sup> Zelensky and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated that Putin’s decision required an immediate response from allies and sanctions.<sup>35</sup> Zelensky and the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry (MFA) sent a request to United Nations (UN) member states to hold immediate consultations with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum signatories.<sup>36</sup> Zelensky stated that the MFA sent him a request to sever diplomatic relations with Russia. Ukraine’s parliament called on the international community to block Nord Stream-2, to disconnect Russia from the SWIFT international banking system, and ban Russian technology and military imports.<sup>37</sup> Leaders of the Ukrainian ruling party Servant of the People told MPs not to leave Kyiv for the next two weeks.<sup>38</sup> The Ukrainian Armed Forces increased their readiness and stressed the need for calm. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov stated Ukraine might experience losses and fear but will be triumphant against Putin’s desire to reunite the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> The Ukrainian Defense Ministry refuted Kremlin-sponsored media claims that the Ukrainian Armed Forces shelled a Russian border checkpoint in the Rostov Oblast.<sup>40</sup>

## **US Activity**

**The White House expanded sanctions against Russia and the Donetsk (DNR) and Luhansk (LNR) People’s Republics on 22 February, altering the February 21 White House’s statement that Russia’s recognition of its proxies did not count as an invasion.**<sup>41</sup> US President Joe Biden stated that Russia’s aggression is the “beginning of an invasion of Ukraine” in a televised address on February 22. Biden announced new sanctions on two Russian financial institutions and confirmed the halt of Nord Stream 2’s certification process on February 22 --marking a shift from the White House’s February 21 stance on Russian deployments to Donbas.<sup>42</sup> US Secretary of State Antony Blinken echoed Biden’s comments and reaffirmed the US’ support for Ukraine in a call with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on February 21.<sup>43</sup> Blinken emphasized President Putin’s decision calls for a swift and firm response and emphasized the United States will take appropriate actions alongside its allies.<sup>44</sup> Biden also met with Kuleba before announcing sanctions against Russia in Washington on February 22.<sup>45</sup>

**US President Joe Biden authorized additional deployments of troops, jets, and helicopters in Europe to strengthen allies and defend NATO on February 22.**<sup>46</sup> A US defense official specified that the United States will move F-35 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, and approximately 800 troops already in Europe to the Baltic states, Romania, and Poland.

**CNN cited anonymous US officials saying that the US discussed options with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to travel from Kyiv to Lviv, in Western Ukraine, if Russia continues to escalate on February 21.**<sup>47</sup> The White House said that it is Zelensky's decision to relocate.

## **NATO and EU Activity**

**The European Union condemned Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) and Russian deployments to these areas on February 22.**<sup>48</sup> The EU stated that Russia's decision violates international law and agreements, including UN Security Council Resolution 2202 and the Minsk Agreements. The EU called on Russia to reverse its decision and uphold its commitments to work within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG). The EU said it will impose economic sanctions on Russia for violating Ukrainian sovereignty and warned of additional political and economic sanctions should Russia use the recognition as a pretext for taking further military action against Ukraine. EU states—including Germany, Poland, Italy, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—also issued individual statements condemning Russia's actions as a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity.<sup>49</sup> EU Foreign Ministers discussed specific sanctions against Russia, including Russian banks and individuals involved in recognizing the DNR and LNR, to limit Russia's access to European capital and financial markets on February 22.<sup>50</sup> No readouts have been published on this meeting as of 4:30 pm ET.

**The NATO-Ukraine Commission held an extraordinary meeting to address the security situation in Ukraine on February 22.**<sup>51</sup> NATO condemned Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) but said that diplomacy is still an option, echoing the European Union's response. NATO warned that Russian forces are "ready to strike" and that NATO will do whatever is necessary to defend Ukraine from Russian aggression.

**The G7 foreign ministers agreed on a sanctions package against Russia and reiterated support for Ukraine in a joint phone call on February 22.**<sup>52</sup> UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss announced that the foreign ministers agreed on a "strong package of coordinated escalatory sanctions" in response to Russia's violation of its "international commitments." The G7 is comprised of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Japan, Italy, and France. The foreign ministers did not issue further details as of February 22, 5:00 pm.

## **Other International Organization Activity**

**The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemned Russia's decision to recognize the Donetsk (DNR) and Luhansk (LNR) People's Republic and order troops to Ukraine during an emergency session on February 21.**<sup>53</sup> The US, UK, and Ukraine said that Russia's decision is a violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity and Ukrainian sovereignty and violated international norms and agreements.<sup>54</sup> Representatives from China and India called for all parties to exercise restraint and to seek mutually amicable solutions, breaking from other member states' full condemnation of Russia's actions.<sup>55</sup> Russian Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzya said that UNSC

member states should, "not make the situation worse" and that Russia would continue to concentrate on "how to avoid war."<sup>56</sup>

## **Individual Western Allies' Activity**

**German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced Germany will pause the authorization of Russia's Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline on February 22.**<sup>57</sup> Germany's temporary pause will harm the Kremlin's European energy policy. Scholz's decision is reversible if the EU assesses a greater energy need or diplomatically favorable conditions to continue with the project in the coming months, however. The US and UK supported Germany's decision to halt certification.<sup>58</sup> Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev threatened a severe increase in natural gas prices for Europe in response to Scholz's announcement.<sup>59</sup>

**The UK imposed a first round of sanctions against Russia on February 22.**<sup>60</sup> UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson sanctioned five Russian government-run banks (Rossiya, IS Bank, GenBank, Promsvyazbank, and Black Sea Bank), several oligarchs and businesspeople with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Russian Duma and Federation Council members who voted to recognize the DNR and LNR. UK officials reiterated their commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and warned that Russia may be laying the groundwork for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The UK will extend its standing territorial sanctions on Russian-occupied Crimea to the DNR and LNR. UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss threatened further sanctions on the Russian financial sector, Russian oligarchs, and businesses to prevent Russian access to sovereign debt on UK markets and isolate Russia from the global economy if the Kremlin continues with its escalation in Ukraine.<sup>lvi</sup> The UK called on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine, meet its obligations under the UN Charter, and fulfill the commitments it made under the Helsinki Final Act, the Minsk Agreement, and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.<sup>61</sup>

**Hungarian Defense Minister Tibor Benko announced that Hungary will deploy an unspecified number of troops to its eastern border with Ukraine on February 22.**<sup>62</sup> Benko said that Hungary must prepare for "every eventuality, including humanitarian tasks and border protection." He announced that Hungary will prepare for the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

**UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron condemned Russia's "blatant attack on freedom and democracy" in a February 22 call.**<sup>63</sup> Johnson and Macron agreed that they must continue to work together to target Russian individuals and entities who finance Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions. They reiterated that the UK and France will continue to defend European security against Russian aggression.

**Turkey rejected Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) and reiterated support for Ukraine but remains wary of imposing sanctions against Russia.** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a phone call on February 22. President Zelensky suggested including Turkey, Ukraine, and Germany in a summit with the United Nations Security Council's permanent members.<sup>64</sup> Erdogan emphasized that Russia's recognition of the DNR and LNR is unacceptable and stressed the need for diplomacy in a statement after the call.<sup>65</sup> The Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a similar statement on February 21 that classified Russia's actions as a clear violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity but refrained from calling for sanctions against Russia—a break from most NATO allies' sanctions-oriented approach.<sup>66</sup> Turkey still seeks to maintain close defense and diplomatic ties with Ukraine but likely wants avoid a possible retaliatory response from Russia and the spillover financial impact of Russia-targeted sanctions. Turkish Presidential Advisor Ibrahim Kalin recommended against



sanctions in an earlier statement on February 19.<sup>67</sup> Erdogan also cut short his three-day Africa trip and returned to Turkey on February 22—likely in response to recent Russian escalations in Ukraine.

## Other International Activity

**Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on all parties involved in the worsening Ukraine conflict to show restraint in a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on February 22.**<sup>68</sup> Yi's abstention from taking a hardline stance on the issue likely signals China's reluctance to harm its already deteriorating ties with the West nor its growing relationship with Moscow. Yi said the security concerns of any country must be respected and urged the involved parties to resolve differences through dialogue.<sup>69</sup> Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin reiterated Yi's statements during a briefing on February 22 and said China will contact all involved parties "based on the merits of the matter."<sup>70</sup> Chinese ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun echoed Yi and Wenbin's messaging in an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on February 22.<sup>71</sup> Jun said that all parties must exercise restraint and avoid any action that may fuel tensions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rosbalt dot ru/world/2022/02/22/1945351.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://tass dot ru/politika/13803459>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://iz dot ru/1295166/2022-02-22/v-mide-zaiavili-ob-otsutstvii-u-rf-planov-po-razmeshcheniiu-voennykh-baz-v-donbasse>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://twitter.com/HN\\_Schlottman/status/1496139716315557898](https://twitter.com/HN_Schlottman/status/1496139716315557898);

[https://twitter.com/Tar\\_Milus/status/1495962963378905092](https://twitter.com/Tar_Milus/status/1495962963378905092)

<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1496185134457966597>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZXtOnW\\_LmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZXtOnW_LmY).

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1496157854918709248?s=20&t=2bVf4Hs-3utAceCfEk1xzg>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1799883/](https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1799883/).

<sup>9</sup> [https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1799937/](https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1799937/).

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<sup>11</sup> <https://tass dot ru/politika/13798793>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13798171>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://lenta dot ru/news/2022/02/22/contingent/>.

<sup>13</sup> [https://tvrain dot ru/news/tsb\\_objavil\\_o\\_merah\\_podderzhki\\_rossijskih\\_bankov\\_iz\\_za\\_padenija\\_rynka-548320/?from=rss](https://tvrain dot ru/news/tsb_objavil_o_merah_podderzhki_rossijskih_bankov_iz_za_padenija_rynka-548320/?from=rss)

<sup>14</sup> [https://tvrain dot ru/news/tsb\\_objavil\\_o\\_merah\\_podderzhki\\_rossijskih\\_bankov\\_iz\\_za\\_padenija\\_rynka-548320/?from=rss](https://tvrain dot ru/news/tsb_objavil_o_merah_podderzhki_rossijskih_bankov_iz_za_padenija_rynka-548320/?from=rss)

<sup>15</sup> <https://tass dot ru/ekonomika/13806303>; <https://www.marketwatch.com/investing/stock/sbrcy>

<sup>16</sup> <https://tass dot ru/ekonomika/13807103>; <https://tass dot ru/ekonomika/13807103>;

<https://twitter.com/MedvedevRussia/status/1496107792331157508?ext=HHwWiMC9uYiHn8MpAAAA>

<sup>17</sup> <https://tass dot ru/politika/13805875>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www dot mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1800036/](https://www dot mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1800036/)

<sup>19</sup> [https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1800042/](https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1800042/)

<sup>20</sup> <https://twitter.com/michaelh992/status/1496192950463782915>;

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<sup>21</sup> <https://novosti dot dn.ua/news/320822-v-lnr-i-dnr-zayavili-chto-schitayut-svoej-territoriej-ves-donbass>

<sup>22</sup> <https://novosti dot dn.ua/news/320822-v-lnr-i-dnr-zayavili-chto-schitayut-svoej-territoriej-ves-donbass>

<sup>23</sup> <https://tass dot ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13806741>

<sup>24</sup> <https://tass dot ru/proisshestiya/13808279>

<sup>25</sup> <https://tass dot ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13799173>

<sup>26</sup> <https://tass dot ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13799343>; <https://iz dot ru/1295114/2022-02-22/pushilin-podpisal-ukaz-o-prizyve-na-sluzhbu-grazhdan-1995-2004-godov-rozhdeniia>

<sup>27</sup> <https://iz dot ru/1295162/2022-02-22/okolo-90-tys-bezhentcev-uzhe-pribyli-iz-donbassa-v-rossiiu>

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