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# Nemtsov Allies Plan to Publish Report on Russian Soldiers in Ukraine

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Boris Nemtsov

A report being prepared by supporters of slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov claims that Moscow has started discharging its soldiers from the army before sending them to Ukraine and then denying compensation to the families of men who were killed in order to cover up Russia's involvement in the conflict.

The report, which Nemtsov was working on before he was shot and killed in Moscow on Feb. 27, will be completed and published next month by his allies, the politician's friend and associate Ilya Yashin wrote on his Facebook page Monday.

"We have managed to communicate with people who were Nemtsov's sources," Yashin said. "They were very much afraid to speak while he was alive. The murder of Boris, as you understand, did not give them new courage, so they were reluctant to get in contact."

The sources for the report are representatives of the families of Russian soldiers who have been trying to receive compensation from the government for the deaths of their loved ones in Ukraine, Yashin said. The representatives had initially contacted Nemtsov in late January for help in pressuring the Defense Ministry into paying, according to the Facebook post.

According to these sources, Russia's involvement in Ukraine was marked by two "waves" of increased military casualties, Yashin said. The first surge in casualties came last summer, when scores of Russian troops moved across the border and helped secure an advance by separatist forces. The second wave came in January and February of this year, during the large-scale fighting that preceded the signing of the so-called Minsk II agreement on Feb. 11.

Throughout the conflict, Moscow has claimed that Russian fighters in Ukraine were "volunteers." Initial deployments were made up of troops listed as being on leave from their units, Yashin said.

Reports of Russian soldiers on leave fighting alongside Ukrainian separatists have also come from the rebels themselves. Igor Strelkov, a former commander of the separatists in eastern Ukraine, said in an interview with the nationalist Zavtra newspaper in November that heavily armed "vacationers" from Russia began arriving en masse in eastern Ukraine last August.

But, Yashin said, tactics changed this year when the military began discharging soldiers from the army before their deployment, with verbal promises that their families would still receive compensation if they were killed.

"The plan was to conceal this way the involvement of our army in military action, presenting soldiers as volunteers," Yashin said.

"Military unit commanders gave their word to guarantee that in case of an injury or death, their relatives would receive monetary compensation, comparable to the sums that had been paid out last summer," he said. "In practice, relatives received no compensation this time."

At least 70 Russian soldiers were killed in Ukraine during the second "wave" early this year, according to estimates cited by Yashin.

The preparation of the report is "approaching the finish line," and the findings will be published "already in April," Yashin said.

Nemtsov — the most prominent politician killed since Russia's President Vladimir Putin came to power 15 years ago — had titled the report: "Putin. War," according to Yashin.

The preparation of the document was clouded by fears of possible government interference even before the politician's death.

Worried that his offices were bugged by security services, Nemtsov summarized his findings to aides by scribbling notes.

"Paratroopers from Ivanovo got in touch with me: 17 killed, no money paid, but they are afraid to speak so far," a handwritten note said, according to a photocopy posted by Yashin.

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