

Ukraine's Far Right and Moscow: Cooperation of Ukrainian Ultra-Nationalists with Russian and Pro-Kremlin Actors

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Summary

This paper details, contextualizes and explains the – often paradoxical – contacts to Russian and Russia-related actors of such post-Soviet Ukrainian far-right parties as “Svoboda” (Freedom), “Azov” and “Bratstvo” (Brotherhood), as well as of some groups from Ukraine's ultra-nationalist uncivil society. The analysis covers an array Ukrainian far right connections to Moscow-related Ukrainian oligarchs, the pro-Russian Yanukovych regime of 2010-2014, and Kremlin-related actors in Russia as well as elsewhere. It starts with a survey of Ukrainian ultra-nationalist parties, and then details contacts of Ukrainian right-wing extremists with various Russian ultra-nationalist groups, pro-Russian actors in Ukraine, Russia-connected Ukrainian oligarchs, as well as with Kremlin-related actors in Russia. It also briefly deals with cooperation of Ukraine's far-right with non-Russian actors – above all, in the EU – who have voiced pro-Putinist views or have cooperated with Russia. This largely descriptive study uses primary and secondary sources in Ukrainian, Russian, English and German, including press reports, party documents, interviews, earlier analyses of these topics, and investigations by such agencies as “Bellingcat” and “FOIA Research.” The paper's introduction and conclusions provide some historical contextualization and political interpretation of this paradoxical aspect in the evolution of the Ukrainian far-right.

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1. Introduction: The Purposes of this Study

The purpose of this study is to outline the recent history and possible causes of contacts between two, in principal, antagonistic and antinomic groups: Ukrainian ultra-nationalist groups, on the one side, and Russian or pro-Kremlin actors, associations and institutions, on the other.¹ The primary dividing line and crux of the fundamental conflict between – both, mainstream and radical – Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms lies in the mostly imperial and partly messianic character of Russian nationalist thought. The more general Russian pathology of believing that the current Russian state and population are too small becomes particularly virulent with regard to the territory and people of Ukraine. There is a widespread idea, in Russia's elite and population, that Ukraine – despite having its own state, history, language, culture and traditions – should belong to the Russian Federation's special sphere of influence as well as to Moscow-dominated organizations. Many in Russia, in fact, think that there is no properly developed and united Ukrainian nation and that thus Ukraine or, at least, significant parts of it should simply be merged into Russia. Only some select factions within radical Russian nationalism fully accept and properly respect the uniqueness, separateness and distinctiveness of the Ukrainian nation vis-à-vis the Russian.

A secondary dividing line that separates sections within and between different camps of Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms is their stance towards Europe and West. Whereas most Ukrainian nationalists (and even some of the more radical ones) are decidedly pro-European. Most of Ukrainian moderate nationalism is even pro-Western. In contrast, most Russian nationalists tend to be anti-Western (especially, anti-American), and partly even anti-European. This division, to be sure, is not clear-cut. There are strands within both moderate and radical Russian nationalism – including

¹ Larger surveys on post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism and far right politics include, in chronological order: Volodymyr Kulyk, *Ukrains'kyj natsionalizm u nezalezhniy Ukrayini* (Kyiv: Tsentr doslidzhen' natsional'noi bezpeky NAUKMA, 1999); Taras Kuzio, *Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives on Nationalism: New Directions in Cross-Cultural and Post-Communist Studies* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2007); "Ukrainskie pravye ekstremisty vo vremia i posle vosstaniia 2013-2014 gg." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2013, pp. 103-206; Andreas Umland (ed.), "Post-Soviet Ukrainian Right-Wing Extremism." *Russian Politics & Law*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2013, pp. 3–95; Andreas Umland and Oleksandr Zaitsev (eds.), "The Ukrainian Radical Right in Past and Present: Studies in Ideology, Memory and Politics." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 48, nos. 2–3, 2015, pp. 169–271; Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, *Fenomen "Svobody:" Vybortsyi radykal'nykh natsionalistiv u dzerkali sotsiolohii* (Kyiv: KMIS/Vaad, 2016); V'iacheslav Likhachov [Likhachev], *Vid Maidanu pravoruch: Revoliutsiia, viyna i ul'trapravi v Ukrayini (2013–2016 roky)* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2020).

parts of Russian racism – that see Russia as belonging in one way or another to the European or even Western culture often seen as a “Nordic” or “White” civilization. Sometimes these Russian nationalists are, as illustrated below, relatively pro-Ukrainian as they understand the Ukrainian nation to be a legitimate and independent participant in the international concert of, for instance, “Aryan” nations.

The majority of Russian nationalists, however, see Russia as a distinct Orthodox or/and Eurasian civilization that is separate from, or even opposite to, the West. In contrast, Ukrainian nationalists are mostly oriented towards the West rather than toward Ukraine’s eastern neighbor Russia or other countries to the East. This creates additional tension between Russian and Ukrainian nationalists. All integral nationalisms – including Russia’s and Ukraine’s – are more or less ethno-centric, anti-individualistic, traditionalist, patriarchal and illiberal. They thus tend to be similarly structured and have potential points of agreement. Yet Russian and Ukrainian nationalist world-views are different not only in their ideational substance. They are also often – though not always – distinct in their larger geopolitical outlook.

No wonder thus that there is much demonstrative animosity between Russian and Ukrainian nationalists. In spite of apparently fundamental impossibility of their cooperation, there have been contacts, however, between certain Ukrainian radical right groups and selected Russian as well as non-Russian pro-Kremlin actors. Some, moreover, go back as long as to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. In this paper, we illustrate different forms, motivations and spectra of the paradoxical interaction of these presumably opposite poles in East European politics. We list not only the relevant facts of their cooperation, but also try to explain why and how such counter-intuitive cooperation became possible, and was partially continued even after the Revolution of Dignity as well as start of Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. But first we introduce the spectrum of Ukrainian far right groups today.

2. The Ukrainian Far-Right Scenery Since 1991

2.1. Ukrainian Far-Right Political Parties

UNA-UNSO

The political party Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self-Defense, known by its Ukrainian acronym UNA-UNSO, is the oldest such larger grouping in post-Soviet Ukraine. It had its origins in 1990s when it grew out of the Ukrainian National Union of Ukrainian Nationalists (UNS).² Initially it was an illegal paramilitary formation of nationalist volunteers who, for instance, took part in the protection of the Lithuanian Parliament when Soviet army units were storming the Vilnius TV tower during the tumultuous events of 1991.³ A similar group from the ranks of the UNS was involved in counteracting the attempted August Putsch in Moscow in 1991.⁴ In the same August 1991, the emerging Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNSO) resisted pro-Soviet forces in Kyiv and protected meetings of the large Ukrainian independence movement.

Following Ukraine's Declaration of Independence, in September 1991, nationalists of the UNS and other similar organizations merged into – what became called – the Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA).⁵ The first notable Ukrainian nationalists organization, UNA-UNSO, came then to include two wings – a political party (UNA) and a semi-official para-military unit for “direct action” (UNSO).⁶ The UNSO was, among others, engaged in countering separatist and ethnic minority organizations and activities in Ukraine throughout the 1990s.

In 1991, for instance, the UNA-UNSO became notorious for assaulting the parliamentary Deputy of the Ukrainian SSR Honcharov,⁷ dispersing the Romanian Congress in the city of Chernivtsi,⁸ and

² Evhen Vasyl'chuk, “Ideolohichni doktryny ukrains’kykh pravoekstremists’kykh ob’ednan’ u konteksti postmodernistskoho dyskursu (na prykladi UNA-UNSO).” *Visnyk Natsional’noho tekhnichnogo universytetu Ukrayiny “Kyiv’s’kyj politekhnichnyy instytut”: Politolohiia. Sotsiolohiia. Pravo*, no. 3, 2013, pp. 16-20.

³ “Prezydent Lytvyn nahorodiv hrupu ukrayintsviv – zakhysnykiv Vil’niusa 1991 roku. Foto.” *Novynarnia*, 11 January 2020, <https://novynarnia.com/2020/01/11/prezident-litvi-nagorodiv-grupu-ukrayintsviv-zahisnikiv-vilnyusa-1991-roku-foto/>.

⁴ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.” *UNA-UNSO*, 17 April 2020, <http://una-unso.com/styslyi-kurs-una-unso>.

⁵ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.”

⁶ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.”

⁷ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.”

⁸ “Zaria nezalezhnosti. Kak v 90-ye ukrainskiye natsionalisty sozdali partiyu, tserkov’ i shturmovyye otryady.” *Lenta.ru*, 20 October 2018, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2018/10/22/ukrideology7/>

attacking pro-Russian rallies in Odesa.⁹ Later in the 1990s, the UNSO became known for participating in armed confrontations outside Ukraine, first in the Transnistria separation war,¹⁰ then Abkhazian conflict, and later in First Chechen war.¹¹ Some of UNSO para-militaries took part in the Bosnian conflict on the side of ethnic Croatians.¹²

During the Transnistrian conflict of the early 1990s, the UNSO's official reason for engagement was its protection of the Ukrainian community in Transnistria. It is curious, however, that the two UNSO para-military units participating in it thereby ended up fighting on the side of the pro-Russian separatists against the Moldovan army. The Ukrainian ultra-nationalists thus functioned – whether intentionally or not – as situational allies to Moscow-related forces in Transnistria, and even cooperated with the 14th USSR army that became a part of the Russian Federation's armed forces in late 1991.¹³ This episode was one of the earliest instances of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists cooperating with a Russian neo-imperialist project.

The UNA-UNSO's stance in the civil war in Moldova is even more odd in view of the fact that the opposite was the case at about the same time in Georgia. Here, the UNA-UNSO supported Tbilisi within the Abkhazian conflict, and fought on the Georgian side against pro-Russian Abkhaz separatists. For instance, on 15th July 1993, an UNSO irregular armed group called "Argo" joined the battle against Russian troops near the village Starushkino. This seems to have been the first armed clash on a battlefield between Ukrainian para-military and Russian regular forces, of the post-Soviet period. Oddly, it happened at a time when other activists of the UNSO were in Transnistria officially supporting the Ukrainian ethnic community, but thereby also helping pro-Russian separatism.¹⁴

⁹ "Zaria nezalezhnosti. Kak v 90-ye ukrainskiye natsionalisty sozdali partiyu, tserkov' i shturmovyye otryady."

¹⁰ Stanislav Secrieru. "Come and Go: Trajectories of Foreign Fighters in and out of Moldova." *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series - E: Human and Societal Dynamics*, 2016, pp. 108-124.

¹¹ Vasilii Babenko, "Pravyi radikalizm v gosudarstvennoi politike sovremennoi Ukrayny." in: *Pravyi radikalizm v Vostochnoi Evrope* (Moscow: RAN, 2018), pp. 134-167.

¹² Raymond C. Finch, "The Strange Case of Russian Peacekeeping Operations in the Near Abroad 1992-1994." *III U.S. Army, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth*, 1996.

¹³ Secrieru. "Come and Go: Trajectories of Foreign Fighters in and out of Moldova."

¹⁴ Eduard Baidaus, "Portraying heroes and villains: Moldovan and Transnistrian print media during the 1992 war in the Dniester Valley." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 60, nos. 3-4, 2018, pp. 497–528.

The UNSO also participated in the First Chechen War of 1994-1996, on the side of the anti-Moscow separatists, by sending a so-called “Delegation for diplomacy protection” to Chechnia.¹⁵ The first such “delegation” was headed by one of the founders of the movement, then Ukrainian Member of Parliament Yuriy Tym.¹⁶ The future leader of the UNA-UNSO and later founder of the *Bratstvo* micro-party Dmytro Korchyns’kyy – on whom more below – also took part in this so-called “delegation.”¹⁷

The UNO-UNSO presents its ideology to be a “program of civil nationalism” where the members of the nation are identified by their affiliation with a particular state. But in its practice and rhetoric, the UNA-UNSO followed the more ethno-centric traditions of the radical Stepan Bandera wing the war-time Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its paramilitary arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrains’ka povstans’ka armiya* - UPA), known under the acronym OUN-UPA.¹⁸ The organization’s first head was Yurii Shukhevych - the son of Roman Shukhevych, the one-time legendary leader of the UPA who fell in his fight against the Soviet regime.¹⁹ The leaders of the UNSO claimed that they had borrowed from the military traditions of the UPA. Some UNSO participants eventually became members of radical parties with more explicitly ethno-nationalist ideologies.

The All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” (Freedom)

The party that later became *Svoboda* was established on 13th October 1991 in L’viv under the name Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). It was founded by representatives of the Afghanistan Veterans Organization, youth organization “Spadshchyna” (Heritage) chaired by Andriy Parubiy (speaker of Ukraine’s parliament in 2016-2019), Student Brotherhood of Lviv led by Oleh Tiahnybok, as well as “Varta Ruhu” (Movement’s Guard) under the leadership of Yaroslav Andrushkiv and Yuri Kryvoruchko.²⁰ In 2004, the SNPU was renamed into All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” (Freedom) under Tiahnybok’s leadership. The party had usually performed miserably in national parliamentary

¹⁵ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.”

¹⁶ “Short history of UNA-UNSO.”

¹⁷ Ewa Wolska-Liśkiewicz, “Czeczeński ślad na Ukrainie.” *Bezpieczeństwo: Teoria i Praktyka*, no. 3, 2014, pp. 39-46.

¹⁸ Vasyl’chuk, “Ideolohichni dokryny ukrains’kykh pravekstremists’kykh ob’ednan’ u konteksti postmodernistskoho dyskursu (na prykladi UNA-UNSO).”

¹⁹ “Shukhevych Yuriy Bohdan Romanovych.” CHESNO PolitHub, 1 January 2020, <https://www.chesno.org/politician/17209/>.

²⁰ “History of All-Ukrainian Union ‘SVOBODA’.” *All-Ukrainian Union ‘SVOBODA’ official site*, 1 April 2020, <https://svoboda.org.ua/party/history/>.

elections, until, in October 2012, it passed into the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) with 10.44% of the votes in the proportional part of the voting, on which more below. This was then and remains until today the, by far and away, best national electoral result of the far-right in post-Soviet Ukraine's history.²¹

When it was still called SNPU, the party was mainly engaged in educational and cultural activities in Western Ukraine during the 1990s and early 2000s. It picketed the Verkhovna Rada building in Kyiv, mainly on language and culture issues. For the then still non-canonical Kyiv Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the SNPU provided security guards.²² Like many other Ukrainian far-right parties of that time, the SNPU had its own para-military group, the "Patriot of Ukraine," which, however, was officially disbanded when the SNPU was renamed into *Svoboda* and rebranded its public image in the mid-2000s.

Svoboda started to rise to national prominence after, in spring 2010, the pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovych had won the presidential elections. *Svoboda* became the most visible Ukrainian nationalist grouping conducting various public actions against the ruling Party of Regions, and in support of Ukrainian language as well as culture. It was one of the main organizers of protests against the so-called Kivalov-Kolesnichenko language law in 2012.²³ Subsequently, Tiahnybok became one of the leaders of Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014.²⁴

Azov and the National Corps

After the Euromaidan revolution, the Azov movement (named after the Sea of Azov at which the volunteer battalion out of which it has grown was stationed) became a prominent new right-wing grouping in Ukraine – even rivalling the *Svoboda* party in some regards. According to recent estimates, there are over 10,000 active members of the various organizations, departments, and

²¹ Sergei Vasylchenko, "'Svoboda' protiv vsekh: kratkii obzor rezul'tatov radikal'nykh pravykh na vyborakh 1994-2012." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2013, pp. 64-92.

²² Vasylchenko, "'Svoboda' protiv vsekh."

²³ "Istoriia kievskikh 'Maidanov' – ot Revoliutsii na granite do lazykovogo maidana." *Segodnya.ua*, 2020, <https://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/istoriya-kievskih-maydanov-ot-revoliutsii-na-granite-do-yazykovogo-maydana-484705.html>

²⁴ Vladimir Ishchenko, "Uchastie kraine pravykh v protestnykh sobytiakh Maidana: Popytka sistematicheskogo analiza." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2016, pp. 103-127.

arms of the movement.²⁵ Azov has its roots in a minuscule, initially Russian-speaking Kharkiv groupuscule called “Patriot of Ukraine” that had emerged out of the SNPU’s above-mentioned paramilitary group of the same name disbanded in 2004. The leader of the groupuscule Andriy Biletskyi as well as some other members of the “Patriot of Ukraine” were, in 2011-2012, imprisoned for various reasons, including robbery, beatings and assaults to murder, but they were released after the toppling and escape of Viktor Yanukovych.²⁶

In spring 2014, Biletskyi and his followers organized, in Eastern Ukraine, small paramilitary units called “little black men” – named so with obvious reference to the “little green men,” as the Russian forces without identification marks in Crimea in March 2014 had been called.²⁷ As the confrontation with pro-Russian groups in the Donets Basin (Donbas) and Kharkiv grew, Biletskyi’s originally minor grouping developed rapidly.²⁸ In May 2014, it formed the semi-regular volunteer battalion “Azov,” under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.²⁹ In summer 2014, the Azov battalion played a crucial role in the liberation of Mariupol from Russia-led separatists.³⁰

By autumn 2014, the battalion had become a large professional military unit, and was transformed into the fully regular Regiment “Azov” of the National Guard under the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine.³¹ It has since been considered to be one of Ukraine’s most capable armed formations. The regiment’s commanders claim that it is now operating according to NATO standards which, in

²⁵ Ivan Gomza and Johann Zajaczkowski, “Black Sun Rising: Political Opportunity Structure Perceptions and Institutionalization of the Azov Movement in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine.” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2019, pp. 774-800.

²⁶ “Velyke interv’yu. Komandyr Natsional’nykh druzhyn, Ihor Mykhaylenko druh Cherkas.” *Ndrugua.org*, 23 June 2019 <https://ndrugua.org/articles/velike-intervyu-komandyr-nacionalny/>

²⁷ “Ne bachu zhodnogo parostka do stvorennya armii novoho zrazka”, *Gazeta.ua*, 10 June 2015, https://gazeta.ua/articles/people-and-things-journal/_ne-bachu-zhodnogo-parostka-do-stvorennya-armiyyi-novogo-zrazka/625937; “‘Little green men’ or ‘Russian invaders?’” *BBC*, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

²⁸ “Iz budivli ‘Prosvity’ na vul. Rymars’kii, de stalasia perestrilka, pochaly vykhodyty lyudy.” *112.ua*, 15 March 2014, <https://ua.112.ua/kryminal/iz-budivli-prosviti-na-vul-rimarskiy-de-stalasya-perestrilka-pochali-vihoditi-lyudi-34519.html>

²⁹ “Komandyr polku ‘Azov’ Andrii Bilets’kyi: Ti, kto prolyvaye krov za Ukrayinu, povynni maty svii holos u vladu.” *UNIAN*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/994779-komandir-polku-azov-andriy-biletskiy-ti-ho-prolivae-krov-za-ukrajinu-povinni-mati-sviy-golos-u-vladi.html>

³⁰ “Komandyr polku ‘Azov’ Andrii Bilets’kyi: Ti, kto prolyvaye krov za Ukrayinu, povynni maty svii holos u vladu.” *UNIAN*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/994779-komandir-polku-azov-andriy-biletskiy-ti-ho-prolivae-krov-za-ukrajinu-povinni-mati-sviy-golos-u-vladi.html>

³¹ “‘Azov’ rozshyryvsia do polku i naholoshuye, shcho na vybory ne ide.” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 18 September 2014, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/09/18/7038164/>

Ukraine's public discourse, are considered to be an exceptional indicator of quality.³² In winter 2015, veterans and volunteers of the regiment created the Azov Civil Corps, and thereby started the extension of Azov into a multi-faceted social movement.³³ In 2016, Biletskyi announced the foundation of the political party "National Corps" (NC) based on veterans of Azov's Civil Corps, Battalion, and Regiment.³⁴

In January 2018, the public march of another offspring of the Azov movement, the unarmed vigilante organization "National Fellowship" (*Natsional'nyi druzhyny*), became a media sensation.³⁵ There are, moreover, other sub-organizations of the overall *Azov movement*.³⁶ They include such initiatives as the Engineering Corps, Cossack House (*Kozats'kyy dim*), *Plomin* (Flame) Literary Club, group "Order," Youth Corps, Intermarium Support Group, and others.³⁷ While being partly independent, all of these subunits share common stances on the majority political issues, closely cooperate with each other, and accept Bilets'kyi as the unofficial leader of the entire movement. As a result, Azov is now a multi-dimensional socio-political phenomenon that is developing in a variety of directions.

Though being initially at a distance from other Ukrainian far right groups, Azov has, since 2016, started to cooperate increasingly closely with other ultra-nationalist groups. In spring 2019, the National Corps joined an electoral alliance of several Ukrainian far-right parties under the organizational umbrella of *Svoboda* for the July 2019 snap parliamentary elections. The unified list, however, received only 2.15% in the proportional part of the elections, and thus missed to pass the 5% barrier. The far-right coalition did also not win any seats in its majoritarian part, and thus failed to secure any official mandates in Ukraine 9th Verkhovna Rada. While the current Ukrainian parliament contains a number of members who have described themselves as "nationalists," only

³² "Bilets'kyi: Dlia novoho prezydenta armiia – tema dla harnoho posta u Feisbutsi." *ZIK.ua*, 12 September 2019,

https://zik.ua/news/2019/09/12/biletskyy_dlya_novogo_prezydenta_armiya__tema_dlya_garnogo_posta_u_feysbutsi_1645903

³³ Gomza and Zajaczkowski, "Black Sun Rising."

³⁴ "Chleny TSK 'Azov' ta veterany odnoimennoho polku stvoryly politychnu partiyu 'Natsional'nyi korpus'." *Interfax.com.ua*, 14 October 2016, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/376701.html>

³⁵ "'Natsional'ni druzhyny: dopomoha pravookhorontsiam chyi sylovyi 'arhument' dla politykiv?' *Radio Svoboda*, 30 Januray 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29008242.html>.

³⁶ "Azovs'kyi rukh." *Nackor.org*, 8 December 2015, <https://nackor.org/ukr/azovskoe-dvizhenie>.

³⁷ Gomza and Zajaczkowski, "Black Sun Rising."

one of the 423 MPs is informally aligned to the political organizations of the now more or less unified Ukraine's far right.

At the same time, the Azov movement remains an ideologically and institutionally specific phenomenon within the ultra-nationalist political spectrum, and contains organizations that profess views partly untypical of the traditional Ukrainian far-right.³⁸ This includes a less pronounced Orthodox outlook and an interest in paganism rather than Christianity.³⁹ The Azov movement has conducted numerous semi-political street actions in major cities of Ukraine, and in smaller towns, such as rallies against the closure of a university in Zhovty Vody.⁴⁰ Among its major mobilizing issues have been various ecological problems across Ukraine.⁴¹ There is a widespread belief that Azov is closely tied to the Minister for Internal Affairs of Ukraine Arsen Avakov, and some evidence of connections between the Azov-dominated Veterans Movement of Ukraine to the Ministry of Veterans Affair.⁴² Nevertheless, the movement's profile as that of an opposition force engaged in clashes with the police and mobilizing against the government.⁴³

The Azov Battalion/Regiment has been a Ukrainian volunteer organization that has been particularly active in recruiting foreigners for fighting in the East of Ukraine.⁴⁴ Among all the foreign fighters present in the Donbas, there may have been as many as 3,000 Russian citizens who have temporarily taken part in the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of, and fighting for, Ukraine.⁴⁵ A significant part

³⁸ "Olena Semenyaka: 'Cherez liniyu' – dialoh Ernsta Yungera ta Martina Haydeggera pro evropeis'kyi nihilizm." *Plomin.club*, 11 May 2018, <https://plomin.club/through-the-line-ernst-junger-and-martin-heideggers-dialogue-on-european-nihilism/>.

³⁹ "Chy pokhovaye Bilets'kyi z 'Azovom' Veimars'ku Ukrainu?" *Depo.ua*, June 2016, <https://www.depo.ua/ukr/politics/chi-pohovae-biletskiy-z-azovom-veymarsku-ukrainu--04062016200000>.

⁴⁰ "Natsional'nyi Korpus prodovzhuye borot'bu za mozhlyvist' studentiv Zhovtykh Vod navchatysia u ridnomu misti!" *Nationalcorps.org*, 20 June 2017, <https://nationalcorps.org/naconalnij-korpus-prodovzhu-borotbu-za-mozhlivst-studentv-zhovtih-vod-navchatisja-u-ridnomu-msti/>.

⁴¹ "Rennovation of Khortcsa." *Youtube*, 22 April 2018, <https://youtu.be/BVH4axKZIJU>.

⁴² "Ukraine's Ministry of Veterans Affairs Embraced the Far Right – With Consequences to the U.S." *Bellingcat*, 11 November 2019, www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/11/11/ukraines-ministry-of-veterans-affairs-embraced-the-far-right-with-consequences-to-the-u-s/

⁴³ "Avakov khoche zalyshytys' hlavoyu MVS - Cherenenko pro napad na Poroshenka." *Prm.ua*, 19 July 2019, <https://prm.ua/avakov-hoche-zalishitis-glavoyu-mvs-cherenenko-pro-napad-na-poroshenka/>

⁴⁴ Michael Colborne and Oleksii Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home." *Bellingcat*, 4 September 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/09/04/the-hardcore-russian-neo-nazi-group-that-calls-ukraine-home/>.

⁴⁵ Kacper Rekawek, "Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine." *Counter Extremism Project*, April 2020, p. 7, <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/new-cep-report-career-break-or-new-career-extremist-foreign-fighters-ukraine>.

of these have served and some still are serving with the Azov Regiment. As detailed below, a number of these Russians are also actively involved in the development of the Azov's civil and political structures.⁴⁶

“Pravyi sektor” (Right Sector, PS)

The Right Sector was formed during Euromaidan out of several political and para-military far-right groups in late 2013 – early 2014. For about half a year, until approximately mid-2014, it constituted a serious competitor for the older *Svoboda* party.⁴⁷ The Right Sector became famous, among others, during the events of January-February 2014 in Kyiv, when then Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh took public responsibility for clashes with governmental forces on the Hrushevskoho Street – a key escalation in the development in the protest.⁴⁸ However, the actual contribution of the far right to these and other episodes in the escalation of the protest is a contested issue.⁴⁹

With the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine, the Right Sector formed a so-called Volunteer Ukrainian Corps (*Dobrovolchyy ukrains’kyy korpus* – DUK), a small irregular military unit for which the term “corps” is a hyperbolical. In 2015, the Right Sector claimed to have more than 30,000 participants which is seemingly a vast exaggeration.⁵⁰ In reality, the overall number of active members of the fickle and decentralized movement is in the hundreds. In 2014, the then popular brand name “Right Sector” had functioned as label for a number of small groupings which were

⁴⁶ Colborne and Kuzmenko, “The ‘Hardcore’ Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home.”

⁴⁷ “Pravyi sektor: boevoi otriad Evromaidana.” BBC Ukraine, 14 January 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/01/140120_ru_s_right_sector.shtml.

⁴⁸ “5 rokiv pislia Maidanu: khronika narodnoho povstannia.” Deutsche Welle, 20 November 2019.

⁴⁹ William Jay Risch, “What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us about the Maidan.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2015, pp. 137–144; Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Ukrainian Far Right and the Ukrainian Revolution.” In: Irina Vainovski-Mihai, ed., *N.E.C. Black Sea Link Program Yearbook 2014-2015* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2015), pp. 216-237; Kostiantyn Fedorenko, “The Two Movements: Liberals and Nationalists during Euromaidan.” *Ideology and Politics*, vol. 1, no. 5, 2015, pp. 4-35; Ishchenko, “Uchastiye kraine pravykh v protestnykh sobytiyakh Maidana: Popytka sistematiceskogo analiza;” V'yacheslav Likhachov [Likhachev], “Chomu perebil'shennia roli ul'trapravykh v ukrains'kii revoliutsii ne mensh nebezpechne nizh prymenshennia.” Zaborona, 3 May 2018, <https://zaborona.com/likhachov-column/>.

⁵⁰ “Pravyi sektor: skil’ky batal’oniv u larosha?” BBC Ukraine, 15 July 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/07/150714_right_sector_now_vc.

emerging across Ukraine and had partly little to do with the initial Right Sector with its headquarters in Kyiv.

In 2015, moreover, the organization split, when its popular leader Yarosh resigned as the head of the Right Sector, and founded his own micro-group called “Statist Initiative of Yarosh.” The Right Sector remained as a registered party and has operated since in close cooperation with *Svoboda*, the National Corps and other right-wing structures.⁵¹ Over the years, the Right Sector was discredited by a number of local events such as a clash at Mukachevo in 2015 when several members of its local branch were involved in a shoot-out with local criminal authorities.⁵² Earlier, in March 2014, the former leader of the Rivne Right Sector branch in Western Ukraine and convicted criminal, “Sashko Bilyy” (alias Oleksandr Muzychko) had been shot in a confrontation with the police. In the 1990s, “Bilyy” had been among the para-military UNSO volunteers in Chechnya, and been wanted in Russia since.

In sum, Ukraine has an organizationally developed, yet politically weak spectrum of far-right parties. The seeds Ukraine’s far-right party spectrum started to emerge already in the late 1980s and have since given birth to an array of different groupings and alliances. However, its electoral performance in national polls has remained largely abysmal. Only, in the 2012 Ukrainian parliamentary elections did *Svoboda* perform relatively well, and this happened under special circumstance – one which more below.

⁵¹ “Manifest ukrayins’kykh natsionalistiv ob’ednav ‘Natsional’nyi korpus’, ‘Svobodu’ ta ‘Pravyi sektor.’” *Hromadske*, 16 March 2017, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/lidery-natsionalistychnykh-partii-pidpysaly-manifest-pro-spilnu-diialnist>

⁵² “Mukachivs’kyi trykutnyk: Kontrabanda, Pravyi sektor ta zakliati druzi.” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 13 July 2015, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2015/07/13/7074291/>.

Table 1. Vote shares of major Ukrainian far right parties in the presidential and parliamentary elections' proportional parts in 1998-2019 (in percent; shaded rows: presidential elections).⁵³

Party or alliance	Bloc “Natsionalnyy front” [National Front] (KUN, UKRP & URP) / URP / KUN	UNA / Pravyi sektor [Right Sector]	Bloc “Menshe sliv” [Fewer Words] (VPO-DSU & SNPU) / VOS
National election			
1998 (parliamentary)	2.71 (NF)	0.39 (UNA)	0.16 (MS)
1999 (presidential)			
2002 (parliamentary)		0.04 (UNA)	
2004 (presidential)	0.02 (Kozak, OUN)	0.17 (Korchyns'kyy)	
2006 (parliamentary)		0.06 (UNA)	0.36 (VOS)
2007 (parliamentary)			0.76 (VOS)
2010 (presidential)			1.43 (Tiahnybok)
2012 (parliamentary)		0.08 (UNA-UNSO)	10.44 (VOS)
2014 (presidential)		0.70 (Iarosh)*	1.16 (Tiahnybok)
2014 (parliamentary)	0.05 (KUN)	1.81 (PS)	4.71 (VOS)
2019 (presidential)			1.62 (Koshulyns'kyy)
2019 (parliamentary)			2.15 (VOS)**

* In the 2014 presidential election, Dmytro Iarosh was formally running as an independent candidate, yet he was publicly known as the leader of the PS – *Pravyy sektor*.

** In fact, the 2019 Svoboda list was a unified bloc of most of the relevant Ukrainian far right political parties, but it was officially registered as a list only of the VOS.

Abbreviations: KUN – *Konhres ukrains'kykh natsionalistiv* [Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists], UKRP – *Ukrains'ka konservatyvna respublikans'ka partiia* [Ukrainian Conservative Republican party], URP – *Ukrains'ka respublikans'ka partiia* [Ukrainian Republican Party], VPO-DSU – *Vseukrainske politychne ob'ednannia “Derzhavna samostiynist’ Ukrayiny”* [All-Ukrainian Political Union “State Independence of Ukraine”], SNPU – *Sotsial-natsionalna partiia Ukrayiny* [Social-National Party of Ukraine], OUN – *Orhanizatsiia ukrainskykh natsionalistiv* [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists], UNA – *Ukrains'ka natsionalna assemblya* [Ukrainian National Assembly], UNSO – *Ukrains'ka narodna samooborona* [Ukrainian National Self-Defense], VOS – *Vseukrains'ke ob'ednannia “Svoboda”* [All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda].

⁵³ Andreas Umland. 2014. “The Right-Wing Extremisms of Post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine, 1991-2014: Hypotheses on Differences in Their Permutation and Performance.” Presentation to the Danyliw Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine, University of Ottawa, 2 November.

a. Ukrainian “Uncivil Society”

Most of the widely known Ukrainian radical right activists are affiliated to one of the above political parties. There are also a number of those, however, whose activities are focused on direct action in the societal and cultural realm. The main organizations in this realm – in addition to the above-mentioned non-party subunits of the Azov movement – are the following:

“Bratstvo” (Brotherhood)

After leaving the UNA-UNSO in 1997, one of its, until today, most well-known early leaders Dmytro Korchyns’kyj became mainly a publicist and commentator.⁵⁴ In 1999, he founded a new organization under the name “*Bratstvo*” (Brothehood).⁵⁵ Presenting itself as a “Christian Hezbollah,” *Bratstvo* sought its own niche as a demonstratively radical party. Yet, it remains an entity that is mostly perceived as an eccentric fringe group.⁵⁶

Bratstvo was one of the few far-right movements which did not support the “Orange Revolution” of 2004 in Ukraine, and instead, as detailed below, cooperated with pro-Russian and pro-Putin structures.⁵⁷ At the start of the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, *Bratstvo* was involved in a violent demonstration and confrontation with the police, in front the Presidential Administration building, on December 1st, 2013.⁵⁸ At the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, Korchinskyy was briefly involved with the Azov Battalion, before he created an autonomous irregular armed group called "Saint Mary."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ “Dos’ye. Korchinskii Dmitrii.” *Liga.net*, 21 Januray 2020, <https://file.liga.net/persons/korchinskiy-dmitriy>

⁵⁵ “Dos’ye. Korchinskii Dmitrii.” *Liga.net*, 21 Januray 2020, <https://file.liga.net/persons/korchinskiy-dmitriy>

⁵⁶ “Korchyns’kyj-‘satanist’ pryyikhav u TSVK na bron’ovyku.” *Ukrains’ka Pravda* 19 July 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/07/19/3001239/>.

⁵⁷ “Dmytro Korchins’kyj: ia khochu v Ukraine khristianskui Khizballu.” *Glavred.info*, 8 April 2011, <https://glavred.info/politics/3817-dmitriy-korchinskiy-ya-hochu-v-ukraine-hristianskuyu-hizballu.html>; “Vitrenko z Korchyns’kym stvoruiut’ narodnu opozytsiyu i klychut’ Ianukovycha z Medvedchukom.” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 22 February 2005, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2005/02/22/3007322/>.

⁵⁸ “Korchyns’kyj pro podii 1 hrudnia.” *24tv.ua*, 1 December 2014, https://24tv.ua/korchinskiy_pro_podiyi_1_grudnya_n515481.

⁵⁹ “Dos’e. Korchinskii Dmitrii.”

C14

The neo-Nazi group C14 was established in 2009 in Kyiv,⁶⁰ is led by Evhen Karas, and consists of few hundred mainly young men and women.⁶¹ Its name's letter C or S is said to refer to "Sich" – the name of a Cossack fort. The number 14 is a code for an infamous quote from the US white supremacist David Eden Lane who coined the slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

Having been marginal until 2013, C14 gained some publicity via its involvement in the Revolution of Dignity.⁶² It also became infamous for its actions against anarchist, leftist, liberal, and pro-Russian groups. It became particularly notorious for attacking LGBTQ+ and their supporters during the Kyiv Pride parades in 2015-2018.⁶³

The Carpathian Sich

The Uzhhorod far-right so-called Transcarpathian Military-Patriotic Union "*Karpats'ka Sich*" (Carpathian Fort) was created – first, as non-registered informal group – in 2010 under the permanent leadership of Taras Deiak.⁶⁴ It cooperated with, and was temporarily a part of, *the Pravyi sektor* and also maintained contacts with *Svoboda* as well as the international department of Azov movement.⁶⁵ Almost all of the activities and members of the organization are concentrated in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine.

⁶⁰ "Yes, It's (Still) OK To Call Ukraine's C14 'Neo-Nazi'." *Bellingcat*, 9 August 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/09/yes-its-still-ok-to-call-ukraines-c14-neo-nazi/>.

⁶¹ "'C14'. Natsionalisty-radykaly chy neonatsysty?" *Radio Svoboda*, 19 March 2018, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29109819.html>.

⁶² Serhiy Movchan, "Nestandard BBC, abo sorom"iazlyvi terorysty." *Politychna krytyka*, 19 July 2017, <http://ukraine.politicalcritique.org/2017/07/19/nestandard-bbc-abo-sorom-yazlivyi-teroristi/>.

⁶³ "Bellingcat: Ul'trapravi hotuyut' anty-LGBT aktsii do praidu-2019." *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 16 June 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/06/16/7218311/>.

⁶⁴ *Karpats'ka Sich*, 20 April 2020, <https://karpatskasich.com/>.

⁶⁵ "Karpatska Sich." *FOIA Research*, 14 January 2019, [https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/karpatska-sich/](https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/karpatska-sich;); "2nd Pan europa Conference." *FOIA Research*, 3 March 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/article/2nd-paneuropa-conference>.

The Carpathian Sich has developed especially close links to right-wing European parties and organizations. The Sich protested against the Equality March in Kyiv since 2017,⁶⁶ as well as the Istanbul Convention on Human Rights,⁶⁷ and supports white supremacist terrorist acts. In August 2019, the Carpathian Sich advertised in social media a Ukrainian translation of the manifesto written by Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant, the mass murderer of Muslims at Christchurch in New Zealand.⁶⁸

“Tradition and Order” (TiP)

The Kyiv-based right-wing conservative group “*Tradytsiia i poriadok*” (“Tradition and Order,” TiP) is, according to its leaders, “a champion of Christianity.”⁶⁹ It has recently become one of the most active and visible post-Maidan right-wing organizations in Kyiv, for instance, during rallies against the LGBTQ+ community.⁷⁰ “Tradition and Order” also claims to have an irregular paramilitary unit.⁷¹ Many of its members fought in the Donbas, as participants of volunteer battalions, against the Russia-led separatists. Some members of the group claim to have close ties to the newly united autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine established in 2019.⁷² According to some of its members, the model organization of the “Tradition and Order” group is the Iron Legion - a fascist Romanian party of the inter-war period.⁷³

⁶⁶ “Kyiv-Pride: pidsumky.” *Karpat-s’ka Sich*, 2 June 2019, <https://karpatskasich.com/news/item/74-kyivprayd-pidsumky>.

⁶⁷ “V Uzhgorod nationalists napaly na mitynh za prava zhinok ta proty nasyl’stva.” *Zmina*, 9 March 2017, https://zmina.info/news/v_uzhgorodi_nacionalisti_napali_na_miting_za_prava_zhinok_ta_proti_nasilstva-2/.

⁶⁸ “The Russians and Ukrainians translating the Christchurch shooters manifesto.” *Bellingcat*, 14 August 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/14/the-russians-and-ukrainians-translating-the-christchurch-shooters-manifesto/>.

⁶⁹ Interview with members of TiP.

⁷⁰ “Zakhystymo ditei vid pederastiv: U Kyevi prokhodyt’ aktsiia protestu na shliakhu khody Kyiv Praydu.” *Ukrains’ki Novyny*, 23 June 2019, <https://ukranews.com/ua/news/638287-aktsiya-protestu-tradytsiyi-i-poryadku-prokhodyt-na-shlyahu-hody-kolony-v-pidtrymku-lgbt-v-kyyevi>.

⁷¹ ““Lehiony Poriadku’: v Ukrayini z’iavylasia cherhova paramilitarna orhanizatsiia.” *Kontrakty.ua*, 17 April 2019, <http://m.kontrakty.ua/photo/7976/4>.

⁷² Interview with members of TiP.

⁷³ Interview with members of TiP.

TiP has been involved in far-right attacks on the yearly Kyiv Pride demonstrations, and trying to disrupt the marches.⁷⁴ Perceiving themselves as "Christian fundamentalists", the members of TiP consider foreign influence on Ukraine as harmful, and are especially opposed to liberal and left-liberal values.⁷⁵ The TiP specifies the movement of 1968 as its key opponent, and sees its own formation as a reaction to the emergence of neo-Marxist discourses in Ukraine.⁷⁶

3. Interactions of Ukraine's Ultra-Nationalists with Russian and Pro-Kremlin Actors

3.1. Ukraine's and Russia's Far-Right Groups Watching Each Other

Post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist discourses are, almost all, loudly and radically anti-Russian. Yet, both Ukrainian and Russian ultra-nationalism developed, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, in the 1990s within the context of wider and interconnected East European, all-European or global far-right trends. There are thus a number of similarities in their ideas, concepts and tactics that are common to those transnational ideological movements and cross-border organizational networks – fundamentalist, ultra-conservative, neo-Nazi, identitarian, pan-nationalist etc. – to which the respective groups belong. As a result, there was not only certain mutual interest. Occasionally, this has also led to sympathy and contacts between sections of both movements.

Yet, the historically and currently predominant tendency was and is deadly opposition between Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms. The already high polarization between the Ukrainian and Russian far right surged further in the 2000s when most of the Ukrainian right-wing forces supported the pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko elected in late 2004.⁷⁷ For the Russian far right, the Ukrainian ultra-nationalists' support of Yushchenko's pro-Western course as well as his US-born second wife Kateryna Yushchenko (nee Chumachenko) became additional sources of irritation. This

⁷⁴ "Zakhystymo ditei vid pederastiv: U Kyevi prokhodyt' aktsia protestu na shliakhu khody Kyiv Praydu."

⁷⁵ Interview with members of TiP.

⁷⁶ Interview with members of TiP.

⁷⁷ Alla Hurska, "Far-right Movements and Ideology in Contemporary Ukraine: Formidable Image vs. Weak Essence." *Notes internacionals CIDOB*, no. 141, 2016, https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionals/n1_141_far_right_movements_and_ideology_in_contemporary_ukraine_formidable_image_vs_weak_essence/far_right_movements_and_ideology_in_contemporary_ukraine_formidable_image_vs_weak_essence.

polarization further escalated during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych in 2010-2014. Yanukovych's shift away from the pro-European vector of Ukraine's political development as well as his relatively pro-Russian position were a "red rag" for all Ukrainian patriots – whether radically nationalist or not.

Yanukovych's pro-Russian foreign and cultural policies led to a temporary broadening of all-Ukrainian support for outspoken nationalism. As result, in the parliamentary elections of 2012, the most demonstratively larger anti-Russian nationalist party *Svoboda* received 10.44% of the votes, which was the best result of any right-wing radical force in a national poll during the country's post-Soviet history. The head of *Svoboda*, Oleh Tiahnybok, emerged as one of the main opposition leaders against Viktor Yanukovych in 2012-2014, as well as a major speaker for the Maidan movement during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014. Due to growing public distrust of the state and an increase in corruption under Yanukovych, other new nationalist movements were arising in various cities, including those in Ukraine's Russophone parts.

At the same time, certain Russian ultra-nationalists began to flee from Russia abroad, including Ukraine, for a variety of reasons. Somewhat overstating the magnitude of the phenomenon, Michael Colborne and Olexiy Kuzmenko of *Bellingcat* noted:

Many Russian far-right nationalists have, perhaps to the surprise of many, been anti-Kremlin and opposed Putin's rule due to their perception of his soft stance on issues like immigration, best seen in the annual "Russian March". While a large portion of the Russian far-right was instrumental in fomenting and fighting in the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine, some factions of the Russian far-right actually supported the protests on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv that mushroomed into the February 2014 revolution and have found room to operate within Ukraine.⁷⁸

3.2. Ukrainian Far Right Contacts with Russian Ultra-Nationalists

In the early 1990s, the first implicitly pro-Russian activity of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists was their above-mentioned participation in the separatist war in Moldova, on the side of Ukrainians. The

⁷⁸ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

UNA-UNSO thus indirectly supported of Moscow's military operations in Transnistria.⁷⁹ Altogether this incident of a para-military cooperation has, however, remained an exception. It can, because of the primary interest of the Ukrainian ultra-nationalists in Transnistria's Ukrainian population, not count as an unreserved support by the UNA-UNSO for Russian imperialism.

In the mid-1990s, one of the first friendly and close encounters between Ukrainian and anti-Kremlin Russian ultra-nationalists, on Ukrainian ground, occurred between the UNA-UNSO and the marginal People's National Party of Russia (*Narodnaia natsional'naia partiia Rossii* - NNPR). "In 1996 in Kyiv, at a [joint] conference of the UNA-UNSO and People's National Party of Russia (NNPR), [its leader] Alexander Ivanov-Sukharevsky discussed the idea of creating a coordinating common conspiratorial White Order. The NNPR then planned to take part in the agitation of federal troops in Chechnya on the subject of fraternization with Chechens and turning weapons against the Kremlin."⁸⁰

A new wave of cooperation between parts of the two ultra-nationalist camps started in 2014, when a number of Russian ultra-nationalists with supposedly pro-Ukrainian views moved to Ukraine. The, by far, biggest accumulation of active Russian and presumably anti-Putinist right-wing radicals in Ukraine merged into the Azov movement. According to *Bellingcat*, a number of Russian neo-Nazi movements are represented, with their Ukrainian branches, in the Azov movement's various structures.⁸¹ For instance, as Michael Colborne and Olexiy Kuzmenko noted in September 2019, the

Wotanjugend ["Youth of Wotan" – a pagan god] was born in Russia, and publishes its online content almost exclusively in Russian. Today the self-described "hammer of National Socialism" is [however] based in Ukraine and, for all intents and purposes, is part of the country's far-right Azov movement that is trying to expand its domestic and international influence. But *Wotanjugend*'s activities aren't just limited to the web. In 2018 the head of *Wotanjugend* met with members of violent American neo-Nazi gang Rise Above Movement (RAM) in Kyiv. *Wotanjugend* also recently hosted a seminar that included lectures on race, firearms training and even a mock knife fight tournament. Moreover, the head of the group,

⁷⁹ "20 let konfliktu v Pridnestrov'e. UNA-UNSO: 'Pogibali ukraintsy, i my dolzhny byli ikh zashchishchat'." *Segodnya.ua*, 19 June 2012, <https://www.segodnya.ua/world/20-let-konfliktu-v-pridnectorve-una-unco-pohibali-ukraintsy-i-my-dolzhny-byli-ikh-zashchishchat-308277.html>.

⁸⁰ Albert Shatrov, "Neonatsisty i separatisty: Ukrainskikh ekstremistov po-prezhnemu pritiagivaet Kavkaz." *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 30 June 1998, https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/NG_97_99/1149381.htm.

⁸¹ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

Alexei Levkin, is hopeful he will receive Ukrainian citizenship, and has been a key figure in Azov's public push to get Ukrainian citizenship for far-right friends from abroad who have joined their ranks. With its message that includes terrorist fanboying and literally worship of Hitler, *Wotanjugend* continues to operate openly in Ukraine, using the country as a base to grow and to spread its message of hate worldwide.⁸²

Moreover, because of participation of foreign – including Russian – fighters in the Azov movement, it has become one of the main lobbyists for the legalization of the status of foreigners who have fought against pro-Russian forces in the East of Ukraine.⁸³ A number of such foreigners, including several Russian ultra-nationalist immigrants, received citizenship during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko. Sometimes, this has happened in explicit gratitude of their contribution to the Ukrainian defence effort in the Donbas.

The most infamous such case is a former member of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity party and Belarusian People's Front Sergei Korotkikh, who, after his move to Ukraine in 2014, has become one of the key figures in the Azov movement.⁸⁴ Another such figure, the above-mentioned member of the Russian *Wotanjugend* Aleksei Levkin, is also an immigrant from Russia who has gained some importance in the Azov movement, and calls himself a “political ideologist” of the Azov’s vigilante branch, *Natsional'nyy druzhyny* (National Fellowship). The rise of Korotkikh and Levkin in Ukraine indicate considerable influence of Russian neo-Nazis on Azov.⁸⁵

The ideological basis for such seemingly paradoxical contacts and even partial merger is a particular type of racist pan-Slavism for which issues of national sovereignty and territory are secondary to an allegedly common pan-national or even pan-European “white” or “Aryan” identity. Some branches of Russian ultra-nationalism, like the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, support the concept of a triple unity of Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians. Unlike most other permutations of Russian ultra-nationalism, the pro-Ukrainian subsections of Russian racism do not assert, however, a “Great Russian” supremacy vis-à-vis “Little” and “White Russians,” within the triple Eastern Slavic family of

⁸² Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

⁸³ “Ukraine’s Ministry of Veterans Affairs Embraced the Far Right – With Consequences to the U.S.” *Bellingcat*, 11 November 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/11/11/ukraines-ministry-of-veterans-affairs-embraced-the-far-right-with-consequences-to-the-u-s/>.

⁸⁴ “Belorus iz batal’ona ‘Azov’ – geroi, avantiurist ili natsist? Istoryia Sergeia Korotkikh.” *Belorusskiy partisan*, 16 January 2015, <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/292580/>.

⁸⁵ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

peoples. They are instead obsessed with large-scale immigration and, thereby, racial-cultural subversion by non-white people in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus as well as, to a lesser degree, with the rise of the LGBTQ+ movement in these countries.

At the same time, the larger part of Russian neo-Nazism, it needs to be emphasized, is as anti-Ukrainian as most other varieties of Russian ultra-nationalism from neo-Eurasianism to Orthodox fundamentalism. Within the latter, to be sure, one can also occasionally find isolated individuals or minor subsections that accept Ukraine's nationality, sovereignty and integrity. Most of such tendencies within Russian ultra-nationalism are, nevertheless, to be found in various Russian organizations espousing biological racism. Often these groups, whether in Russia, Ukraine, or elsewhere, see their nations as being part and parcel of a "white" or "Aryan" pan-national community. They thus espouse more or less sympathy towards all those who they regard as being within this larger "racial" collective.

Among this small section of Russian political extremism, whether biologically racist or not, one can not only find regret about Moscow's actions vis-à-vis Ukraine since 2014. There is also considerable verbal solidarity with the Ukrainian fight for independence from Russia. A number of individuals and certain groupuscules as a whole, like the *Wotanjugend*, have moved to Ukraine. Many more or less successfully tried to take part in the Russian-Ukrainian war, on the Ukrainian side.

3.3. Russian Insurgent Army and "Russian Center"

The most vivid expression of this type of Russian-Ukrainian far-right interaction has become the so-called "Russian Center," a quasi-party, and its para-military arm called "Russian Insurgent Army." The latter name, to be sure, is a hyperbolic title for (possibly only virtual) small irregular armed group. The movement emerged in 2015, after a famous Russian opposition blogger who calls himself "Orange," Andrei Kuznetsov, had migrated from Russia to Ukraine.⁸⁶ Together with some other immigrants from Russia, he created – what was suggestively called – the Russian Insurgent Army (*Russkaia povstancheskaia armiiia* - RPA). This title makes allusions to both, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a West Ukrainian nationalist partisan movement during and after World War II, and the

⁸⁶ "V batal'one OUN voiuiut rossiane, kotorykh na rodine obviniaiut v separatizme." *Obozrevatel'*, 10 April 2015, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/65823-v-batalone-oun-voyuyut-rossiane-kotoryih-na-rodine-obvinyayut-v-separatizme.htm>.

Russian Liberation Army, a large collaborationist unit fighting alongside the Wehrmacht, on the Eastern Front in 1941-1945.⁸⁷

As a volunteer battalion, the RPA claims to have participated, on the Ukrainian side, in the Donbas war against pro-Russian forces.⁸⁸ It has also been rumoured to conduct clandestine activity within Russia.⁸⁹ The idea of founding the RPA was first presented to the public on a December 29th, 2014, at a press conference in Kyiv. The young anti-Kremlin activist Andrei Kuznetsov made an appeal for unification of anti-Putinist Russian forces. He addressed his words to “all adequate Russians...descendants of white immigrants ..., who do not want Russian culture to disappear from the world.”⁹⁰

The movement rejects Eurasianism as well as Islamism. It officially espouses an ethno-centric, yet supposedly still moderately right-wing ideology. It uses concepts and symbols, however, representing far-right rather than liberal nationalist discourses. To be sure, the RPA is apparently being made up of a variety of individuals of different persuasions. Yet, it is seemingly dominated by racist activists, as various entries on its website illustrate.⁹¹ The formation of the RPA battalion led later to the creation of a Russian political organization in Ukraine called “Russian Center.” This unified political platform of more or less nationalist Russian political immigrants in Ukraine was officially set up on October 11th, 2015, at Kyiv.⁹²

The “Russian Center” seems to have contacts to a number of right-wing radical groups in Ukraine such as the above-mentioned Carpathian Sich in Uzhhorod.⁹³ Both the “Russian Center” and the Carpathian Sich were co-hosts, for instance, of the 2019 Hungarian “*Festung Budapest*”

⁸⁷ *Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiiia*, 20 April 2020, <http://dobrovoletz.blogspot.com/>.

⁸⁸ Andrei Kuznetsov, Viktor Smalii, and Bogdan Titskii, “Dlia chego sozdayetsia Russkaya Povstancheskaya Armiya.” *Youtube*, 30 December 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_66RhYXK7X0.

⁸⁹ “Zayavila o prichastnosti k ubiistvu deputata Shevtsova ‘Russkaia povstancheskaia armiia.’” *Kur’yer-Sreda*, 4 February 2017, <https://kurer-sreda.ru/2017/02/04/275075-zayavila-o-prichastnosti-k-ubijstvu-deputata-shevcova-russkaya-povstancheskaya-armiya>. See also: <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/04/21/v-habarovske-napali-na-strelkovyy-klub-i-priemnyu-fsb-glavnoc>.

⁹⁰ Andrei Kuznetsov, Smalii and Titskii, “Dlia chego sozdayetsia Russkaya Povstancheskaya Armiya.”

⁹¹ *Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiiia*, 20 April 2020, <http://dobrovoletz.blogspot.com/>.

⁹² “Prezidium.” *UNIAN Fotobank*, 11 May 2015, <https://photo.unian.net/photo/664249-prezidium>; “Repressii erekfii protiv russkikh.” *A-Radio*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TEQOSepWRQ>.

⁹³ “Russkaia delegatsiia na konferentsii ‘Mech Evropy’ i marshe ‘Radikal’nogo Al’iansa.’” *Russkii Tsentr*, 16 June 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/russkaya-delegaciya-na-konferenci-mech-evropy-i-marshe-radikal-nogo-al-yansa>.

international meeting of far-right activists organized by "Legio Hungaria" and including representatives of "Hammerskins Hungaria", "Combat 18 Hungaria", "Skins4Skins", "Betyársereg". The meeting's allegedly 600 participants were, among others, honouring and remembering the "fighters who fell in the long-ago year of 1945 in an unequal battle against the Red International," i.e. Hitler Germany's soldiers and their allies defending Budapest at the end of World War II.⁹⁴ The "Russian Center" also participated in a so-called "Sword of Europe" Conference of the Carpathian Sich on April 13-14, 2019 in Uzhgorod, and in a joint march of the Radical Alliance.⁹⁵

The "Russian Center" has seemingly even more intense contacts with the Azov movement. Since 2016, members of the "Russian Center" took part in several conferences organized by the international department of the National Corps. These meetings were typically devoted to the promotion of international cooperation among European radically right-wing groups, and happened under the slogan of a "Reconstruction of Europe."⁹⁶

Above-mentioned Andrei Kuznetsov claims that many Russian political refugees are in contact with his network of Russians in Ukraine. Others are, according to him, in independent and direct contact with the Azov movement. Their links to Azov allow them to become, in one way or another, involved in the struggle against the Putin regime that they fled from, and help them to pass the bureaucratic procedures for acquiring the status of a temporary or permanent resident, or of a citizen of Ukraine.⁹⁷

In general, however, Russia's right-wing radical circles in Ukraine are under-institutionalized, or they may, if well-organized, be partly operating in secrecy. All Russian political organizations in Ukraine – even if they are explicitly anti-Putinist – are watched upon with suspicion, and suspected to be secret special operations of Moscow. Most Russian right-wing radicals who emigrated from Russia to Ukraine have thus emigrated individually and are integrating into Ukrainian right-wing organizations.

⁹⁴ "Russkie soratniki na Festung Budapest 2019." *Russkiy Tsentr*, 19 March 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/russkie-soratniki-na-festung-budapest-2019>.

⁹⁵ "Russkaia delegatsiia na konferentsii 'Mech Evropy' i marshe 'Radikal'nogo Al'iansa'."

⁹⁶ "Konferentsiia Intermarium v Kiev." *Russkiy Tsentr*, 1 July 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/konferenciya-intermarium-v-kieve>.

⁹⁷ "Kuznetsov Andrei: imenno v emigratsii proiskhodit ta splavka rossiiskoi oppozitsii, kotoraiia byla na ukrainskem maidane." *Euro russians*, 8 September 2015, <http://eurorussians.com/russian-rebel-army/>.

The main host for these Russian rightists who have moved to Ukraine became the Azov Regiment that has created a special Russian Corps, within its structure. Azov's affiliated party National Corps has become the leader to their incorporation into Ukraine's far-right political milieu. The leadership of the Azov movement recognizes itself publicly in its role as a main facilitator of legalization of foreign volunteers fighting – not only Russian ones – as residents or even citizens of Ukraine.⁹⁸

3.4. Contacts of Azov with the neo-Nazi Russian group BORN

Special mention is due to the link of the Azov movement to the so-called Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists (*Boevaia organizatsiia russkikh natsionalistov* – BORN). This semi-clandestine organization was founded by the Russian far-right terrorists Nikita Tikhonov and Ilia Goriachev in 2008, as a para-military branch of the Russian ultra-nationalist political party “Russkii obraz” (Russian Image). The Ukrainian contact to this particular group is in so far worth-mentioning here separately as “Russian Image” was apparently a project secretly promoted by the Kremlin.⁹⁹

Kyiv researcher Hanna Hrytsenko has detailed in a special paper on this issue the ties between the Russian ultra-nationalists of BORN with Ukrainian radical nationalists, in particular with the Azov Regiment and Dmytro Korchyns'kyj.¹⁰⁰ Hrytsenko also mentions the case of the Russian neo-Nazi Aleksandr Parinov who was formerly linked to Tikhonov, but had moved to Ukraine already before the Euromaidan:

After that, nothing was known about him until two independent investigations by *Mediazona* and *Novaia Gazeta* found Parinov in the Russian Corps of the Ukrainian volunteer battalion Azov. The Corps was supposedly headed by another well-known Russian neo-Nazi who also collaborated with Goriachev – Roman Zhelezov with the nickname "Zukhel." [...] Zhelezov is not a member of the military service, but a volunteer of the Azov press service.¹⁰¹

Zhelezov moved from Russia to Ukraine in June 2014. When still in Russia, Zhelezov had been involved with the circle of fascists that was to form BORN, since 2007. His activities for this circle included the gathering of information about Russian anti-fascists. According to Hrytsenko,

⁹⁸ “Aktsiya: Pasport dobrovol'tsu.” *Russkii Tsentr*, 21 September 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/akciya-pasport-dobrovol-cu>; Ukraine’s “Ministry of Veterans Affairs Embraced the Far Right – With Consequences to the U.S.” *Bellingcat*, 11 November 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/11/11/ukraines-ministry-of-veterans-affairs-embraced-the-far-right-with-consequences-to-the-u-s/>

⁹⁹ Robert Horvath, “Russkii Obraz and the Politics of ‘Managed Nationalism’.” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2014, pp. 469-488.

¹⁰⁰ Anna Grytsenko, “Ot Donbassa do ‘Azova’: Ukrainskoe dos'e BORN.” *Politychna krytyka*, 24 February 2015, <https://politkrytyka.org/2015/02/24/ot-azova-do-donbassa-ukrayinskoe-dose-born/>.

¹⁰¹ Anna Grytsenko, “Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov: kontakty i konteksty v do- i postmaidannoï Ukraine.” *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2015, pp. 180-193.

Zheleznov's accomplice Ilya Goryachev, a later leader of BORN, used this information for establishing a cooperation with Nikita Ivanov and Pavel Karpov, two employees of the Presidential Administration responsible, who were interested in such details.¹⁰²

4. The Special Case of the Pseudo-UNA and Kovalenko Episode

A different instance of apparently deep Russian involvement with a seemingly Ukrainian ultra-nationalist group is worth treating separately in so far as it falls outside the various forms of cooperation mentioned above and below. This is the story, during the last 15 years, of an obvious attempt, by either the Kremlin or Ukrainian pro-Kremlin forces, to instrumentalize a Ukrainian fake fascist organization to discredit the Ukraine's pro-democratic electoral uprisings and resistance against Russia. The exhilarating episode has, so far, received only little Western attention. That is in spite of the story's touching upon some core topics in Western-Ukrainian debates, and connecting the "Orange Revolution" with the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014 as well as with the widely publicized POW exchanges between Ukraine and Russia in 2019-2020.

In the wake of the 2004 presidential electoral campaign, a split-off from the above-introduced Ukrainian far-right party UNA that used the same name "UNA" was, as later became clear, created or infiltrated by pro-Kremlin agents. As a result, it became purposefully employed to defame Ukraine's pro-Western political camp. A leading expert on the international far right, Anton Shekhovtsov, summarized this operation in 2014, in his blog, as follows:

In the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, which resulted in a dramatic stand-off between Viktor Yanukovych and Viktor Yushchenko, a certain Eduard Kovalenko, leader of the virtual far right party Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA), declared that he and his party would hold a march in support of Yushchenko as a presidential candidate. Yushchenko's office immediately replied that they never needed that support and did their best to distance from Kovalenko's sordid initiative. Yet Yushchenko's office could not hamper that march and,

¹⁰² Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov: kontakty i konteksty v do- i postmaidannoj Ukraine."

on 26 June 2004, Kovalenko proceeded. At the meeting that was held after the march, Kovalenko declared: "We, the right-wing nationalist party, are supporting the only one candidate from the right-wing forces: Viktor Yushchenko. One Ukraine, one nation, one people, one president!" And he gave a Hitler salute. According to Andriy Shkil, then the leader of the [real] UNA-UNSO, the whole event was staged by Viktor Medvedchuk, then the Head of the Presidential Administration (under President Leonid Kuchma), who was later involved in the electoral fraud in favour of pro-Russian Yanukovych which triggered the "Orange revolution". Medvedchuk was (and still is) also known for his close personal relations with Vladimir Putin who is the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter. Kovalenko's task was simple: by giving support to Yushchenko under the Nazi-like flags, he was expected to discredit the democratic candidate in the eyes of Western observers. Luckily for Yushchenko, however, the Western media largely did not buy into that frame-up and ignored it.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ "Pro-Russian network behind the anti-Ukrainian defamation campaign." *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*, 3 February 2014, anton-shekhtsov.blogspot.com/2014/02/pro-russian-network-behind-anti.html.



Eduard Kovalenko, 26 June 2004. Source: <https://anton-shekhortsov.blogspot.com/2014/02/pro-russian-network-behind-anti.html>

After the beginning of the war in 2014, the supposed Ukrainian nationalist and Yushchenko supporter Kovalenko turned, however, into an anti-governmental anti-war activist in Ukraine. He

was arrested for his calls to Ukrainians to abstain from military service.¹⁰⁴ Kovalenko's fate thereby resembled somewhat that of the, in Germany well-known case, of Ruslan Kotsaba. The West Ukrainian anti-Semitic journalist Kotsaba was, in 2019, scheduled to receive the so-called Aachen Peace Prize – an, already before this episode, controversial non-governmental acknowledgment of pacifist activism. Kotsaba was apparently selected because of his public calls to Ukrainian men to hide from obligatory military service during the ongoing war in the Donbas. Kotsaba was subsequently accused for illegal propaganda by the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. He fled to Germany and became acquainted with left-wing political circles, among them *Die Linke* (The Left) MP Andrej Hunko, who co-nominated Kotsaba for the peace prize. However, after an older video appeared in which Kotsaba outlined his anti-Semitic views, the Aachen prize committee withdrew Kotsaba's nomination.¹⁰⁵

Kovalenko's case is even more dubious than Kotsaba's, in as far as Kovalenko had – as mentioned – not only voiced far-right views, but obtained a sharp public profile as an official Ukrainian ultranationalist leading an organization with the well-known name "Ukrainian National Assembly," in 2004.¹⁰⁶ The real UNA-UNSO that Kovalenko had claimed to represent in 2004, moreover, has later participated with its own volunteer battalion in Ukraine's war against Russia, in the Donbas, since 2014. Yet, as Halya Coynash remarked, in May 2017:

A court in the Kherson oblast has passed sentence on Edward Kovalenko, a Ukrainian whose involvement in fake far-right movements and separatist scandals dates back to at least 2004. The Henichesk District Court found Kovalenko guilty of obstructing the legitimate activities of Ukraine's Armed Forces and other military formations (Article 114-1 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced him to 5 years' imprisonment. Kovalenko was taken into custody in the courtroom. The criminal charges against Kovalenko were brought over an anti-mobilization rally which he organized on January 27, 2015. During the rally, he issued an ultimatum, threatening that, if mobilization did not stop in Ukraine, the protesters would block roads

¹⁰⁴ "Ukrainian Anti-War Political Prisoner Eduard Kovalenko Appealed to International Organisations for Support." *Stalker Zone*, 10 January 2019, www.stalkerzone.org/ukrainian-anti-war-political-prisoner-eduard-kovalenko-appealed-to-international-organisations-for-support/.

¹⁰⁵ Roman Goncharenko, "Kontroverse um Aachener Friedenspreisträger." *Deutsche Welle*, 9 May 2019, www.dw.com/de/kontroverse-um-aachener-friedenspreisträger/a-48678625.

¹⁰⁶ Denis Kazanskyi, "Zachem Rossiia zabraла по обмену ukrainskogo fashista iz UNA-UNSO." *Youtube*, 3 January 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2q8FAznF_w.

and seize control of the military recruitment office, police and administrative buildings. In November 2016, [Kovalenko] was reported as being behind a petition to Sergei Aksyonov, installed as Crimean leader by Russian soldiers in February 2014, with Aksyonov in turn writing to Putin with a request to ‘help Henichesk with gas’. In July 2016, he was directly implicated in the fabrication of a supposed demand from local Ukrainian Bulgarians for a Bulgarian autonomy. The report from July 4, 2016 was entitled ‘Ukraine’s Bulgarian diaspora demands territorial autonomy from Poroshenko and attached a letter allegedly signed by Yury Palichev, who in the report itself is described as one of the leaders of the Bulgarian diaspora.¹⁰⁷

The episode reached its apogee in late 2019 when the arrested and once demonstratively fascist Ukrainian activist Kovalenko was transferred to Russia within a prisoners exchange in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian negotiations known as the Minsk Process. Halya Coynach reported in early 2020:

While Russia has claimed that the 29 December exchange was purely between Ukraine and the so-called ‘Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics’, it was first agreed during the meeting on 9 December 2019 between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Few would, in any case, dispute that it is the Kremlin and its people who make all decisions regarding the release of prisoners and inclusion of people to be handed over to Russia / the Russian-controlled ‘republics’. Russia could easily hope that Kovalenko’s former persona [as a Ukrainian fascist in 2004] had been forgotten, especially since his activities after Russia’s invasion of Crimea and military aggression in Donbas were quite different. [...] While Kovalenko is, to date anyway, the only supposed ‘Ukrainian nationalist’ whose release “from Ukrainian persecution” Russia and its proxy ‘republics’ have demanded, UNA-UNSO was led in the 1990s by the even more notorious provocateur Dmytro Korchinsky, who was reportedly a KGB agent back in Soviet times. While the Kremlin, or its friends, like Medvedchuk, were engaging individuals like Kovalenko to push their narrative on ‘Ukrainian nationalism’, the Kremlin and various far-right Russian organizations, especially that of fascist ideologue Alexander Dugin, were heavily involved from as far back as 2006, in

¹⁰⁷ Halya Coynash, “Fake ‘Ukrainian fascist’ jailed for pro-Russian separatist rally.” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 22 May 2017, khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1494888580.

recruiting and training Ukrainians with pro-Russian and right-wing views in Donbas, Crimea and, doubtless, other parts of Ukraine. While Russia tried to present Ukraine's post-Maidan leaders as 'fascists', it was in Donbas that most of the militant leaders, whether Ukrainian or Russian, were known for their far-right, sometimes neo-Nazi views.¹⁰⁸

The Kovalenko affair is not only as such useful to understand the Kremlin's mingling in Ukrainian politics. It is also of value for larger cognitive purposes of proper understanding the Russian-Ukrainian cooperation involving the far right. Kovalenko's various operations were, to an unusually high degree, characterized by such aims as disinformation and manipulation. They are, as such, easily understandable as well as classifiable. In distinction to the Kovalenko affair, the cases of such people as Dmytro Korchyns'kyy, whom Coynash mentions above and who will be dealt in detail shortly, are often far more nebulous stories.

Korchyns'kyy's ties and approach to Russia were and are, as shall become clear below, also suspicious. Yet, they are of a more ambivalent character. In contrast, Kovalenko is a straightforward case of an obviously hired pro-Russian agent. Whereas Korchyns'kyy has, for all the dubiousness of his actions, retained an ultra-nationalist profile, Kovalenko's various actions are in manifest ideological contradiction to each other.

This points to the purely instrumental role that Kovalenko has played in Ukraine for the Kremlin, and indicates a relative unambiguity of this phenomenon. In contrast, most other incidents of involvement of Russian or pro-Kremlin actors with Ukrainian ultra-nationalism dealt with in this study are distinctly ambiguous. They involve highly contradictory turns in the biographies of the main protagonists on the Ukrainian side. Unlike Kovalenko's activities, these turns seem to have been, in spite of their incompatibility, driven by this or that ideological factor rather than purely instrumental reasoning.

5. Ukraine's Far Right and the Kremlin: The Korchyns'kyy Case

¹⁰⁸ Halya Coynash, "Why Russia demanded the release of a 'Ukrainian fascist' as part of the prisoner exchange in occupied Donbas." *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 9 January 2020, khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1578530655.

The above-mentioned contacts between pro-Ukrainian Russian neo-Nazi activists with the Ukrainian far right are altogether not that surprising. They are, in view of the peculiar non-imperialist brand of the Russian racists fleeing to Ukraine, at least in part, ideologically coherent. Moreover, they happened only between a marginal Russian émigré group, on the one side, and fringe actors in Ukrainian politics, on the other. The following contact is an ideologically and motivationally more dubious connection and – at least, partly – contradictory. It links a marginal Ukrainian group with its prominent leader to relevant Russian political actors. In the above episodes, the motives of cooperation of both, the pro-Kremlin forces with Kovalenko's pseudo-UNA, and of the Russian racists with their Ukrainian counterparts are easily explainable. In contrast, the following cooperation is more inconsistent.

In the aftermath of the 2004 “Orange Revolution”, there was, for about two years, a curious association between the prominent former UNA-UNSO leader Dmitry Korchyns'kyj and the largely pro-Putinist International Eurasian Movement led by the Russian fascist ideologue Alexander Dugin. To be sure, Korchyns'kyj had already earlier contacts to Russia and disclosed in a 2017 television interview: "We have cooperated with the *moskals* [pejorative term for Russians] since about 1992, in one way or another, in various regions [...]. It has always been a difficult relationship. We have had illusions that we could do something with them."¹⁰⁹ The surprised interviewer asked what the purpose of this cooperation was to which Korchyns'kyj replied that he wanted to encourage Cossack separatism inside Russia. As mentioned above, during about the same period that Korchyns'kyj mentions here, i.e. the early 1990s, his UNA-UNSO was indirectly supporting the pro-Russian Transnistrian separation war in Moldova across the South-Western border of Ukraine.

¹⁰⁹ “HARD z Vlashchenko: Dmytro Korchyns’kyj, literator.” Telekanal ZIK, 3 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-s5nIIL4Os>.

In the mid-2000s, Korchyns'kyj repeatedly displayed his contacts with Dugin in public.¹¹⁰ That was in spite of the latter's earlier well-known and numerous anti-Ukrainian comments.¹¹¹ For example, in his seminal book, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, published in 1997, Dugin had stated:

Ukrainian sovereignty is so negative for Russian geopolitics that it could, in theory, spark an armed conflict [...]. Ukraine as a state makes no geopolitical sense whatsoever. It has no universal cultural meaning, nor geographical distinctiveness or ethnic exclusiveness. The historical significance of Ukraine can be derived from its name. The word "Ukraine" comes from the Russian word "okraina" [outskirts, periphery] or "border-land."¹¹²

Nevertheless, as Viktor Shnirel'man notes, Korchyns'kyj appeared "at [Dugin's] Eurasian Youth Union rally on 21st September 2005 on Slavic Square in Moscow on the 625th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo [where he] called for a relentless war against Atlantic civilization declaring that war was closer than ever."¹¹³

Furthermore, there have been allegations made, in the Ukrainian press, that, shortly before or after an arrest warrant was issued for Korchyns'kyj following the events of 1st December 2013, the Ukrainian ultra-nationalist temporarily went into hiding, according to different reports, in Russia or/and Transnistria (controlled by a pro-Russian satellite regime).¹¹⁴ He, according to one comment,

¹¹⁰ Some photographs documenting Dugin's and Korchyns'kyj's cooperation may be found in: Andreas Umland, "Dobrovol'cheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniya i radikal'nyi natsionalizm v poslemaidannoj Ukraine: nekotorye osobennosti vozniknoveniya polka 'Azov'." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2016, pp. 141-178. The following paras are based on: Andreas Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the 'Azov' Battalion in 2014." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2019, pp. 105-131.

¹¹¹ Andreas Umland, "Fashistskii drug Vitrenko: strannyi soiuz mezdu ukrainskim 'progressivnym sotsializmom' i rossiiskim 'neoevraziistvom'." *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 26 October 2006. <http://pravda.com.ua/ru/news/2006/9/27/46953.htm>; Andreas Umland, "Aleksandr Dugin, evropeiskii fashizm i Vitrenko: chto obshchego?" *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 20 July 2007. <http://pravda.com.ua/news/2007/7/20/61687.htm>.

¹¹² Aleksandr Dugin, "Chast' 5. Vnutrennaya geopolitika Rossii." *Tsentr konservativnykh issledovanii*, 13 September 2009, <http://konservativizm.org/konservativizm/books/130909011417.xhtml>.

¹¹³ Viktor Shnirel'man, "Evraziya ili Evropa? Rol' Ukrainy v evraziiskom i Evrazii v ukrainskom diskurse." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2009, p. 141.

¹¹⁴ "Korchynsky pislya shturmu Bankovoi vyikhav do Rosii, a polkovnyk 'Berkutu' mih zaymatysya provokatsiyamy." *TSN*, 5 December 2013, <http://tsn.ua/politika/korchinskiy-pislya-shturmu-bankovoyi-viyihav-do-rosiyi-a-polkovnik-berkutu-mig-zaymatysya-provokaciymi-323778.html>; "Lidera 'Bratstva'

allegedly gave a Skype interview, from a Russian asylum shelter to Ukrainian television.¹¹⁵ If this episode, which Korchyn'skyy later denied, were to be confirmed this would be remarkable. Korchyn'skyy may have been in Russia between roughly December 2013 and February 2014, at a time when the Kremlin media was conducting a large-scale disinformation campaign about the allegedly deadly threat of radical Ukrainian nationalism to Russian-speakers in Ukraine. Russian state television and newspapers presented the Euromaydan as a fascist, anti-Russian phenomenon and demonized the leader of the Right Sector, Dmytro Yarosh, as an allegedly decisive figure in the events playing out in Kyiv. As one radical Ukrainian nationalist, Yarosh, was being wanted with a Russian arrest warrant, it may have been that another Ukrainian ultra-nationalist, Korchyn'skyy, was being given the chance to evade a Ukrainian arrest warrant in Russia or/and Moscow-controlled Transnistria.¹¹⁶

Regarding Korchyn'skyy's ties to Russia, it is worth adding that the "Bratstvo" leader is not merely a radical Ukrainian nationalist. From the founding of the UNA-UNSO in the early 1990s until today, Korchyn'skyy has episodically collaborated with Yuriy Shukhevych, an iconic figure in the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Yuriy Shukhevych is the son of Roman Shukhevych (1907-1950), the former chief commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and one-time head of the radical Bandera wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Since November 2014, Yuriy Shukhevych has been, together with two MPs linked to Korchyn'skyy, a member of the faction of Lyashko's Radical Party in the *Verkhovna Rada*.

Already, in the 1990s, Korchyn'skyy made a multitude of rabidly anti-Russian announcements, and proclaimed, among others, that "Crimea will be either Ukrainian or unpopulated."¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, he has since visited Russia several times. Writes the late Vladimir Pribylovskiy:

Dmitriia Korchinskogo zaderzhali v Izraile." *UNIAN*, 7 February 2014, <http://www.unian.net/politics/881762-lidera-bratstva-dmitriya-korchinskogo-zaderjali-v-izraile.html>.

¹¹⁵ "Dmytro Korchynsky skype." *YouTube*, 8 December, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzGabLUMcQM>.

¹¹⁶ As mentioned above, in 1992, Korchyn'skyy's UNA-UNSO had taken part in Transnistria's separatist war against Moldova. Marcin Kosienkowski, "Ukraine and Transnistria: A Troubled Borderland." *New Eastern Europe*, 29 September 2014, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1342-ukraine-and-transnistria-a-troubled-borderland>.

¹¹⁷ M. Balutenko and V. Pribylovskii, *Kto est' kto v politike na Ukraine: Biograficheskii sbornik* (Moskva: Panorama, 2007), pp. 141-143.

In 1996, [Korchyn'skyy] fought in Chechnya for the Chechen separatists.

In his memoirs of the Chechen War, published in 2005 (in his book *Revolution Haute Couture*), [Korchyn'skyy] amongst other things, talks about how he was present as captive Russian soldiers were killed (their throats were slit and then shot to make sure they were dead).¹¹⁸

These older ties to Russia reached a new level in 2004 when Korchyn'skyy, as leader of his “Bratstvo” group, became a member of the Highest Council of the Eurasian Movement in Moscow.¹¹⁹ The only other Ukrainian listed in this organ was the head of the misleadingly called “Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine” and Doctor of Economic Sciences Nataliia Vitrenko (b. 1951) whose “Popular Opposition Bloc” went on to win 2.93% of the official turnout in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Vitrenko was then the premier representative of radical anti-Westernism in Ukraine, and known for her frequent invectives against Ukrainian politicians whom she regularly called “fashisty” (fascists).

In 2004-2006, Vitrenko and Korchyn'skyy, though formally being on the opposite sides of the political spectrum and different in their approaches to Russia, remained together listed in the directory of members of, the Highest Council of the Moscow-based International Eurasian Movement.¹²⁰ There was also an announcement in 2005 that Vitrenko and Korchyn'skyy had entered the Highest Council of the Eurasian Youth Union - the International Eurasian Movement's youth section with branches in, among other countries, Ukraine. Both of these organizations, the International Eurasian Movement and Eurasian Youth Union, are led by, and entirely devoted to the ideas of the Russian publicist and Doctor of Political Sciences Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962).

Dugin's name became widely known in Ukraine only later, in 2007, in connection with a scandal that arose when Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykola Zhulins'kyy was barred from entering Russia during a private trip to St. Petersburg. This was interpreted as a retaliation for Ukraine's refusal to permit Dugin to enter Ukraine shortly before. In June 2006, Dugin had been declared *persona non grata* in Ukraine until 2011 for violating Ukrainian law, and was thus deported

¹¹⁸ Balutenko and Pribylovskii, *Kto est' kto v politike na Ukraine*, p. 143. See also: A. Pridonov, “Dmitriy Korchinskiy otvetit za Chechniu.” *Utro.ru*, 20 March 2006. <http://ukraina.utro.ru/articles/2006/03/20/531851.shtml>.

¹¹⁹ “Evraziyskiy antioranzhevyy front.” *Evrazia.org* 23 May 2005, <http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2242>.

¹²⁰ On 11 May 2020, Vitrenko, Aslakhanov and Torshin were, among others, still mentioned on the IEM Highest Council's members list: <http://med.org.ru/article/1908>.

back to Russia when he arrived by plane at Simferopol airport in early June 2007. He wanted to attend the festival “The Great Russian Word” organized by the Russian Community of Crimea.

In Putin’s Russia, Dugin has made himself known as a “neo-Eurasianist” and fanatic anti-American. Dugin also occasionally describes himself with reference to the German anti-democratic publicist Ernst Niekisch, as a “national bolshevist,” with reference to the French esotericist Rene Guenon and Italian Dadaist Julius Evola, a “traditionalist,” with reference to a German inter-war intellectual movement, a “conservative revolutionary,” or, with reference to the ideas of the Parisian theorist Alain de Benoist, a “new rightist.”

Dugin has also made affirmative references to other non-Russian sources including British Satanism, European occultism or Japanese mysticism. While he presents himself as a strident Russian nationalist, Dugin’s world-view is, to a large degree, a variation of a number of ideas that had their origins outside Russia. While Dugin poses as a radical anti-Westerner and devout Orthodox believer, his major concepts are imported from various Catholic and protestant countries of inter- and post-war Western Europe.

In spite of his dubious sources, Dugin was, during his affiliation with Korchyn’sky and Vitrenko, in the company of a number of highly placed Russian political and social figures such as 2004-2008 Minister of Culture Aleksandr Sokolov, 2001-2015 Federation Council Deputy Speaker Aleksandr Torshin, or Presidential Advisor Aslambek Aslakhanov who, like Vitrenko, Korchyn’sky and other post-Soviet figures, were members the International Eurasian Movement’s Highest Council. It is remarkable that all these figures entered into an official alliance with Eurasianist theoretician although, in the 1990s, Dugin had made many strident statements on world history.

In particular, Dugin had, during the 1990s, repeatedly affirmatively assessed West European fascism. To be sure, Dugin has also often criticized German, Italian and other fascisms, for instance, in his article “Fascism — borderless and red” which is a chapter of the electronic version of his book 1997 *Templars of the Proletariat*.¹²¹ Yet, what Dugin blamed the fascist movements and regimes of inter-war Europe for was that they were too moderate, too incoherent, too soft, and not truly revolutionary. Fascism, such is Dugin’s view, is, in principle, a good idea. Unfortunately, in Dugin’s opinion, it has never been consistently implemented. That would be, imagined Dugin, different after

¹²¹ Aleksandr Dugin, *Tampliery proletariata* (Moskva: Arktogeya, 1997), <http://www.my.arcto.ru/public/templars/>.

the break-up of the Soviet Union. In Russia, there will, as he wrote in his “Fascism – borderless and red,” emerge a truly “fascist fascism.” In such earlier articles as “Conservative Revolution” (1991), “The Great War of the Continents” (1991-1992) or “Left Nationalism” (1992), Dugin had already elaborated why he thinks Russian fascism is a benevolent ideology, the SS was an organization with positive characteristics, the break-up of the 1939 alliance between Hitler and Stalin constituted an unfortunate event, etc. The banner of the notorious National-Bolshevik Party that Dugin co-founded, with the notorious writer Eduard Limonov (see below), in 1994 and left in 1998 was and is an adaptation of the colors of the Nazi flag, with the Soviet hammer-and-sickle symbol replacing the black swastika.

Already during the 1990s, Dugin became not only notorious, among Russia’s nationalists, for his debt to Western radical anti-democratic ideas. He had, furthermore, made himself known by especially strident statements on the future of Ukraine that were, even by Russian nationalist standards, extravagant. In his major book *Foundations of Geopolitics* first published in 1997 and reprinted in 2000, Dugin, for instance, writes that “[t]he sovereignty of Ukraine represents such a negative phenomenon for Russian geopolitics that it can, in principle, easily provoke a military conflict.” (p. 348).¹²² Apart from other similar statements about Ukraine as a whole (“Malorossiya” and “Okraina,” p. 799),¹²³ he, in *Foundations of Geopolitics*, noted, with reference to Southern Ukraine, that “[a]n absolute imperative of Russian geopolitics on the Black Sea shores is the total and unlimited control by Moscow of [these shores] over their whole stretch – from the Ukrainian to the Abkhaz territory” (p. 349). Similar sentences can be found in *Foundations of Geopolitics* and other publications by Dugin.

In the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, Dugin published a programmatic article on Ukraine in the official newspaper of Russia’s parliament *Rossiiskaia gazeta* on 26 January 2005:

Ukraine Russia has lost, and it is not necessary to cover up this sad fact. It will not be possible to develop positive relations with the Kiev of [Viktor] Yushchenko, it is irresponsible and historically criminal to dream about it. We are dealing with an "orange" country under direct American control, whose accession to NATO is a matter of the very near future. Therefore,

¹²² Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitik: Geopoliticheskie budushchee Rossii. Myslit' prostranstvom* (Moskva: Evraziia, 2000), p. 348.

¹²³ Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitik*, p. 799.

Russia has to support the federalization of Ukraine, to use all its influence to create in this brotherly country a south-eastern geopolitical zone aimed at autonomy from an anti-Russian and pro-American Kiev. In addition, certain steps should be taken already now to create a new political opposition to the Yushchenko regime, using all the contradictions in his rule, all clan frictions and political mistakes. If Moscow has lost power in Ukraine, it should do everything possible to form a real, effective and efficient Eurasian opposition there.¹²⁴

In 2006, Dugin became more explicit and suggested that Ukraine should be divided into two states via a “delimitation” (*razmezhevanie*) with the prospect that Eastern and Southern Ukraine would *de facto*, if not *de jure*, become parts of Russia.¹²⁵

Dugin’s explicitly anti-Ukrainian statements were, especially in 2005-2006, not only remarkable by themselves. They were also paradoxical in view of his simultaneous cooperation with Korchyns’kyy and his “*Bratstvo*” party. The head of Ukrainian right-wing radical group later explained this unusual course of action by his anti-American attitudes, and Ukraine’s pro-American orientation during Viktor Yushchenko’s reign. In a 2005 interview with an inquisitive investigator from the patriotic Ukrainian website Censor.net, Korchyns’kyy defended his connections in Moscow:

Censor.net: - The “Brotherhood” [party] works closely with the Eurasian Youth Union, which advocates the establishment of the Eurasian Empire of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. How did Korchyns’kyy’s nationalists’ partnership with such an organization become possible?

Korchyns’kyy: - The Eurasian movement, led by Dugin, is trying to establish relations between nationalists of different nations. There is nothing surprising about it.

Censor.net: - How do you see the future of Russia and Ukraine? Do the two countries have the possibility of a common future?

Korchyns’kyy: - The main problem is that, in any family, the relations between brothers are very complicated. There is never a cloudless relationship in such a situation. In addition, there is obvious competition between Russia and Ukraine in the post-Soviet space. Ukraine, of course, would like to dominate this space someday. But the future of Ukrainian-Russian

¹²⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, “Viktor Yushchenko kak zerkalo rossiyskoy geopolitiki.” *RG.ru*, 26 January 2005, <https://rg.ru/2005/01/26/yushenko-geopolitika.html>.

¹²⁵ Aleksandr Dugin, “Razmezhevanie Ukrayny – geopoliticheskaiia neobkhodimost’.” *Mezhdunarodne evraziiskoe dvizhenie*, 22 August 2006, med.org.ru/article/3223.

relations is determined first of all by the fact that Slavs are discriminated against in the modern world. [...] The big political forces, the American and European bureaucracy deny any national state sovereignty. The only real way to resist these forces is through joint efforts and actions. Of course, the Slavs have a common future. If there is a future at all, then only a common one.¹²⁶

In summer 2005, the “*Bratstvo*” leader together with Putin’s future coordinator of Ukrainian affairs Dmitriy Surkov, the then pro-Putinist political technologist Gleb Pavlovskiy and the leader of the pro-Putin youth GONGO “*Nashi*” (Ours), Vasyl Yakemenko, held a series of lectures for the notorious youth organizations yearly summer camp on lake Seliger.¹²⁷ The topic of Korchyns’kyy’s presentations was how to counter “colour” protests, i.e. actions of civil disobedience similar to the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine or “Rose Revolution” in Georgia.¹²⁸ This was not only a highly dubious engagement of Korchyns’kyy within the context of Ukrainian far right behaviour.

It was also a problem for the late leader of the National-Bolshevik Party of Russia Eduard Limonov, who reported to have been close to Korchyns’kyy before that and who earlier espoused anti-Putinist positions. In 2003, Korchyns’kyy had been, for instance, arrested together with Eduard Limonov after a joint action.¹²⁹ Yet, in December 2013, Limonov reported that he discontinued his contacts with “*Bratstvo*” because of Korchyns’kyy’s involvement not with *Ukrainian* nationalism, but with official *Russian* nationalism to which Limonov was then opposed.¹³⁰ Hanna Hrytsenko adds a further detail on the contacts between Ukrainian and Russian ultra-nationalists related to Oleksandr Matiushin, a former coordinator of a local Ukrainian branch of Limonov’s Moscow-based National-Bolshevik Party, in the Donetsk region, and activist for the above-mentioned “Russian Image” party secretly linked to the Russian Presidential Administration:

¹²⁶ “Korchinskiy: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est’.” *Censor.net*, 11 November 2005, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/2162/korchinskiyi_u_slavyan_obshee_budushee_esli_ono_voobsche_est_rosbalt.

¹²⁷ “Korchinskiy nauchil rossiyskikh ‘nashikh’ borot’sia s revoliutsiey.” *Censor.net*, 27 July 2005, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/1689/korchinskiyi_nauchil_rossiyiskih_quotnashihquot_borotsya_s_revolutsiey_gazetaru.

¹²⁸ “Korchinskiy nauchil rossiyskikh ‘nashikh’ borot’sia s revoliutsiey.”

¹²⁹ “V Moskve zaderzhany Limonov, Korchinskiy i s”emochnaja gruppa telekanala ‘1+1’.” *Podrobnosti*, 2003, <https://podrobnosti.ua/91773-v-moskve-zaderzhany-limonov-korchinskij-i-semochnaja-gruppa-telekanala-11.html>.

¹³⁰ Limonov Eduard, “Izvini, Dmitro!” *Livejournal*, 6 December 2013, <https://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/402436.html>.

Matiushin, formerly also a member of the “Brotherhood” of Dmytro Korchyns’kyy and the Eurasian Youth Union, claims that by the end of 2013 a combat unit consisting of right-wing youth had grown out of the [Ukrainian separatist micro-group] “Donetsk Republic.” This wing, called the “Varyag crew”, as Matiushin points out, played a special role in the events of the so-called “Russian Spring” [i.e. the alleged uprising in Eastern and Southern Ukraine in spring 2014].¹³¹

Yet another exhilarating facet of this story is that, in a 2005 interview for Censor.Net, Korchyns’kyy indicated that he had been in coalition talks with Viktor Yanukovych to jointly confront the “Orange” political camp, yet failed to implement the alliance: “Initially, we tried to create one powerful opposition bloc. But after Yanukovych decided to be not the leader of the opposition but the leader of a small party by signing a Memorandum with [then President Viktor] Yushchenko, now we want to create at least a radical-opposition electoral bloc.”¹³² In this interview, Korchyns’kyy also agreed to an extension of the lease on Russia’s Black Sea naval base in the Ukrainian port city of Sevastopol – an idea to which Ukrainian nationalists were always radically opposed.¹³³

Later on, Korchyns’kyy has repeatedly assured that his dubious contacts in Russia are in the past. Indeed, in spite of his one-time declarative support of Yanukovych, Korchyns’kyy and his group ended up with criminal cases against the members of “Bratstvo” when Yanukovych became President in 2010. In Russia, since 2005, Korchyns’kyy is wanted because of his alleged deeds in Chechnya. Communication with Dugin, in Korchyns’kyy’s words, ended with “the burning of Dugin’s office in Moscow.” He apparently implied with this formulation that he or his people had set a fire at Dugin’s office.¹³⁴ In any way, by 2007, “Bratstvo” and Korchyns’kyy had officially left the International Eurasian Movement after three members of the Eurasian Youth Union desecrated Ukrainian state symbols on Mount Hoverla in October 2007.¹³⁵ After that, Korchyns’kyy did not seem to have had any ties to representatives close to the Kremlin, and returned to traditional Ukrainian far-right activism.

¹³¹ Grytsenko, “Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov.”

¹³² “Korchinskiy: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est’.”

¹³³ “Korchinskiy: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est’.”

¹³⁴ “HARD z Vlashchenko: Dmytro Korchyns’kyy, literator.” *Telekanal ZIK*, 3 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-s5nIIL4Os>.

¹³⁵ “‘Bratstvo’ ob’iavilo rozyisk vandalov iz Evraziyskogo soiuza molodezhi.” *Liga.net*, October 2007, <https://news.liga.net/politics/news/bratstvo-obyavilo-rozyisk-vandalov-iz-evraziyskogo-soyuza-molodezhi>.

6. Ukraine's Far Right and Pro-Kremlin Actors in Ukraine

6.1. Ukraine's Far Right and Russia-Related "Oligarchs"

Azov, Medvedchuk and Muraev

In March 2018, members of Korchyns'kyy's "Bratstvo" and their supporters were trying to block the entrance to the main office of the TV channel ZIK in Kyiv.¹³⁶ The main reason for the nationalists' protest was the sale of the formerly pro-Ukrainian television station to an entity indirectly related to the notorious Ukrainian politician and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk who has close ties to the Kremlin. In reaction to this ultra-nationalist protest not only the police, but also the ultra-nationalist vigilante "*National druzhyny*" affiliated with the National Corps came to defend the operation of the TV channel.

According to the Azov Movement's leadership, the channel management had asked Azov for protection.¹³⁷ While the provision of such protection services is a common practice for Ukraine's para-military nationalist groups, this case was special as the final beneficiary of the channel was Viktor Medvedchuk.¹³⁸ Curiously, in May 2020, the same National Corps attacked the office of Medvedchuk's "Opposition Platform — For Life" party in Kyiv.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ "Blokuvannia telekanalu ZIK: lak vse rozPOCHYNALOSIA." ZIK, 3 March 2018, https://zik.ua/news/2018/03/28/blokuvannya_telekanalu_ziku_yak_vse_rozPOCHYNALOSYA_1294755; "Korchyns'kyy zaiavyv pro piketuvannia telekanalu ZIK." Slovo i Dilo, 3 March 2018, <https://www.slovovidilo.ua/2018/03/28/novyna/suspilstvo/korchynskyj-zayavyv-pro-piketuvannya-telekanalu-zik>.

¹³⁷ "'Natsional'ni Druzhyny' vzialy pid okhoronu telekanal ZIK." Ukrains'ka Pravda, 3 March 2018, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/03/27/7175935/>; "Telekanal ZIK pid okhoronoiu 'Natsdruzhyn': iaki povnovazhennia ta shcho dozvoleno aktyvistam?" Slovo i Dilo, 3 March 2018, <https://www.slovovidilo.ua/2018/03/28/pogljad/suspilstvo/telekanal-zik-oxoronoyu-naczdruzhyn-yaki-povnovazhenna-ta-dozvoleno-aktyvistam>.

¹³⁸ "Vlasnyk '112' i NewsOne Kozak kupiv Zik – kil'ka zhurnalistik zaiavyly pro zvil'nennia." Radio Svoboda, 9 June 2019, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kozak-kupiv-zik/29999891.html>; "Vlasnyk '112 Ukraina' ta NewsOne kupiv ishche y telekanal ZIK." Ukrinform, 14 June 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2721693-vlasnik-112-ukraina-ta-newsone-kupiv-ise-j-telekanal-zik.html>.

¹³⁹ Valeriy Saakov, "Aktsiu pod ofisom Viktora Medvedchuka provodyv 'Natskorpus'." Deutsche Welle, 23 May 2020, <https://www.dw.com/uk/aktsiu-pid-ofisom-viktora-medvedchuka-provodyv-natskorpus/a-53545845>.

In general, Ukrainian right-wing radicals have, contrary to Azov's 2018 action in support of Medvedchuk, repeatedly attacked certain pro-Russian TV channels. In 2016, due to the pro-Russian rhetoric of the Inter TV channel, Azov had blocked and organized actions against it across Ukraine. The difference was, however, that unlike in the situation with the ZIK channel that Azov defended in 2018, Viktor Medvedchuk (who, to be sure, has been verbally attacked by Azov during rallies) was in 2016 not the owner of the Inter TV channel.

A somewhat similarly suspicious case is that of the pro-Russian politician Dmytro Muraev, a frequent guest to ZIK, and one of former co-owners of the relatively pro-Russian TV channels "112" and "NewsOne." In spite of their generally anti-nationalist rhetoric, these TV channels have given considerable air-time to Azov representatives. That, moreover, happened although in 2018 the Mykolaiv branch of Azov had publicly attacked Muraev. That was a reaction to the fact that Muraev considers the Donbas conflict to be Ukraine's purely domestic problem and a "misunderstanding of the East."

Svoboda and Yanukovych

In connection with US presidential elections of 2016, the activities of Donald Trump's election campaign manager Paul Manafort's previous activities in Ukraine came under scrutiny.¹⁴⁰ Manafort had advised Yanukovych in 2007-2009 in preparation for his successful 2010 Ukrainian presidential election bid. Manafort apparently recommended, among others, to play on political polarization in Ukraine. He seems to have, in particular, advised to utilize the anti-Semitic as well as anti-Russian rhetoric of Ukraine's ultra-nationalists for Yanukovych's electoral campaigning. This would have helped to do both, creating the image of a radical nationalist threat to Ukraine's integration with the West, and mobilizing the pro-Russian electorate in Ukraine's eastern regions.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Franklin Foer, "The Quiet American." *Slate*, 28 April 2016. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/04/paul-manafort-isnt-a-gop-retread-hes-made-a-career-of-reinventing-tyrants-and-despots.html#f_comment=500595474; "Ukrains'ki 'druzi' Manaforta: khto, koly i za iaki hroshi naymav polittekhnolohia." *BBC Ukraine*, 30 July 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-45003132>; "The Mueller Report's Secret Memos." *BuzzFeed.News*, 3 November 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jasonleopold/mueller-report-secret-memos-1>.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Miller and Mike Eckel, "On the Eve of His Trial: A Deeper Look Into How Paul Manafort Elected Ukraine's President." *Radio Free Europe - Radio Liberty*, 27 July 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/on-eve-of-trial-a-deeper-glimpse-into-how-paul-manafort-elected-ukraine-s-president/29394601.html>.

While this was a predictable strategy, another aspect of this approach was more intriguing. Apparently, *Svoboda*'s was not only indirectly utilized for Yanukovych's image makeover, but also directly supported and included into Yanukovych's Party of Regions' "dark accounting." Such an operation had been suspected ever since the rise of "*Svoboda*," but was only documented after Viktor Yanukovych's February 2014 escape from Ukraine.¹⁴² In August 2016, Serhiy Leshchenko – a well-known journalist and then an MP – made public visual evidence from the black book-keeping of the Party of Regions that had been found in 2014 at Yanukovych's former estate at Mezhihiria near Kyiv. Leshchenko posted the photograph of a table of unofficial expenses of the Party of Regions that listed not only payments to Manafort. It also showed a transfer of US\$200,000 by the Party of Regions to the *Svoboda* party, in 2010. When publishing this document, Leshchenko, moreover, alleged that this was not the only such incident and that there was evidence for more such payments already during the years of 2007-2009.¹⁴³

Following Yanukovych's victory in the 2010 presidential elections, a number of commentators, including an editor of the left-wing Kyiv *Commons* magazine, started to already publicly accusing *Svoboda* and the Party of Regions of unofficial cooperation.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps, also on Manafort's recommendation, Yanukovych and his party not only supported, in secret, *Svoboda* financially. The Party of Regions and its affiliated oligarchs with their influential TV channels also increased the media publicity of *Svoboda*.¹⁴⁵ The purpose of promoting a then still marginal and, to many voters, unknown party was not only to complement Yanukovych's 2010 presidential elections victory with a 2012 parliamentary elections victory for his Party of Regions, by way of shaking up the nationally political party spectrum of Ukraine.

There seems to have been also a larger plan, of the Party of Region's "political technologists," to strengthen *Svoboda* in order to fundamentally split the nationalist opposition to Yanukovych's rule into a moderate and an extremist camp. The rise of *Svoboda* was supposed to create a scarecrow

¹⁴² "Khroniky 'Svobody'." *Chesno*, 1 Januray 2020, <https://www.chesno.org/post/3763/>.

¹⁴³ "Leshchenko: U 'chorniy bukhalterii' Partii rehioniv e platezhi dlia partii 'Svoboda'." *Hromadske.ua*, 19 August 2016, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/leshchenko-u-chornii-bukhalterii-partii-rehioniv-ie-platezhi-dlia-partii-svoboda>.

¹⁴⁴ Vitaliy Atanasov, "Osoblyvosti natsional-radykal'noi dzhynsy." *Spil'ne: zhurnal sotsial'noi krytyky*, 13 May 2011, <https://commons.com.ua/uk/osoblivosti-natsional-radikalnoyi-dzh/>.

¹⁴⁵ Sergei Shcherbina, "Politychni tok-shou: Iak vony tse robliat'?" *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 7 June 2011, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2011/06/7/6275793/>.

for the Party of Regions' Russian-speaking core electorate and mobilize it during elections. In Ukraine's relations to the West, *Svoboda*'s ultra-nationalism would also provide a convenient deflection from Yanukovych's own anti-Westernism and authoritarianism.

Moreover, there seems to have been a long-term scheme to grow the popularity of *Svoboda* chairman Oleh Tiahnybok to such a degree that he would make it, together with Yanukovych, into the second round of the next regular presidential election that had then been scheduled for 2015. The calculation was that Yanukovych might have serious problems to win against a moderately nationalist candidate in the run-off, but would be certain to gain more votes than a radical nationalist in a presidential election's two-candidates-only second round. The most visible expression of this strategy was the mentioned rapid rise, in 2010-2012, of the presence of the then still marginal *Svoboda* in Ukrainian mass media controlled by various oligarchs. This concerned, above all, the various popular political evening TV talk-shows where representatives of the, until November 2012, extra-parliamentary and largely Galicia-based *Svoboda* became surprisingly regular participants.

Table composed by Anton Shekhovtsov: Talk-shows that included representatives of the *Svoboda* party in 2005–2012¹⁴⁶

Period	" <i>Svoboda Slova</i> " ("Freedom of the Word," channel ICTV)	" <i>Velyka polityka z Evheniem Kysel'ovym</i> " ("Big Politics with Evhen Kysel'ov," channel "Inter")	" <i>Shuster LIVE</i> " (channels "Ukraina"/First National)
2nd half of 2005 r.	1	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2006 r.	1	No shows	No shows
2nd half of 2006 r.	0	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2007 r.	0	No shows	No shows

¹⁴⁶ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Vseukrainskoe ob'edinenie 'Svoboda': Problema legitimnosti bor'by za vlast'." *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2013, pp. 22-63. Data collection ended on 5 May 2012.

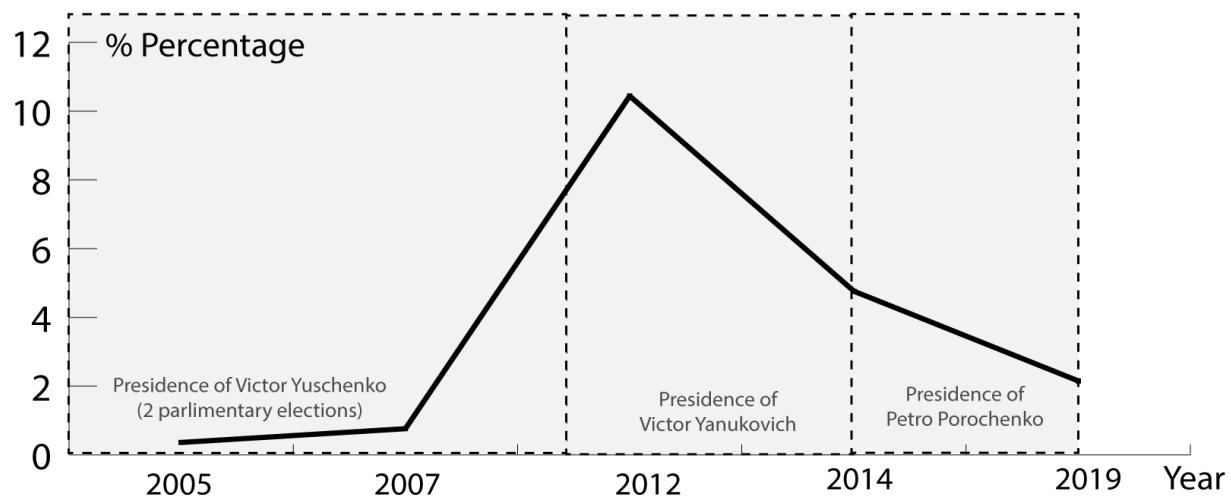
2nd half of 2007 r.	0	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2008 r.	1	No shows	No shows
2nd half of 2008 r.	0	No shows	0
1st half of 2009 r.	0	No shows	2
2nd half of 2009 r.	1	1	2
1st half of 2010 r.	0	6	6
2nd half of 2010 r.	3	10	7
1st half of 2011 r.	3	11	10
2nd half of 2011 r.	4	5	5
1st half of 2012 r.	3	3	7
<u>In sum</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>39</u>

As the table indicates, once Yanukovych became president in spring 2010, the presence of *Svoboda* representatives in popular TV talk shows of the two channels under his most direct influence grew rapidly. This happened though Tiahnybok had done miserably in the 2010 presidential elections. To be sure, his party had been far more successful in the 2009–2010 regional and local elections than before. Yet, the jump in *Svoboda*'s popularity before its promotion by Yanukovych-influenced TV channels had only happened in the three Galician oblasts of Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivs'k and L'viv. This had not yet translated into notable all-Ukrainian support for the party's chairman in the 2010 presidential elections.

Because of the manifest media support by TV channels connected to then President Yanukovych, the party's secretly improved financial situation, and some other reasons, it was thus, perhaps, no surprise that *Svoboda* sharply increased its results in the parliamentary elections of October 2012. While having earlier always only gained less than 1% of electoral support in parliamentary elections, it received 10.44%, in the proportional part of the voting, in 2012.¹⁴⁷ However, it again fell under 5%, in the following October 2014 and under 2.5% in the July 2019 parliamentary elections. While it did thus not quite return to its pre-2012 even lower performance levels in national elections, it is today again on the fringes of Ukrainian politics.

¹⁴⁷ Serhiy Vasylchenko, “‘Svoboda’ proti vsikh: korotkyy ohlyad rezul’tativ radykal’nykh pravykh na vyborakh 1994-2012 rr.” *Ukrainian Centre of Social Data*, 2016, <https://socialdata.org.ua/svoboda-proti-vsikh-korotkiy-oglyad-r/>.

Paradoxically, in the post-Soviet Ukrainian far right's entire history, it was only during the reign of Ukraine's most pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych, that Svoboda received briefly support over the electoral entrance barrier for the parliament, which was at 5%, in 2012. Only during the presidency of a man who had the demonstrative support of Vladimir Putin, Ukraine's far right was able to form an own faction in the Verkhovna Rada. During all other national elections, its support remained regional and scanty.



Graph 1: Electoral support for the Svoboda party national parliamentary elections of Ukraine in 2005-2019

Svoboda and Ukraine's Moscow-connected Oligarchs

About a year before Yanukovych fell, in 2013, another dubious episode had also involved *Svoboda* when the party had come publicly out against exploitation of shale gas reserves in Ukraine. That was and is a position similar to that of above-mentioned Viktor Medvedchuk – a defender, in Ukraine, of the interests of the Russia's gas industry.¹⁴⁸ When, in 2014-15, the Dutch-British company "Shell" and "American ExxonMobil" started exploring shale gas development, *Svoboda* organized protests for "defending the eco-system from Western exploitation."¹⁴⁹ In this connection, some observers

¹⁴⁸ "Slantsevyy haz nepokoyit' 'Svobodu' i... Medvedchuka." *Radio Svoboda*, 1 February 2013, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/24890573.html>.

¹⁴⁹ "'Svoboda' proty vydobutku slantsevoho hazu na Donbasi." *UNIAN*, 18 January 2013, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/740428-svoboda-proti-vidobutku-slantsevogo-gazu-na-donbasi.html>.

speculated that *Svoboda's* actions may have also followed the interests of another notorious pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch in the gas trade sector – Dmytro Firtash. Such an idea suggested itself as Firtash was known to be a business-partner of one of the biggest donors of the *Svoboda* party, Ihor Kryvetskiy.¹⁵⁰

The dubious secret collaboration between *Svoboda* and pro-Russian politicians as well as Moscow-connected businesspeople even continued after the victory of the Euromaidan. In September 2015, Ukrainian journalist Oleksandr Paskhover published an investigation on the *Svoboda* party relying on earlier revelations by above-mentioned journalist Leshchenko:

In May 2015, in connection with the opening of the [legal] case against Serhii Klyuyev, Poroshenko Bloc People's Deputy Serhii Leshchenko discovered an interesting document. It was a copy of the correspondence between the EU High Commissioner Catherine Ashton and the *Svoboda* party activist Oleh Makhnits'ky when he headed [Ukraine's] Prosecutor General's Office in the spring of 2014 [immediately after the victory of the Euromaidan]. Thanks to the received copies, Leshchenko learned that the lists of Ukrainian officials under Yanukovych, against whom the EU imposed personal sanctions, had been prepared not in Brussels, but in Kyiv, to be more precise – in the Prosecutor General's Office [then led by Makhnits'ky]. And here's what surprised Leshchenko: initially 18 people were included in the list, and later [the list] was supplemented by four more old-time politicians (Serhiy Arbuzov, Oleksandr Klymenko, Yuriy Ivanyushchenko and Eduard Stavyts'kyi). But such odious figures as former head of the presidential administration Serhii L'ovoč'kin, the Kremlin's gas magnate and partner of RosUkrEnergo Dmytro Firtash, former deputy prime minister Yuri Boyko, who had “distinguished himself” with the deal to acquire drilling rigs for oil production (the multimillion-dollar case of the so-called “Boyko rigs”), and Serhiy Klyuyev were not included in the black list provided by Makhnits'ky [as then General Procurator]. “This may be evidence of a conspiracy between the ‘Svoboda’ [party] and this group [of oligarchs],” Leshchenko explained and specified: “Then Poroshenko was not president yet. As a result, Brussels, having received Makhnitsky's list, in March 2014, blocked funds and

¹⁵⁰ Oleksandr Paskhover, “Shcho soboyu predstavliae VO Svoboda - doslydzhenia NV.” *Novoe vremia*, 7 September 2015, <https://nv.ua/ukr/publications/shcho-soboju-predstavljaje-vo-svoboda-doslidzhennja-nv-67371.html>.

assets of Yanukovych's comrades-in-arms – those who fell under the suspicion "of stealing state funds," but Firtash, L'ovoch'kin, Boyko and Klyuev remained – as if they were "Caesar's wives" – beyond suspicion.¹⁵¹

To be sure, such possible protection by Ukraine's General Prosecutor is not unusual in post-Soviet politics. However, in this case, the representative of a loudly anti-Russian and manifestly ultra-nationalist party – Oleh Makhnits'ky from *Svoboda* – was apparently protecting from sanctions certain oligarchs and politicians with a publicly pro-Russian profile, and with known close relations to Moscow.

6.2. Ukraine's Far Right and Russia-related Political Actors

In connection with the victory of the pro-Western Revolution of Dignity and start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, most of the Ukrainian far right's then still existing international contacts, including those with partners in Russia, were aborted. Soon, however, new foreign relations were being established mainly by the increasingly ambitious Azov movement. This peculiar development and role of Azov as the Ukraine's far right prime international networker has had various reasons. It can be partly explained by the relative youthfulness of its leaders, modernity of its discourse, and separateness of Azov's outlook from the mainstream Ukrainian ultra-nationalist discourse.

One of several curious facets of the rise of Azov became its surprisingly neutral assessment in the Russian-language videoblogs of the notorious anti-Maidan blogger Anatoly Sharii. The popular commentator has his own party named after him in Ukraine, yet lives outside the country and is often accused of implementing a Kremlin-inspired political agenda via the internet.¹⁵² In spite of Sharii's otherwise radically anti-nationalist and, some would say, anti-Ukrainian positions, his numerous comments on the regiment Azov have – in stark contrast to the general ideology of his widely watched video shows – been demonstratively ambivalent, documental and non-

¹⁵¹ Paskhover, "Shcho soboyu predstavliae VO Svoboda - doslydzheniya NV."

¹⁵² "Feyki Shariya. Kak Shariy pokryvayet ubiys ukraintsev. Chast' 1." *Mil.in.ua*, 18 July 2019, <https://mil.in.ua/uk/blogs/fejky-sharyya-kak-sharyj-pokr-d1-8bvaet-ubyjcz-ukraynczhev-chast-1/>; "Feyki Shariya. Kak Shariy pokryvayet ubiys ukraintsev. Chast' 2." *Mil.in.ua*, 18 July 2019, <https://mil.in.ua/uk/blogs/fejky-sharyya-razoblachenye-propagandysta-chast-2/>.

judgemental. Sharii has, moreover, criticized the movement's opponents and provided a platform for the movement's representatives to respond to negative assessments of Azov.¹⁵³

In 2017, Sharii released, for instance, two videoblogs that may be seen as partial apologies of Azov's unarmed extra-governmental vigilante militia *Natsional'nyy druzhyny* (National Fellowship). He has included in one such blog a brief interview with the above-mentioned Russian political emigre Aleksei Levkin who is – according to his own claims – an ideologist of the *Natsional'nyy druzhyny*, and also a part of the above-introduced Russian Center. Before moving to Ukraine, Levkin was, among others, a member of the party *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo* (RNE, Russian National Unity) – Russia's most well-known openly neo-Nazi political organization founded in the 1990s and using the swastika as its main symbol.¹⁵⁴

This link is in so far worth-mentioning as Russian para-military volunteers from Levkin's former organization RNE have, since 2014, actively taken part in the Kremlin's delegated inter-state war against Kyiv in the Ukrainian Donets Basin.¹⁵⁵ One of the initially best known official leaders of the Donbas separatist movement in spring 2014 and first "people's governor" of Donets'k was Pavlo Hubarev (Russian: Pavel Gubarev). While being born in Ukraine and a Ukrainian citizen, Hubarev had been a member of the RNE, and received training in one of its camps. There are photographs and videos of Hubarev in the black RNE uniform with its red swastika.¹⁵⁶ However, the former RNE members and today Azov activists Levkin and Korotkikh appear to have left behind this aspect of the RNE ideology since arriving in Ukraine.

In any way, Sharii has mostly interviewed Azov affiliates less relatively prominent than Levkin. He has mainly taken interviews with low-ranking Azov members who may have spoken to him with or without approval of the leadership of the movement.¹⁵⁷ There was only one exception – a seemingly

¹⁵³ Anatoliy Shariy. "Azov" otvechayet Sergeyu." *Anatoliy Shariy channel*, 5 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qp5ybqzq5rg.

¹⁵⁴ Anatoliy Shariy, "'Natsional'nyye druzhiny'. To, chego vam ne pokazali Novyy poryadok." *Anatoliy Shariy channel*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ36dxjY4cg&t=112s>.

¹⁵⁵ Vyacheslav Likhachev, "The Far Right in the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine." *Notes del l'Ifrī: Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 95, 2016. <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russienevervisions/far-right-conflict-between-russia-and-ukraine>.

¹⁵⁶ Nikolay Mitrokhin, "Im Namen des Staates: Russische Nationalisten im Ukraine-Einsatz." *Osteuropa*, nos. 3-4, 2019, pp. 103–121.

¹⁵⁷ Anatoliy Shariy, "'Natsional'nyye druzhiny'. To, chego vam ne pokazali Novyy poryadok." *Anatoliy Shariy channel*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ36dxjY4cg&t=112s>

official interview by Sharii's program with a formal representative of the movement, Eduard Yurchenko, one of the Azov's official ideologists.¹⁵⁸ Yurchenko heads the conservative wing of the Azov Movement, the *Orden*, which has also contacts with the *Svoboda* party and "Tradition and Order" group.

Another peculiarity in the public behaviour of the Azov movement is that its public activism, on the streets, countering communist and pro-Russian demonstrations in Ukraine has, in spite of Azov's right-wing and Ukrainian nationalist ideology, been relatively muted. From May 2015 to October of 2018, there were 1,535 public actions of Azov recorded. Yet, only 51 of them were directed against communist and pro-Russian forces or values in Ukraine. This is, in relative terms, a surprisingly low number for an ultra-nationalist Ukrainian movement.¹⁵⁹

It is further worth noting that the Azov movement has received attention and publicity from Dmytro Hordon (Russian: Dmitriy Gordon), a famous Ukrainian journalist in the post-Soviet media space. In his program "Evening with Dmitriy Gordon," the journalist has interviewed Andriy Biletsky,¹⁶⁰ the leader of the Azov movement, whom Gordon described "as a clever and wise man." In this connection, it is worth noting that Gordon conducts his interviews in Russian language, and has been an active commentator on such TV channels as "NewsOne" and "112."¹⁶¹ These media outlets are said to indirectly belong to pro-Russian figures such as the above-mentioned Muraev and Medvedchuk. In most of his assessments concerning Ukrainian right-wing radicalism, Gordon has harshly criticized the *Svoboda* party and Right Sector. In contrast, Andriy Biletsky has been characterized by Gordon as a patriot of Ukraine: "The main part of the nationalists are normal people, but we have problems with nationalist leaders. We also have some good leaders, Andriy Biletskyi, for example."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Anatoliy Shariy, "Natskorpus iznutri CH1." *Anatoliy Shariy channel*, 24 February 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY5u4duvMDI>.

¹⁵⁹ These concerns have been published on web media such as *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, *Obozrevatel'*, as well as the sites and official pages of the Azov movement on social networks (Facebook, Telegram). There are no data on the dynamics for the period from January to September of 2015 and from January to May of 2018.

¹⁶⁰ "V gostyakh u Dmitriya Gordona (2019)." Andrey Biletskiy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paQBjBdAmbY>

¹⁶¹ "Gordon: Nas mogut zhdat' bol'shie potriaseniiia – Ukraina mozhet raspast'sia." *Nash*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w4n6magrQU>.

¹⁶² "Gordon: Bol'shinstvo natsionalistov normal'nye lyudi." *112.UA*, 17 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LIGgfIS8e8>.

As this outline has shown, direct contacts of Ukraine's far right with the Kremlin are, for obvious reasons, rare. Direct cooperation with any pro-Putinist actors are risky for the far right, and will be, if conducted, hidden as much as possible. Not only Ukrainian nationalist ideology, but also the post-2014 Ukrainian political mainstream does not tolerate any collaboration with pro-Moscow forces, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In general, information on the financing of right-wing radicals has, with some exceptions, remained largely hidden from the public eye. The above listed cases remained situational alliances that do, by themselves, not indicate stable contacts between pro-Russian forces and Ukrainian right-wing radical movements. The situation with partners outside the borders of Ukraine is different.

7. Ukraine's Far Right and Pro-Kremlin Actors Around the World

7.1. Ukraine's Far Right and Pro-Kremlin Groups in Eastern Europe

Most of the lines of communication between some Ukrainian far-right actors and certain pro-Kremlin disappeared or became, at least, more indirect, after the Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the conflict in Donbas. On the other hand, since then, some groups managed to build up new or to deepen older connections with the non-Russian European far-right. The problem with these older and new connections was and is, however, for Ukraine's radical nationalists, that a whole number, if not the majority of Europe's right-wing radical formations have more or less intense sympathies for, or even contacts with, Putin's Russia.¹⁶³

Many of the West European radically nationalist groups espouse openly pro-Kremlin views, and have not seldomly even a special allegiance to Vladimir Putin personally. Moreover, some of these groups have been publicly accused of lobbying the Kremlin's interests in EU countries. Nevertheless, Ukraine's post-Euromaidan far right has maintained or partly even extended contacts to similar groups in East-Central Europe (Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary), Western Europe (France, Germany, Sweden and Italy), and in the United States.

¹⁶³ Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

Azov and Its Intermarium Support Group

After the abortion of most of *Svoboda*'s earlier foreign ties by 2014, the Azov Movement has become the Ukrainian far right's leader in terms of international cooperation mostly obtaining new partners abroad rather than continuing older foreign links of Ukraine's far right. The main branch of Azov conducting these contacts is the semi-intellectual off-shot of the movement - the Intermarium Support Group.¹⁶⁴ The word Intermarium is the Latin variant of the name of the Polish "Międzymorze" (Between the Seas) geopolitical scheme promoted, after World War I, by, among others, Józef Piłsudski who wanted to create an anti-German and anti-Soviet alliance of East-Central European nations located between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas.

Azov's Intermarium Support Group has become a medium for the involvement of Ukrainian right-wing activists with Croatian, Belarusian, Polish, Hungarian and Baltic radical nationalists.¹⁶⁵ This happens, for instance, through conferences about the future of the *Trymor'ya (Three Seas)* or *Mizhmorev'ya* (Between the Seas) projects.¹⁶⁶ Today, Croatian, Polish and Ukrainian nationalists are re-interpreting these older ideas into a novel concept of a separate East European multi-national defence and economic bloc that would be opposing both liberal Europe and imperial Eurasia.

The Intermarium Support Group conducts a variety of activities including discussions and commemorative events. One of the largest such series of meetings with foreign right-wing radical movements is the annual Intermarium conference taking place in Kyiv.¹⁶⁷ Through these and similar initiatives, the international department of the Azov movement has become one of the key actors in East European far-right discourse. Over the last years, Kyiv's Intermarium conferences have brought together representatives and participants from 13 Central and Eastern European countries.¹⁶⁸

This activity is by itself not noteworthy, and does fall outside the framework of Ukrainian nationalist ideology and behaviour. However, within this international network, Ukraine's far right sometimes

¹⁶⁴ "Intermarium Support Group." FOIA Research, 17 January 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/intermarium-support-group>.

¹⁶⁵ "Intermarium' krokue Evropou." *Natsional'nyy korpus*, 8 February 2019, nationalcorps.org/intermarum-kroku-evropou/.

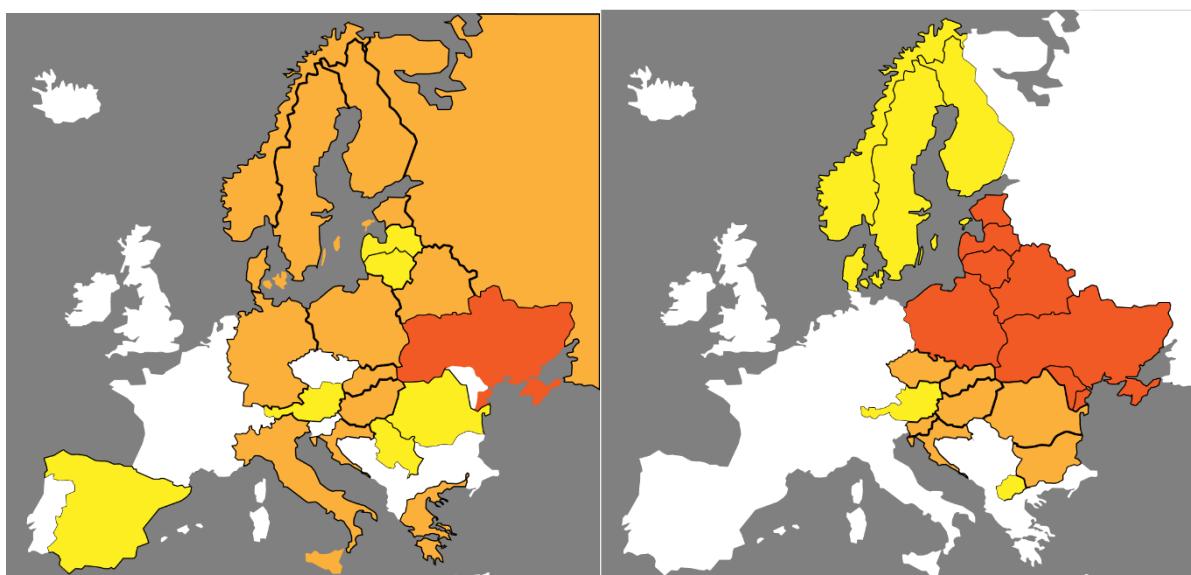
¹⁶⁶ "Natskorpus vidvidav Khorvatiju: rozbudova Intermariumu nabyraye obertiv." *Natsional'nyy korpus* 12 July 2019, nationalcorps.org/nackorpus-vdvdav-horvatju-rozbudova-intermarumu-nabira-obertv/.

¹⁶⁷ "Intermarium Support Group."

¹⁶⁸ "Intermarium Support Group."

works with certain non-Ukrainian right-radical organizations whose relation to the Kremlin is ambivalent. The official position of Ukraine's nationalists is that they do not cooperate with foreign partners who support Moscow. Yet, this is not what is happening sometimes in practice – even after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014.

The future members of the National Corps party took, within the Azov Battalion and later Regiment, active part in the fighting in the Donbas in 2014-15. Yet, at the same time, the Azov movement is in contact with the Italian fascist organization CasaPound that lacks a clear position on the Russian-Ukrainian war. This, outside Italy, largely unknown movement started with the creation of a commune for "true Italians" in Rome for the families of their ideological supporters. Over time, this practice spread throughout Italy, and the group became a more notable neo-fascist actor in Europe.¹⁶⁹ Some members of CasaPound support Ukraine in this war, while others support Russia and even have experience of fighting on the side of pro-Russian militants.¹⁷⁰ A somewhat similar story goes for the Carpathian Sich whose official hostility to Russia did not prevent its cooperation with Polish radical nationalists who have links to Moscow.



¹⁶⁹ Caterina Froio, Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Giorgia Bulli, Matteo Albanese, *CasaPound Italia: Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics* (London: Routledge 2020).

¹⁷⁰ "I fascisti italiani fanno i mercenari per Putin." *Espresso.repubblica*, 11 October 2017, <https://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2017/10/11/news/i-fascisti-italiani-fanno-i-mercenari-per-putin-1.311735>.

Map 1 (left): European countries in which the Azov movement has links to local far-right groups.

Map 2 (right): Countries seen by Ukrainian far right Intermarium Support Group as potential members of their Intermarium Support Group geopolitical project.¹⁷¹

Polish and Ukrainian Ultra-Nationalists

In 2019, hackers of the Distributed Denial of Secrets group published 175 gigabytes of mailbox information and other data from Russian officials.¹⁷² According to this so-called archive "Dark Side of the Kremlin," the Belarus-born political entrepreneur Aleksandr Usovsky proposed to the well-known State Duma deputy and head of the notorious CIS Institute Konstantin Zatulin a project for creating a network of anti-Ukrainian forces in Eastern Europe.¹⁷³ According to the published correspondence, Usovsky offered to hold, for instance, rallies during the Eastern Partnership Summits in the Visegrad Four capitals. For Poland, such a project was approved, so that Usovski requested funding.

According to the project's plan, he wanted to, among others, utilize and raise public "condemnation of Bandera" by several Polish far-right movements. This included, apart from pro-Russian organizations, also the far-right groups *Szturm* as well as *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* (ONR), the latter being one of the three largest right-wing radical organizations in Poland. These groups agreed to sign a joint declaration condemning Ukraine's European integration because of the support of the "ideology of Banderism" in the country.

This was, to be sure, by itself an altogether unsurprising episode, and fits the scheme of several similar Russian operations with Polish far-right activists that became disclosed. In one case, it even involved Manuel Ochsenreiter, a prolific German affiliate of Alexander Dugin's Eurasianist movement, who was at the moment of the disclosure of his action, together with Polish far-right activists, against Ukraine an employee of the German Bundestag.¹⁷⁴ Usovkiy's project, moreover,

¹⁷¹ Maps based on information excerpted from reports on the websites of FOIA Research and Bellingcat.

¹⁷² "The Dark Side of the Kremlin." *Distributed Denial of Secrets*, 25 January 2019, <https://bird.bg/kremlin?q=%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0>.

¹⁷³ Paweł Reszk and Pavla Holcova, "The man who wanted more October." *StopFake*, 18 October, 2017, www.stopfake.org/en/the-man-who-wanted-more/.

¹⁷⁴ Sabine am Orde, "Brandanschlag in der Ukraine: Spur nach Deutschland." *Taz.de*, 24 March 2020, taz.de/Brandanschlag-in-der-Ukraine/!5673875/.

continued a Soviet-era tradition of clandestine operations in the West by Moscow with the help of Western and supposedly anti-Soviet radical nationalists.¹⁷⁵

Remarkable in the Usovskiy case was, however, that, about the same time, members from the ONR were in contact with, and participated in actions of, the Azov movement.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, *Szturm* has, in general, behaved as a relatively pro-Ukrainian nationalist movement among the Polish far right. It had and has well-established contacts with the Azov movement in the framework of projects of the above-mentioned Intermarium Support Group.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, both Polish ultra-nationalist groups became unwitting parts of Russian secret operation.

7.2. Ukraine's Far Right and Pro-Kremlin Actors in Western Europe

Azov and CasaPound

Since 2014, the Carpathian Sich together with the international department of the Azov movement has conducted joint conferences with CasaPound, in Uzhgorod and Lviv. According to *FOIA Research*, representatives of the Intermarium Support Group, together with CasaPound, participated in a Acca Larentia commemoration in 2019.¹⁷⁸ The multi-national meeting attended by representatives of the Azov movement was part of a series of yearly events of the European far right in Rome commemorating the death of three young neo-fascist activists in 1978 in violent clashes with communists (on the Acca Larentia street) and the police.¹⁷⁹

As in other such cases, the close cooperation of the Ukrainian far right with CasaPound was paradoxical in view the organizations ambivalent stance towards Russia and Ukraine. On the one

¹⁷⁵ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*.

¹⁷⁶ Vladislav Mal'tsev, "Soiuz svastiki i vol'chego kriuchka: Shturmoviki 'Azova' nashli pobratimov v Pol'she." *Ukraina.ru*, 25 October 2018. ukraina.ru/exclusive/20181025/1021547860.html.

¹⁷⁷ Witold Dobrowolski, "O narodowcach co pokochali Murzynkę." *Szturm*, 30 November 2017, <http://szturm.com.pl/index.php/miesiecznik/item/642-witold-dobrowolski-o-narodowcach-co-pokochali-murzynke>.

¹⁷⁸ "Karpatska Sich." *FOIA Research*, 14 January 2019. www.foiaresearch.net/organization/karpatska-sich.

¹⁷⁹ "'Presente!' Nationalrevolutionäre Aktivisten beim 'Acca Larentia' Gedenken in Rom," *Der Dritte Weg*, 12 January 2019, <https://der-dritte-weg.info/2019/01/presente-nationalrevolutionare-aktivisten-beim-acca-larentia-gedenken/>.

hand, the leadership of the CasaPound supported the Right Sector during the Maidan revolution.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, it had manifest sympathies for Putin's Russia before and after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war.¹⁸¹ Anton Shekhovtsov mentions, for instance, that "[o]n 18 October 2014, the L[ega]N[ord], CasaPound and several other far-right organisations held an anti-immigration protest in Milan, and 'the crowd displayed posters hailing Putin' as well as waving flags of the DNR."¹⁸² In 2018, CasaPound organized a public discussion in Rome with the above-mentioned notorious anti-Ukrainian Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin. At the occasion, a CasaPound representative also spoke to the audience. This was reported by the Italian far right website *The Primacy of the National*:

The intervention of CasaPound's national secretary, Simone Di Stefano, focused on the idea of an eternal Italy: "Outside the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance, Russia is a fundamental strategic ally for us. We have never been 'anti' anything or anyone, because we always act in the national interest. I very much appreciate the concept of 'eternal Russia' expressed in Dugin's book. A fundamental idea that must exist and endure over time. The world must not be the molasses without identity that liberalists and mondialists would like. We would like it to be possible also in Italy to affirm this thought. The beacon that we Italians must look to, however, must be that of an eternal Rome, looking to the Mediterranean and Africa."¹⁸³

Svoboda and West European Rightists

Being the oldest relevant Ukrainian far right party, *Svoboda*'s relations with other European far-right groups are the longest and go back to the 1990s when it still operated under its original name Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). The SNPU became early on affiliated with EuroNat – a semi-formal association of European far-right parties founded by the French National Front in 1997 and today

¹⁸⁰ Giovanni Savino, "From Evola to Dugin: The Neo-Eurasianist Connection in Italy." In: Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 97-124, here p. 114.

¹⁸¹ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 184.

¹⁸² Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 186.

¹⁸³ La Redazione, "Dugin a CasaPound: 'Il populismo è la sfida al pensiero unico'." *Il Primo Nazionale*, 23 June 2018, www.ilprimatonazionale.it/primo-piano/dugin-a-casapound-il-populismo-e-la-sfida-al-pensiero-unico-88026/

seemingly defunct.¹⁸⁴ The SNPU also established, already in the 1990s, intense bilateral relations with Le Pen and the French National Front.¹⁸⁵ For instance, in 2000, at the invitation of the SNPU, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Chairman of the *Front National*, visited Ukraine.¹⁸⁶

The cooperation [between the two parties] has also evolved on the level of youth organizations. French training camp [...] in addition to the French and Ukrainian parties' youth organization representatives includes young nationalists from Italy, Spain and Belgium. Some of the objectives of the camp are noted as being to strengthen cooperation, exchange ideas, propaganda and organizational work. In-camp free-time activities include parties, music, sport and French boxing."¹⁸⁷

The French radical nationalists may have also helped *Svoboda*, as a party from a non-EU country, to gain observer status in the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM) founded in 2009.¹⁸⁸ The AENM was, for a while, an official roof organization of some of the EU's major radical right-wing populist parties. It had been initiated, by among others, the Hungarian Jobbik Party when it was still ultra-nationalist, and when it assembled like-minded EU parties at its 2009 sixth congress in Budapest to create the AENM.¹⁸⁹

After entering parliament in 2012 and before the start of the Euromaidan in late 2013, *Svoboda*, however, had already been expelled from the AENM.¹⁹⁰ The expulsion was apparently inspired by

¹⁸⁴ Anton Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party." *Searchlight*, 9 January 2013, <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/archive/the-old-and-new-european-friends-of-ukraine%E2%80%99s-far-right-svoboda-party>

¹⁸⁵ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party."

¹⁸⁶ "Molodizhnyy Natsionalistychnyy Front Frantsii v hostiakh u ukrains'kykh patriotiv." *Narodnyy Ohlyadach* 22 August 2003, <https://www.ar25.org/article/molodizhnyy-nacionalistychnyy-front-franciyi-v-gostyah-u-ukrayinskyh-patriotiv.html>; R. Zelyk, "Istoriya SNPU – VO "Svoboda'." In: *Kurs I. Osnovy natsionalizmu* (Ivano-Frankiv's'k: Instytut politychnoi osvity VO "Svoboda," 2008), pp. 56-71; Anton Shekhovtov, "The Ukrainian far-right National Corps picks up where Svoboda left off." *Tango Noir*, 15 May 2018. www.tango-noir.com/2018/05/15/the-ukrainian-far-right-national-corps-picks-up-where-svoboda-left-off/.

¹⁸⁷ Artem Iovenko, "The ideology and development of the Social-National Party of Ukraine, and its transformation into the All-Ukrainian Union 'Freedom,' in 1990–2004." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 48, nos. 2-3, 2015, pp. 229–237, here p. 233.

¹⁸⁸ "Le Pen i Tyahnybok: chomu druzi staly vorohamy?" *BBC Ukraine*, 3 June 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/06/150527_le_pen_svoboda_vc.

¹⁸⁹ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party.", *Searchlight*, 9 January 2013, <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/archive/the-old-and-new-european-friends-of-ukraine%E2%80%99s-far-right-svoboda-party>.

¹⁹⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov. "Svoboda is no longer an observer in the AENM." *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*, 11 April 2013, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2013/04/svoboda-is-no-longer-observer-in-aenm.html>.

offensive behaviour of Jobbik that referred to *Svoboda*'s "anti-Hungarian statements."¹⁹¹ This early expulsion was probably a lucky development for *Svoboda*, as the AENM declared, in 2014, that the new Kyiv government which included *Svoboda*'s members had no legitimacy, and that the AENM supported Russia's annexation of Crimea.¹⁹²

Svoboda had other bilateral contacts with West European far right parties – including Italian neo-fascists. In April 2013, Andriy Il'enko and Taras Osaulenko (two leaders of *Svoboda*) visited Italy at the invitation of the Italian party *Forza Nuova* to discuss possible cooperation between the parties. Before that, in March 2013, Taras Osaulenko responsible for the *Svoboda* party international relations, had taken part in the conference "Visions of Europe" (*Vision Europa*) in Stockholm, organized by the Party of the Swedes – a neo-Nazi group.¹⁹³ Roberto Fiore, leader of the Italian fascist party *Forza Nuova*, was among the speakers at this conference.¹⁹⁴

First contacts between *Svoboda* and Fiore had been established already in 2009, when Tiahnybok had been at Strasbourg to meet with members of the European Parliament from far-right parties and met Fiore. In 2013, Osaulenko and Il'enko came on Fiore's invitation to Rome where the leaders of the *Forza Nuova* and representatives of *Svoboda* discussed cooperation between their parties.¹⁹⁵ *Svoboda*'s delegation also visited the *Forza Nuova* youth camp where Il'enko made a presentation on the history and ideology of *Svoboda* and shared his views on how the two parties could join forces to "fight against liberal forces of multiculturalism and degradation of national traditions in European civilization."¹⁹⁶ In June 2013, representatives of the *Forza Nuova*, including Fiore, came to Ukraine to discuss the creation of a new European nationalist movement, and to "develop active strategic cooperation aiming to create a new European political class."

In spite of their, before 2014, partly intense contacts with Ukrainian nationalists, some of *Svoboda*'s erstwhile closest partners – *Jobbik*, *Front National* and *Forza Nuova* – came out as some of the most

¹⁹¹ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right *Svoboda* party."

¹⁹² "Le Pen i Tiahnybok: chomu druzi staly vorohamy?." BBC.Ukraine, 3 June 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/06/150527_le_pen_svoboda_vc

¹⁹³ Jens Rydgren "Radical Right-wing Populism in Denmark and Sweden: Explaining Party System Change and Stability." *SAIS Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, pp. 57-71.

¹⁹⁴ Shekhovtsov. "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right *Svoboda* party". *Searchlight*, 9 January 2013.

¹⁹⁵ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right *Svoboda* party."

¹⁹⁶ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right *Svoboda* party."

vocal Western far-right supporters of Putin's aggressive policies vis-à-vis Ukraine.¹⁹⁷ In December 2014, the leader of Italy's *Forza Nuova* Roberto Fiore participated in the Conference "Ukraine. Novorussia. Russia" in occupied Yalta where they expressed support for Russia's interests in Ukraine.¹⁹⁸ Reportedly, *Forza Nuova* has even sent volunteers to the Donbas to fight, together with the pro-Russian separatists, against Ukrainian governmental forces.¹⁹⁹

Today, *Svoboda* claims to have no links with pro-Putin European parties anymore. *Svoboda*'s leaders do not like to be reminded of their earlier contacts with various European far-right parties in Italy, France, Hungary, Britain (British National Party) or Germany (National-Democratic Party) that have come out in support of Putin's Russia since 2014.

Vagaries of Racist Internationalism: Asgardei and Plomin'

As mentioned, the National Corps has, after the break in most *Svoboda*'s older relations to the West, since 2014 taken over the leading role in the Ukrainian far right's foreign contacts.²⁰⁰ As most of Western Europe's far-right parties have taken pro-Russian positions much of this international cooperation has moved into the political to the subcultural realm. Potentially, however, this is as risky a minefield for Ukrainian ultra-nationalists as the political party sphere. Significant parts of the Western racist underground are also enchanted by Putin, and support recent aggressive Russian foreign policies as well as the Kremlin's right-wing domestic rhetoric and measures.

A prime example of the new foreign cooperation formats has, since 2015, become "Asgardei" – a yearly hard rock festival of far-right metal music in Kyiv organized by the Azov movement. In 2019, among others, American white supremacist Greg Johnson and German neo-Nazi Hendrik Möbus

¹⁹⁷ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁸ "Politicheskaya partiya 'Novaia sila.' ('Forza Nuova')." *CACDS.Posipaka*, 25 July 2017, <https://www.posipaka.org/uk/baza-posipak/organizatsii/politicheskaya-partiya-novaya-sila-forza-nuova/>.

¹⁹⁹ Rexhino Abazaj, "Don't Be Fooled by the Red Fascists: A brief introduction to the 'red-brown' movement." *Libero*, 4 January 2016, liberolehti.fi/dont-be-fooled-by-the-red-fascists/.

²⁰⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Ukrainian Far-right National Corps Picks up where Svoboda Left off." *Tango Noir*, 15 May 2018, <https://www.tango-noir.com/2018/05/15/the-ukrainian-far-right-national-corps-picks-up-where-svoboda-left-off/>.

visited the concert.²⁰¹ The festival includes discussions, and Möbus gave a lecture at Kyiv, in 2018.²⁰² The bands performing at the festival have been the Italian band Bronson affiliated with CasaPound,²⁰³ the German neo-Nazi band *Path of Resistance*, anti-Semitic Slovak band *Krátky Proces*, and Levkin's M8L8TH, a Russian neo-Nazi hardcore group.²⁰⁴ To be sure, these and similar groups have not become publicly known to make pro-Kremlin statements. Yet, they come from a milieu that is, in many cases, characterized by sympathy rather than antipathy for Putin's Russia.

A 2019 Kyiv incident illustrates the intra-nationalist image risks for the Ukrainian far right's new post-Euromaidan engagement with West European fascist subcultures.²⁰⁵ In December 2019, the Ukrainian far-right literary club *Plomin'* (Flame), which also functions as a cultural department of the Azov movement, organized a public presentation on the person of Franco Freda (born 1941), an Italian neo-Fascist and white supremacist, whose book *The Disintegration of the System* had been translated into Ukrainian and is being sold by *Plomin'*.²⁰⁶ Freda is especially appealing to the far-right scene as he combines the qualities of a neo-fascist political activist, publicist and terrorist. While being largely unknown to the wider public, Freda has become a cult figure of sorts within the international far-right subcultural scene. Kyiv's young far right activists were thus eager to bring their translation of the book by the elderly legend to the attention of a wider audience in Ukraine.

However, as Michael Colborne has aptly noted, Freda's vision of an ideal state may be problematic for Ukrainian readers:

It's a state that not only reads like the fruits of a totalitarian fantasy, but might remind some Ukrainians of the horrors of the 1930s under Stalin. Private property will be abolished, Freda writes, and various "Commissars" (*Commissario* in the original Italian) will oversee everything from foreign affairs and finance to even collective agricultural "combines," where workers will make up what Freda calls the Committee of Management of the Combine.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ "Dispatches from Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival." *Bellingcat* 2 January 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/01/02/dispatches-from-asgardsrei-ukraines-annual-neo-nazi-music-festival/>.

²⁰² "Asgardsrei festival." *FOIA Research* (2019). <https://www.foiaresearch.net/event/asgardsrei-festival>.

²⁰³ "Dispatches from Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival."

²⁰⁴ "Dispatches from Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival."

²⁰⁵ Michael Colborne, "Ukraine's Far Right Is Boosting A Pro-Putin Fascist." *Bellingcat*, 22 January 2020. www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/01/22/ukraines-far-right-is-boosting-a-pro-putin-fascist/.

²⁰⁶ Franko Dzh. Freda [Franco J. Freda], *Dezintehratsiia systemy* (Kyiv: Nuovi Arditi, 2019).

²⁰⁷ Colborne, "Ukraine's Far Right Is Boosting A Pro-Putin Fascist."

Worse, Freda's decades of advocacy of a disintegration of the Western system has led him to embrace Vladimir Putin, and Moscow's various disintegrative anti-Western efforts over the last years. In his investigation into the background of the December 2019 Kyiv incident, Colborne notes:

Even more awkwardly for the fiercely anti-Kremlin Azov movement, Franco Freda is a dedicated fan of Russian president Vladimir Putin. In an interview in November 2018, Freda not only spoke highly of pro-Russian far-right populist Matteo Salvini, but had the highest of praise for the man who literally engineered Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine. "Putin is a champion of the white race," Freda said. "I think of the Slavic peoples, they're the ones who won the Second World War ... they're brutal individuals, of course, but they are the only ones who can resist." That wasn't Freda's first foray into lavishing praise on Putin. In 2014, while the Azov Battalion was fighting Russian-led forces in eastern Ukraine, Franco Freda also took time to compliment the Russian president. "It is my impression that the only decent European politician is Vladimir Putin," Freda said in October 2014.²⁰⁸

It was remarkable, moreover, that Freda, though having made these statements after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in spring 2014, would still be embraced and translated by the Azov movement. Worse, the Ukrainian book was presented at the renowned Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, a university highly regarded not only among moderate, but also radical Ukrainian nationalists. The university's administration had tried to prevent the scheduled meeting, yet the activists went on with their plans. They occupied a lecture room in the Academy's museum where they assembled some 40 listeners and presented the Ukrainian book thereby creating a scandal within the university.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Colborne, "Ukraine's Far Right Is Boosting A Pro-Putin Fascist." quoting from: Raffaella Fanelli, "Fedele Alla Razza." *Estreme Conseguenze*, 29 November 2018. estremeconseguenze.it/2018/11/29/fedele-all-a-razza/; "Intervista a Franco G. Freda a cura di Karel Velicky, in occasione dell'uscita dell'edizione boema della Disintegrazione del Sistema." *Edizioni di Ar*, 21 October 2014. www.facebook.com/EdizionidiAr/posts/10152493748002428?__tn__=-R.

²⁰⁹ Nuovi Arditi, "Franko Freda – 'Dezintehratsiia Systemy' – Prezentatsiia." *Facebook*, 17 December 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/events/2881052415261309/>.

8. Conclusions: Why and How Ukraine's Far-Right Cooperated with Russian and Pro-Kremlin Actors

Our outline has illustrated a range of diverging backgrounds and modes of, often, paradoxical cooperation between Ukraine's far right and Russian or Russia-related actors. Our sketch also indicated changing contexts of Russian-Ukrainian far-right cooperation in the very different historical phases of (a) the transitional 1990s, (b) the first presidencies of Vladimir Putin and Viktor Yushchenko, (c) the Presidency of Viktor Yanukovych in 2010-2014, and (d) the period after the victory of the Euromaidan as well as start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. During the 1990s, the exact post-Soviet relations of the newly independent Ukrainian and Russian states were not yet fully determined. This fluid situation allowed, among others, for an as contradictory development as the UNA-UNSO's simultaneous para-military engagement against pro-Russian separatism in Georgia, indirect support for pro-Russian separatism in Transnistria, and participation in anti-Russian separatism in Chechnya.

With the rise of Putin and accompanying change in Russian foreign policy behavior since 2000, the stakes of the Ukrainian far right's engagement with Russian actors have markedly risen. When the pro-Western politician Viktor Yushchenko became Ukrainian President on 23 January 2005, moreover, both Russia's state bureaucracy and extra-governmental nationalists began to see Ukraine much more critically than before. Already before Yushchenko's electoral victory in late 2014, pro-Kremlin forces had launched, with the above described Kovalenko affair, a major "active measure" operation aimed to discredit the Orange movement that was to bring Yushchenko to power.

Ukraine's unequivocal pro-Western turn as a result of the 2004 Orange Revolution forced Ukraine's far right to position itself anew vis-à-vis the West and Russia. Korchyns'kyy's engagement with Dugin and the Kremlin administration during Yushchenko's presidency illustrated that, for some Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, Ukraine's radical turn to the West in late 2004 was difficult to stomach. It was, from certain neo-fascist points of view, such a negative development that it drove Korchyns'kyy's group into an alliance with Dugin's anti-Ukrainian "neo-Eurasianists."

At about the same time, some pro-Russian forces within Ukraine discovered in the *Svoboda* party a peculiarly useful entity in Ukrainian politics. They started a counterintuitive promotion of the radically anti-Russian party that would indirectly help their causes in Ukraine's domestic affairs. The various positive roles that *Svoboda* could play for Ukrainian pro-Moscow forces included that of (a) a subversive actor splitting Ukraine's unified nationalist political camp, (b) an ultra-nationalist scarecrow for the West, and (c) a convenient sparring partner in various political competitions, and especially, in presidential elections. Apparently at the advice of Paul Manafort, Yanukovych's Party of Regions and various related "oligarchs" to it as well as their media empires started to promote the rise of the *Svoboda* party.

This tactic became especially prevalent after Yanukovych's victory in the 2010 presidential elections. *Svoboda* started to benefit directly and indirectly from a number of policies of the new president, government and their scheming "political technologists." Eventually, the various factors and secret schemes that had been helping *Svoboda* from approximately 2009 led to its most successful electoral performance to date, when it achieved 10.44% in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

Moreover, *Svoboda* – while being Ukraine's most loudly anti-Russian party – did not only benefit from direct and indirect support of the (today defunct) pro-Russian Party of Regions, until 2013. It, in parallel, also built a multitude of foreign relations with once latently and later manifestly pro-Putinist far-right parties in East-Central and Western Europe. As a result of the Euromaidan revolution's victory and start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, both of these developments, however, came to an abrupt halt. *Svoboda*'s secret supporter, the Party of Regions, disappeared, and most of *Svoboda*'s foreign partners became, in view of their demonstrative pro-Putinist coming-outs in 2014, sources of embarrassment for Ukraine's nationalists.

The Euromaidan and Russian-Ukrainian war opened a new chapter in the relations between Ukraine's far right and various Russian as well as pro-Kremlin actors. Among others, the two events led to a realignment within the Russian far right that, in 2014, split along the lines of supporters and enemies of Ukrainian territorial integrity and national independence. A number of pro-Ukrainian Russian ultra-nationalists moved to Ukraine and, in certain cases, not only became political emigres, but even turned into armed fighters for Ukrainian independence. Some managed to enter leadership positions within the newly emerging Azov movement.

Russia's intense hybrid-war against Ukraine since 2014 has, among others, meant that open contacts of Ukrainian nationalists with Russian actors, resembling those of Korchyns'kyi's links to Russia in 2005-2007, became impossible. Nevertheless, the Azov movement has come to occupy a special new niche not only in terms of absorbing a number of Russian émigré nationalists into its various armed and unarmed wings as well as such front organizations as the "Russian Center." Azov has also developed a peculiar relationship to such politically ambivalent journalists as Anatoly Sharii or Dmytro Hordon as well as to certain TV channels under the control of pro-Moscow "oligarchs." The benevolent treatment of Azov by these media actors is in stark contrast to their adversarial relationship with *Svoboda*, the Right Sector and other ultra-nationalist groups.

Whether Azov's absorption of Russian immigrants and peculiar relationships in the media sphere already indicate a political pattern remains an open question. There could be a coordinated scheme behind the disproportionate public presence of the marginal Azov group that gathers, so far, potential electoral support of about half a percent in national political opinion polls. Such a plan – if it were to exist – would resemble, in a certain way, the phenomenon of the dubiously high publicity of the then marginal *Svoboda* party in popular national political TV shows during the period of 2010-2012.

The ambivalent domestic stance of the National Corps is, in some regards, paralleled by considerable ambiguity in the foreign relations that the movement has been building aggressively since 2015. The movement, so it seems, is eager to become a fully respected part of the all-European far right subcultural milieu. In its multi-faceted efforts to enter international racist networks, the National Corps has entered, like *Svoboda* did before 2014, a number of dubious relationships with European partners that have taken ambivalent or even affirmative positions vis-à-vis Putin's Russia. In distinction to *Svoboda*'s relatively prominent foreign partners before 2014, Azov's international contacts are, however, with more marginal neo-fascist political groupscules and relatively closed racist subcultures. These circles do not, unlike the parties in the former AENM, get much media attention, and are largely unknown in Ukraine.

Our study illustrates, at the example of post-Soviet Ukraine, the geographically broader, politically general and altogether trivial observation that, especially for young nation states, ultra-nationalism is problematic in a multitude of ways. It is not only normatively destructive, potentially criminal, and

internally subversive.²¹⁰ The fanaticism of ultra-nationalists is also a risky facet of a nation's foreign relations, and especially so if that nation is in an existential confrontation with an aggressive neighbor. The official image of ultra-nationalists is that of being the nation's most principled defenders of the fatherland. The political practice of such organizations as *Svoboda*, *Bratstvo* and *Azov* is, however, more ambivalent, as illustrate our – perhaps, incomplete – observations.

While such a conclusion is unsurprising by itself, it has a relevant strategic dimension within contemporary Ukrainian politics and especially so for the practice of moderately nationalist Ukrainian political actors. Our study indicates that seemingly pragmatic political alignments between moderate and radical nationalists, such as the pre-2014 cross-factional Committee Against Dictatorship that included *Svoboda*, can turn out to be problematic not only in view of ultra-nationalists' insufficient allegiance to liberal-democratic values. Such alliances across the dividing line between democratism and anti-democratism also entail risks of an entirely different nature.

Radical political forces may often be ready to shape their foreign relations in more adventurous manners than moderate political forces. The latter frequently belong to relatively large and stable international party families or networks that partially pre-frame the direction of their foreign contacts and partnerships. In contrast, far-right parties' foreign relations will often be more erratic, as the example of post-Soviet Ukraine illustrates. Moderate political allies of radical nationalists may thus not only become hostages of their partners' limited allegiance to constitutional procedures.

Moderates can also find themselves in a situation in which they become indirectly linked to dubious foreign partners of their radical domestic allies. The choice and presence of ultra-nationalists' ambivalent contacts abroad may have little to do with particular ideological stances. It may, instead, be the result of the fact that extremist parties operate within different international contexts and behavioral frames than moderate political forces. In short, extremists may not be particularly picky in the building of their international relations that may later turn out to be sources of

²¹⁰ Larger comparative studies of the European far right that, unlike most other such explorations, include the Ukrainian case are: Sabrina Ramet, ed., *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe Since 1989* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Anton Shekhovtsov, *Novye pravoradikal'nye partii v evropeiskikh demokratiakh: Prichiny elektronal'noi podderzhki* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2011); Alina Polyakova, *The Dark Side of European Integration: Social Foundations and Cultural Determinants of the Rise of Radical Right Movements in Contemporary Europe* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2015); Michael Minkenberg, ed., *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process* (London: Routledge, 2015); Lenka Bustikova, *Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

embarrassment. The story of Ukrainian ultra-nationalist connections to Russia as well as to various pro-Kremlin actors in Ukraine and elsewhere illustrates this generic facet of the world-wide far right.