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UNEXPECTED FRIENDSHIPS: COOPERATION OF UKRAINIAN ULTRA- NATIONALISTS WITH RUSSIAN AND PRO-KREMLIN ACTORS



TARAS TARASIUK & ANDREAS UMLAND

**Unexpected Friendships:
Cooperation of Ukrainian Ultra-Nationalists
with Russian and Pro-Kremlin Actors**

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&
Andreas Umland

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Summary

This descriptive analysis details and explains often paradoxical contacts between Russian and Russia-related actors, on the one side, and post-Soviet Ukrainian far-right parties such as *Svoboda* (Freedom), the National Corps, the Right Sector, and *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood), as well as of some other ultra-nationalist groups in Ukraine, on the other. The investigation also covers Ukrainian far right connections to Moscow-related Ukrainian oligarchs, the Yanukovich regime of 2010-2014, and other Kremlin-related actors beyond Russia's borders. 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, as well as with Kremlin-related actors in Russia. It finally briefly examines the cooperation of Ukraine's far-right with non-Russian—mostly European Union—actors who have voiced pro-Putinist views or collaborated with Russia. The study uses primary and secondary sources in the Ukrainian, Russian, English, and German languages. These sources include press reports, party documents, interviews, previous analyses, and investigations by agencies such as Bellingcat. The 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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Responsibility for remaining mistakes and misrepresentations lies solely with the authors.

Introduction: The Purposes of this Study

This investigation outlines the recent history and possible causes of contacts between what appear to be two antagonistic and antinomic forces: Ukrainian ultra-nationalist groups and Russian or pro-Kremlin actors, associations, and institutions.¹ The primary dividing line and crux of the deep conflict between – both, moderate and radical – Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms lies in the mostly imperial and partly messianic character of Russian ethnocentric thought and the obsession of many Russian nationalists with what they perceive as an open “Ukrainian question.”² Many Russian people—not only ultranationalists—believe that there is no properly developed, united, or sufficiently distinct Ukrainian ethnos. Thus parts, most or all of Ukraine should be formally or informally annexed to Russia, as Crimea and parts of the Donets’ Basin were in 2014. Only some select factions within radical Russian nationalism fully accept and properly respect Ukraine as a separate and distinct nation from Russia and recognize its political sovereignty as well as internationally recognized borders.

Another issue that separates sections within and between different camps of Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms is their stance towards Europe and the West. Most Ukrainian nationalists, including many of the more radical ones, are decidedly pro-European. And much of Ukrainian moderate nationalism is loudly pro-Western. In contrast, most Russian nationalists tend to be anti-Western (especially anti-American) and some sections are partly or fully anti-European. This division, however, is not clear-cut. There are strands within both moderate and radical Russian nationalists, including some groups with racist ideologies, who see Russia as belonging to a wider European, or even Western, culture that is perceived as Christian, “Nordic,” or “White.” Sometimes these Russian nationalists are—as illustrated in this study—relatively pro-Ukraine. For instance, they may see the

¹ Larger surveys on post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism and far right politics include, in chronological order: Volodymyr Kulyk, *Ukrains'kyi natsionalizm u nezalezhnyi Ukraini* (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 vostochnoevropeskoii istorii i kul'tury* 13:1 (2013): 103-206; Andreas Umland, ed., “Post-Soviet Ukrainian Right-Wing Extremism,” *Russian Politics & Law* 51:5 (2013): 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* 48:2-3 (2015): 169-271; Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, *Fenomen “Svobody.” Vybortsi radykal'nykh natsionalistiv u dzerkali sotsiologii* (Kyiv: KMIS/Vaad, 2016); Evhen Vasyl'chuk, *Pravyi radykalizm v Ukraini* (Cherkasy: Tretiakov O.M., 2018); V'acheslav Likhachov, *Vid Maidanu pravoruch: Revoliutsiia, viyna i ul'trapravi v Ukraini (2013-2016 roky)* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2021).

² Larger recent surveys on post-Soviet Russian nationalism and far right politics include, in chronological order: Viktor Shnirel'man, *Intellektual'nye labirynty: Ocherki ideologii v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moskva: Academia, 2004); Aleksandr Verkhovskii, ed., *Tsena nenavisti: Natsionalizm v Rossii i protivodestvie rasistskim prestupleniiam* (Moskva: SOVA, 2005); *idem*, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm: ideologiya i nastroyeniye* (Moskva: SOVA, 2006); *idem*, ed., *Verkhi i nizy russkogo natsionalizma* (Moskva: SOVA, 2007); Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Le Rouge et le noir: Extrême droite et nationalisme en Russie* (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2007); *idem*, ed., *Sovremennyye interpretatsii russkogo natsionalizma* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2007); *idem*, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm v politicheskom prostranstve: Issledovaniia po natsionalizmu v Rossii* (Moskva: Franko-rossiiskii tsentr gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk, 2007); *idem*, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm: Sotsial'nyi i kul'turnyi kontekst* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008); *idem*, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *idem*, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London: Routledge, 2009); Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

Ukrainian nation as a legitimate participant and equal partner in the international concert of “Aryan” nations.

Most Russian nationalists, however, see Russia as a distinct Orthodox and/or Eurasian civilization that is separate from, or even opposite to, the West. In contrast, Ukrainian nationalists are largely oriented westwards rather than towards Russia or other countries to its east (with the partial exception of Georgia, often seen as a close ally of Ukraine). This diversion in foreign outlook creates additional tension between Russian and Ukrainian nationalists who may otherwise be able to find a common conceptual language.

Whether conservative or revolutionary, all integral nationalist ideologies – including Ukraine’s and Russia’s – are, to one degree or another, ethno-centric, anti-individualistic, traditionalist, patriarchal, and illiberal. Thus they tend to be similarly structured and have potential points of agreement that can lead to transnational cooperation or even joint organization. Yet Russian and Ukrainian nationalist worldviews are different not only and not so much in their ideational and philosophical substance.

As indicated, most Ukrainian and Russian nationalists are in fundamental conflict regarding their larger geopolitical outlooks and territorial aspirations. Many Russian nationalists do not respect Ukraine’s borders and/or independence. They also take a skeptical or even adversarial stance towards Western civilization and, to a lesser degree, the European Idea. On the other side, there are some Ukrainian nationalists who – especially after the events of 2014 – claim southern parts of the Russian Federation for Ukraine. Thus, it’s no wonder that there is much animosity between Russian and Ukrainian nationalists.

Despite an apparently fundamental impossibility of cooperation, there have been several contacts between certain Ukrainian radical right groups and Russian or non-Russian pro-Kremlin actors. Some relationships go back to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. In this paper, we illustrate different forms, motivations, and spectra of paradoxical interaction of these supposedly opposite poles in East European geopolitics. We list not only the relevant facts of their cooperation, but also try to explain why and how such mostly counter-intuitive collaboration became possible and, in some instances, continued on after the Revolution of Dignity as well as start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014.³

As already indicated in the title, we do not address here intra-nationalist cooperation within Ukraine. We also leave out the Ukrainian far right’s non-paradoxical international ties, like its links to equally anti-Russian Baltic ultra-nationalists. And finally, we do not cover the frequent cooperation of Ukraine’s ultra-nationalist groups with Ukrainian patriotic persons, state actors (ministries, parliamentary factions, agencies, etc.) or with moderate nationalists in the Ukrainian party-political, civil society, and cultural realms. To be sure, cases of such formal or informal collaboration between centrists and extremists within Ukraine have been legion since 1991. We acknowledge that these ties and alliances are larger and more politically relevant than the episodes of Ukrainian ultra-nationalist collaboration outlined in this paper.

While there are thus good reasons to write papers and books on intra-nationalist cooperation between Ukraine’s far right, on the one side, and the Ukrainian government, center right parties, or/and patriotic NGOs, on the other, this paper has different aims. Our aim is to present when and

³ Natalia Yudina, “The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists,” *Illiberalism Studies Program*, 18 December 2020, www.illiberalism.org/the-new-exile-strategy-of-russian-nationalists/.

how Ukrainian far right groups (or certain circles posing as members of the far right) have collaborated with actors who either appear as puzzling partners or who are fundamentally odd allies for Russophobic Ukrainian ultra-nationalists. While this focus may omit other interesting instances of cooperation, it provides us with a chance to hone in on the most putatively or substantively paradoxical instances of a particular type of domestic and external cooperation between Ukraine's ultra-nationalist groups and actors outside the Ukrainian far-right spectrum.

A satisfactory outline of the entire gamut of both conventional and paradoxical cases of collaboration of Ukrainian radically nationalist groups with various moderate or foreign partners would result in a rather thick volume. It would, perhaps, demand a team of more than two researchers to provide such a comprehensive overview. That is why this study only addresses Ukrainian far right cooperation with Russian actors and with seemingly or actually pro-Kremlin partners in and outside Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Far-Right Scenery since 1991

Post-Soviet Ukraine has an organizationally and ideologically well-developed, yet electorally weak family of far-right parties. The seeds of 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.⁴ In spite of their early emergence and continuous presence, the performance of far-right parties and alliances in national votes has been largely abysmal (Table 1).⁵ Only in the 2012 Ukrainian parliamentary elections did *Svoboda* perform relatively well, and this happened under special circumstances, which we will discuss later.⁶

Table 1. Vote shares of major Ukrainian far right parties in the presidential and proportional parts of the parliamentary elections in 1998-2019 (in percent).⁷

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'kyi)	
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 (Yarosh)*	1.16 (Tiahnybok)
2014 (parliamentary)	0.05 (KUN)	1.81 (PS)	4.71 (VOS)
2019 (presidential)			1.62 (Koshulyns'kyi)
2019 (parliamentary)			2.15 (VOS)**

* In the 2014 presidential election, Dmytro Yarosh was formally running as an independent candidate, yet he was publicly known as the leader of the *Pravyi sektor* (Right Sector – PS).

** 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' Ukrainy"* [All-Ukrainian Political Union "State Independence of Ukraine"], SNPU – *Sotsial-natsionalna partiia Ukrainy* [Social-National Party of Ukraine], OUN – *Orhanizatsiia*

⁴ Bohdan Nahaylo, "Ukraine," *RFE/RL Research Report* 3:16 (1994): 42-49; Taras Kuzio, "Radical Nationalist Parties and Movements in Contemporary Ukraine Before and After Independence: The Right and its Politics, 1989-1994," *Nationalities Papers* 25:2 (1997): 211-242; E.S. Andriushchenko, "Paramilitarni struktury ukrainskoho natsionalistychnoho rukhu 90-kh rr. XX st.," *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakul'tetu Zaporiz'koho natsional'noho universitetu* 30 (2011): 42-51.

⁵ Melanie Mierzejewski-Voznyak, "The Radical Right in Post-Soviet Ukraine," in: Jens Rydgren, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 608-629.

⁶ Natalia Belitser, "Vseukrainskoe ob"edinenie 'Svoboda' i ego elektorat, 2012-2013," *The Ideology and Politics Journal*, no. 2(4) (2013): 8-92.

⁷ 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.

ukrainskykh natsionalistiv [Organization of Ukrainian Nationaists], UNA – *Ukrains'ka natsionalna asambleia* [Ukrainian National Assembly], UNSO – *Ukrains'ka narodna samooborona* [Ukrainian National Self-Defense], VOS – *Vseukrains'ke ob'ednannia "Svoboda"* [All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda].

Ukrainian Far-Right Political Parties

Ukrainian National Assembly–Ukrainian National Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO)

The political party Ukrainian National Assembly–Ukrainian National Self-Defense, known by its Ukrainian acronym UNA-UNSO, is the oldest significant ultra-nationalist grouping in post-Soviet Ukraine.⁸ The UNA-UNSO has its origins in the early 1990s when it grew out of two minor groups with pretentious names, the Ukrainian Interparty Assembly (UMA) and the Ukrainian National Union (UNS).⁹ These groups had become known for helping to protect the Lithuanian Parliament when Soviet army units stormed the Vilnius TV tower in 1991.¹⁰ In addition, members from the ranks of the UNS were involved in counteracting the attempted putsch in Moscow in August 1991.¹¹ The emerging *Ukrains'ka natsional'na samooborona* (Ukrainian National Self-Defense or UNSO) resisted pro-Soviet forces in Kyiv, protecting the meetings of the Ukrainian independence movement.

Following Ukraine's declaration of independence in August 1991, nationalists of the UMA, UNS, and some other similar groups merged to become the *Ukrains'ka natsional'na assambleia* (Ukrainian National Assembly or UNA).¹² Later this transitioned into the UNA-UNSO with two wings: a political party (UNA) and a semi-official paramilitary unit for "direct action" (UNSO).¹³ The UNSO was, apart from resisting various Russian neo-imperial activities, also engaged in confronting separatist and ethnic minority organizations and activities in Ukraine throughout the 1990s.

In 1991 the UNA-UNSO became, for instance, known for assaulting the parliamentary Deputy of the Ukrainian SSR Mykola Honcharov,¹⁴ dispersing the Romanian Congress in the city of Chernivtsi,¹⁵ and attacking pro-Russian rallies in Odesa.¹⁶ Later in the 1990s, the UNSO participated in foreign armed confrontations first in the Transnistria separation war,¹⁷ then in the Abkhazian conflict, and

⁸ Halyna Bendza, "UNA-UNSO: Nove oblychchia?" *Studii politolohichnoho tsentru Heneza* 1 (1997): 48-51.

⁹ Evhen Vasylychuk, "Ideolohichni doktryny ukrains'kykh pravoekstremists'kykh ob'ednan' u konteksti postmodernistskoho dyskursu (na prykladi UNA-UNSO)," *Visnyk Natsional'noho tekhnichnoho universytetu Ukrainy "Kyivs'kyi politekhnichnyi instytut": Politolohiia. Sotsiolohiia. Pravo* 3 (2013): 16-20.

¹⁰ "Prezydent Lytvy nahorodyv hrupu ukrayintsiv – zakhysnykiv Vil'niusa 1991 roku. Foto," *Novynarnia*, 11 January 2020. <https://novynarnia.com/2020/01/11/prezident-litvi-nagorodiv-grupu-ukrayintsiv-zahisnikiv-vilnyusa-1991-roku-foto/>.

¹¹ "Short history of UNA-UNSO," *UNA-UNSO*, 17 April 2020. <http://una-unso.com/styslyi-kurs-una-unso>.

¹² "Short history of UNA-UNSO."

¹³ "Short history of UNA-UNSO."

¹⁴ "Short history of UNA-UNSO."

¹⁵ "Zaria nezalezhnosti. Kak v 90-ye ukrainskiye natsionalisty sozdali partiyu, tserkov' i shturmovyie otryady," *Lenta.ru*, 20 October 2018, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2018/10/22/ukrideology7/>.

¹⁶ "Zaria nezalezhnosti."

¹⁷ 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): 108-124.

later in the First Chechen war (more on this below).¹⁸ Some UNSO para-military units also took part in the Bosnian conflict on the side of local Croatians.¹⁹

During the Transnistrian conflict of the early 1990s, the purpose of the UNSO's foreign engagement was to protect the Ukrainian community in left-bank Moldova.²⁰ In doing so two UNSO paramilitary units ended up fighting alongside pro-Russian separatists against the Moldovan army. Thus, whether intentionally or not, Ukrainian ultra-nationalists functioned as situational allies to Moscow-related forces in Transnistria and even indirectly collaborated with the 14th USSR army (later part of the Russian Federation's armed forces).²¹ This episode was one of the earliest instances of indirect Ukrainian ultra-nationalist cooperation with a Russian neo-imperialist action.

The UNA-UNSO's stance in Moldova's civil war was even odder in view of its concurrent actions during the Abkhazia armed conflict in Georgia. There, in the same period, the UNA-UNSO supported Tbilisi fighting 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 may have been the first armed clash on a battlefield between Ukrainian paramilitary and Russian regular forces during the post-Soviet period. Strangely, it happened about the same time that other activists of the UNSO were in Transnistria officially supporting the Ukrainian ethnic community against the Moldovan government and thereby indirectly collaborating with pro-Russian separatists in Moldova.²²

The UNSO also participated in the First Chechen War of 1994-1996 on the side of the anti-Moscow separatists, sending a so-called "Delegation for diplomacy protection" to Chechnia.²³ The first "delegation" was headed by one of the founders of the movement, then Ukrainian Member of Parliament Yuriy Tym.²⁴ It is worth noting here that the future leader of the UNA-UNSO, founder of the *Bratstvo* micro-party and future temporary collaborator with Russian imperial nationalists (on which more below), Dmytro Korchyns'kyi (b. 1964), also took part in this so-called "delegation."²⁵

The UNA-UNSO presented its ideology as a "program of civic nationalism" where members of the Ukrainian political nation are identified by their affiliation with a particular state and not ethnicity. Yet in practice and rhetoric, the UNA-UNSO followed ethno-centric traditions of the radical Stepan Bandera wing of the war-time Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its paramilitary arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrains'ka povstans'ka armiiia* - UPA), known as OUN-UPA.²⁶ The UNA-UNSO's first head was Yuriy-Bohdan Shukhevych (b. 1933), the son of Roman Shukhevych

¹⁸ Vasiliy Babenko, "Pravyi radikalizm v gosudarstvennoi politike sovremennoi Ukrainy," in: *Pravyi radikalizm v Vostochnoi Evrope* (Moscow: RAN, 2018): 134-167.

¹⁹ Raymond C. Finch III, "The Strange Case of Russian Peacekeeping Operations in the Near Abroad 1992-1994." Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, 1996.

²⁰ Valeriy Pal'chuk, *UNSO – pershyi posvyst kul' (vinya u Pridnistrov'i, 1992 rik): viys'kovi memuary* (Kyiv-Mena: Dominant / Orienty, 2016).

²¹ Secrieru, "Come and Go: Trajectories of Foreign Fighters in and out of Moldova."

²² Eduard Baidaus, "Portraying Heroes and Villains: Moldovan and Transnistrian Print Media during the 1992 War in the Dniester Valley," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 60:3-4 (2018): 497-528.

²³ "Short history of UNA-UNSO."

²⁴ "Short history of UNA-UNSO."

²⁵ Ewa Wolska-Liśkiewicz, "Czeczeński ślad na Ukrainie," *Bezpieczeństwo: Teoria i Praktyka* 3 (2014): 39-46.

²⁶ Vasy'l'chuk, "Ideolohichni doktryny ukrains'kykh pravoekstremists'kykh ob"ednan' u konteksti postmodernistskoho dyskursu."

(1907-1950) the one-time legendary leader of the UPA who died fighting the Soviet regime.²⁷ The leaders of the UNSO claimed they followed the military traditions of the UPA, and 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 October 13, 1991 in L'viv under the name Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). It was largely based in Eastern Galicia and founded by representatives of the local branches of the Afghanistan Veterans Organization, the nationalist youth group "*Spadshchyna*" (Heritage) chaired by Andriy Parubiy (b. 1971) who would later become speaker of Ukraine's parliament in 2016-2019, the Student Brotherhood of L'viv led by Oleh Tiahnybok (b. 1968), and the paramilitary group "*Varta Rukhu*" (Movement's Guard) headed by Yuriy Kryvoruchko (b. 1966) and Yaroslav Andrushkiv (b. 1953). Andrushkiv was the SNPU's first leader.²⁸ In 2004, the SNPU was renamed All-Ukrainian Union "*Svoboda*" (Freedom) and elected Tiahnybok as its new chairman. The party usually performed poorly in national parliamentary elections (Table 1). However, 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.²⁹ This remains today the, by far, best national electoral result of a far-right organization in post-Soviet Ukrainian history.³⁰

During the 1990s and early 2000s the party—when it was still called SNPU—was mainly engaged in non-electoral activities in Western Ukraine.³¹ For example, its members would picket the *Verkhovna Rada* building in Kyiv, protesting language and culture issues. They also provided security services for the Kyiv Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, among others.³² Like other Ukrainian far-right parties of that time the SNPU had its own paramilitary group, the "Patriot of Ukraine," which was officially disbanded when the SNPU was re-founded as *Svoboda* and

²⁷ Per Anders Rudling, "The Cult of Roman Shukhevych in Ukraine: Myth Making with Complications," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 5:1 (2016): 26–65; "Shukhevych Yuriy-Bohdan Romanovych," *CHESNO PolitHub*, 1 January 2020, <https://www.chesno.org/politician/17209/>.

²⁸ "History of All-Ukrainian Union 'SVOBODA'," *Svoboda*, 1 April 2020, <https://svoboda.org.ua/party/history/>.

²⁹ Anton Shekhovtsov, "From Para-Militarism to Radical Right-Wing Populism: The Rise of the Ukrainian Far-Right Party Svoboda," in: Ruth Wodak, Brigitte Mral, and Majid Khosravi-Nik, eds., *Right Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013): 249-263; Viacheslav Likhachev, "Right-Wing Extremism on the Rise in Ukraine," *Russian Politics and Law* 51:5 (2013): 59-74.

³⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Vseukrainskoe ob'edinenie 'Svoboda': Problema legitimnosti bor'by za vlast'," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropеiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 9:1 (2013): 22-63; Sergei Vasylychenko, "'Svoboda' protiv vsekh: kratkii obzor rezul'tatov radikal'nykh pravyykh na vyborakh 1994-2012," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropеiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 9:1 (2013): 64-92; Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Ultradright Party Politics in Post-Soviet Ukraine and the Puzzle of the Electoral Marginalism of Ukrainian Ultrationalists in 1994-2009," *Russian Politics and Law* 51:5 (2013): 33-58; Viacheslav Likhachev, "Social-Nationalists in the Ukrainian Parliament: How They Got There and What We Can Expect of Them," *Russian Politics and Law* 51:5 (2013): 75-85.

³¹ 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* 48:2 (2015): 229-237.

³² Vasylychenko, "'Svoboda' protiv vsekh."

rebranded its public image in the mid-2000s.³³ The “Patriot of Ukraine” later reappeared with a new leadership and organization (more on this later).

Svoboda started to rise to national prominence soon after pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich (b. 1950) won the presidential elections in 2010.³⁴ In this context, *Svoboda* became the most visible Ukrainian ultra-nationalist groupings conducting public actions against Yanukovich’s ruling Party of Regions and in support of Ukrainian language and culture.³⁵ In 2012, *Svoboda* was one of the main organizers of protests against the pro-Russian Kivalov-Kolesnichenko law: a new language bill associated with pro-Russian politicians Serhiy Kivalov (b. 1954) and Vadym Kolesnichenko (b. 1958) that allowed—until 2018—the Russian language to be used as a second state-language in certain regions.³⁶ As a new member of parliament, Tiahnybok became one of the leaders of Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014. And *Svoboda* had a few ministers in the first post-Euromaidan government in late February 2014.³⁷ Yet the party had already squandered much of its reputation and popularity by then.³⁸ As a result of the autumn 2014 parliamentary elections, *Svoboda* lost its representatives in the Ukrainian government and faction in the *Verkhovna Rada*, becoming again a largely extra-parliamentary opposition party with a notable political presence only in Eastern Galician regional and local parliaments.³⁹

The Azov Movement and National Corps

After the Euromaidan revolution, the Azov movement—which grew out of a volunteer battalion that was first stationed at the Sea of Azov in 2014—emerged as a new attention-grabbing, multi-dimensional political phenomenon of Ukraine’s post-revolutionary landscape. Since summer 2014, the Azov movement has become a prominent new right-wing force in Ukraine, even rivalling the *Svoboda* party.⁴⁰ The various organizations, departments, fronts, branches, and arms of the Azov movement have been estimated to be able to mobilize 20,000 members all over Ukraine.⁴¹

³³ Viacheslav Likhachev, *Right-Wing Extremism in Ukraine: The Phenomenon of “Svoboda”* (Kyiv: EAJC, 2013).

³⁴ Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Creeping Resurgence of the Ukrainian Radical Right? The Case of the Freedom Party,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63:2 (2011): 203-228.

³⁵ Michael Moser, *Language Policy and Discourse on Languages in Ukraine Under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010–28 October 2012)* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2013).

³⁶ “Istoriia kievskikh ‘Maidanov’ – ot Revoliutsii na granite do lazykovogo maidana,” *Segodnya.ua*, 2020, <https://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/istoriya-kievskih-maydanov-ot-revolyucii-na-granite-do-yazykovogo-maydana-484705.html>.

³⁷ Vladimir Ishchenko, “Uchastie kraine pravykh v protestnykh sobytiakh Maidana: Popytka sistematicheskogo analiza,” *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 13:1 (2016): 103-127.

³⁸ Anton Shekhovtsov, “From Electoral Success to Revolutionary Failure: The Ukrainian Svoboda Party,” *Eurozine*, 5 March 2014. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-03-05-shekhovtsov-en.html/>.

³⁹ Lenka Bustikova, “Voting, Identity and Security Threats in Ukraine: Who Supports the Radical ‘Freedom’ Party?” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48:2 (2015): 239-256.

⁴⁰ 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* 31:1 (2019): 105-131; Ivan Gomza and Johann Zajaczkowski, “Black Sun Rising: Political Opportunity Structure Perceptions and Institutionalization of the Azov Movement in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 47:5 (2019): 774-800.

⁴¹ Katharine Quinn-Judge, “A Shadow over Ukraine’s Presidential Election,” *International Crisis Group*, 19 April 2019, www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/shadow-over-ukraines-presidential-election.

The Azov movement has its roots in a little known and initially Russian-speaking Kharkiv groupuscule called “Patriot of Ukraine.”⁴² This initially miniscule circle emerged from the SNPU’s paramilitary wing of the same name that had been disbanded in 2004.⁴³ The young leader of the group, Andriy Bilets’kyy (b. 1979), as well as some other members of the “Patriot of Ukraine” were imprisoned in 2011-2012 for various reasons, including alleged robbery, beatings, terrorism, and assaults. Partly, these accusations were overdrawn and referred to political rather than criminal episodes. The locked-up ultra-nationalists were released after the toppling of Viktor Yanukovych in early 2014.⁴⁴

In spring 2014 in eastern Ukraine, Bilets’kyy and his followers organized small paramilitary units called “little black men”—an obvious reference to the nickname, “little green men,” given to Russian regular army forces who wore no identification marks while occupying Crimea in late February and early March 2014.⁴⁵ As the confrontation with pro-Russian groups in the Donets’ Basin (Donbas) and Kharkiv g, Bilets’kyy’s once minor grouping grew rapidly.⁴⁶ In May 2014, it formed the semi-regular volunteer battalion “Azov” under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁷ In summer 2014, the Azov battalion played a central role in the liberation of the important Donbas industrial city of Mariupol from Russia-led separatists.⁴⁸

By autumn 2014, the battalion had become a well-known professional military unit and was transformed into the fully regular “Azov” Regiment of the National Guard under the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine.⁴⁹ It has since been considered one of Ukraine’s most capable armed formations. The regiment’s commanders claim it is now operating according to NATO standards.⁵⁰ In winter 2015, veterans and volunteers of the regiment created the Azov Civil Corps and thereby started to

⁴² On the concept of “groupscule” in right-wing extremism studies, see: Roger Griffin, “From Slime Mould to Rhizome: An Introduction to the Groupuscular Right,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37:1 (2003): 27-50.

⁴³ Anton Shekhovtsov, “Radikale Parteien, irreguläre Verbände: Ukrainische Milizen aus dem rechtsextremistischen Milieu,” *Osteuropa* 69:3-4 (2019): 149-162.

⁴⁴ “Velyke interv’iu. Komandyr Natsional’nykh druzhyn, Ihor Mykhaylenko druh Cherkas,” *Ndrugua.org*, 23 June 2019, <https://ndrugua.org/articles/velyke-intervyu-komandyr-nacionalny/>

⁴⁵ “Ne bachu zhodnoho parostka do stvorennia armii novoho zrazka”, *Gazeta.ua*, 10 June 2015, https://gazeta.ua/articles/people-and-things-journal/_ne-bachu-zhodnogo-parostka-do-stvorennia-armiyi--novogo-zrazka/625937; “Little green men’ or ‘Russian invaders?’” *BBC*, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

⁴⁶ “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-stalasia-perestrilka-pochali-vihoditi-lyudi-34519.html>.

⁴⁷ “Komandyr polku ‘Azov’ Andrii Bilets’kyy: Ti, khto prolyvaye krov za Ukrainu, povynni maty sviy holos u vladi,” *UNIAN*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/994779-komandir-polku-azov-andriy-biletskiy-ti-hto-prolivae-krov-za-ukrajinu-povinni-mati-sviy-golos-u-vladi.html>.

⁴⁸ “Komandyr polku ‘Azov’ Andrii Bilets’kyy: Ti, khto prolyvaye krov za Ukrayinu, povynni maty sviy holos u vladi,” *UNIAN*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/994779-komandir-polku-azov-andriy-biletskiy-ti-hto-prolivae-krov-za-ukrajinu-povinni-mati-sviy-golos-u-vladi.html>.

⁴⁹ “‘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/>.

⁵⁰ “Bilets’kyy: Dlia novoho prezydenta armiiia – tema dlia harnoho posta u Feisbutsi,” *ZIK.ua*, 12 September 2019, https://zik.ua/news/2019/09/12/biletskyi_dlia_novogo_prezydenta_armiia_tema_dlia_garnogo_posta_u_fey_sbutsi_1645903.

expand their political grouping into a multi-faceted social movement.⁵¹ In 2016, Bilets'kyi formed the political party National Corps, drawing membership from the Azov Civil Corps and veterans of the Azov Battalion and Regiment.⁵²

In January 2018, an offshoot of the Azov movement, the unarmed vigilante organization National Squads (*Natsional'ni druzhyny*), became a Ukrainian media sensation after it held a visually impressive public torch march.⁵³ Further sub-organizations and branches of the Azov movement have emerged since 2014.⁵⁴ They include entities such as the Engineering Corps, Cossack House (*Kozats'kyi dim*), *Plomin* (Flame) Literary Club, *Orden* (Order) circle, Youth Corps, Intermarium Support Group, and others.⁵⁵ While being partly independent, the fronts and subunits of the Azov movement share basic stances on certain political issues, closely cooperate with each other, and accept Bilets'kyi as the unofficial leader of the entire coalition. As a result, Azov is now a multi-dimensional socio-political movement that is developing in a variety of directions.

Though initially at a distance from other Ukrainian far right groups, Azov, since 2016, has started to cooperate with other ultra-nationalists in Ukraine. 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. Even this unified list of Ukraine's far right, however, received only 2.15% in the proportional part of the elections and thus fell short of the 5% entrance barrier to parliament. The ultra-nationalist coalition also failed to win any seats in the majoritarian part of the election and so was unable to secure any official mandates in Ukraine 9th *Verkhovna Rada*. While the current Ukrainian parliament contains several members who have described themselves as "nationalists," only one of Ukraine's currently 423 national MPs, Oksana Savchuk (née Kryvolin'ska, b. 1983) from the Eastern Galician Ivano-Frankivs'k Oblast, is aligned to the Ukrainian far right, namely to *Svoboda*.⁵⁶

Despite officially allying itself with *Svoboda* and others since 2016, the Azov movement remains an ideologically and institutionally specific phenomenon within Ukraine's ultra-nationalist political spectrum and contains branches that profess views untypical to the traditional Ukrainian far right.⁵⁷ For example, some Azov members espouse not a Christian-Orthodox outlook, but an interest in paganism.⁵⁸ The Azov movement has conducted numerous semi-political street actions in major cities and smaller towns around Ukraine, such as rallies against the closure of a university in *Zhovti*

⁵¹ Gomza and Zajaczkowski, "Black Sun Rising."

⁵² "Chleny TSK 'Azov' ta veterany odnoimennoho polku stvoryly politychnu partiyyu 'Natsional'nyy korpus'," *Interfax.com.ua*, 14 October 2016, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/376701.html>.

⁵³ "Natsional'ni druzhyny: dopomoha pravookhorontsiam chy sylovyi 'arhument' dlia politykiv?" *Radio Svoboda*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29008242.html>.

⁵⁴ "Azovs'kyi rukh," *Nackor.org*, 8 December 2015, <https://nackor.org/ukr/azovskoe-dvizhenie>.

⁵⁵ Gomza and Zajaczkowski, "Black Sun Rising."

⁵⁶ Andreas Umland, "The Far Right in Pre- and Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: From Ultra-Nationalist Party Politics to Ethno-Centric Uncivil Society," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 28:2 (2020): 247-268.

⁵⁷ Adrien Nonjon, "Olena Semeniaka, the 'First Lady' of Ukrainian Nationalism," *Illiberalism Studies Program Working Papers* 1 (2020), <https://www.illiberalism.org/olena-semeniaka-the-first-lady-of-ukrainian-nationalism/>.

⁵⁸ Vitaliy Diachenko, "Chy pokhovaye Bilets'kyi z 'Azovom' Veimars'ku Ukrainu?" *Depo.ua*, 9 June 2016, <https://www.depo.ua/ukr/politics/chi-pohovae-biletskiy-z-azovom-veymarsku-ukrayinu--04062016200000>.

Vody (literally: Yellow Waters) in the Dnipropetrovs'k Oblast.⁵⁹ Another major mobilizing issue are various ecological problems across Ukraine.⁶⁰

There are rumors that the Azov movement was linked to Ukraine's 2014-2021 Minister for Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov (b. 1964). And there is evidence of connections between the Azov-dominated Veterans Movement of Ukraine and the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs.⁶¹ Nevertheless, since 2014 the movement's public profile has been that of a resolute opposition force engaged in clashes with the police and political mobilization against the government.⁶²

The Azov Battalion/Regiment has been particularly active in recruiting foreigners to fight in eastern Ukraine.⁶³ Among all the foreign fighters present in the Donbas, there may have been as many as 3,000 Russian citizens who fought in the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of the Ukrainian state.⁶⁴ Some of them served and are still serving with the Azov Regiment. As detailed below, a number of these former or current Russian citizens are also actively involved in the development of the Azov movement's civil and political structures.⁶⁵

In August 2020, a number of Azov leaders and veterans as well as other activists from certain nationalist student and cadet groups presented a new paramilitary right-wing organization labeled *Centuria*—a Roman Empire term for a military unit of hundred men.⁶⁶ The Ukrainian group uses the Latin version and transcription of the more familiar Ukrainian word *sotnia* (hundred) as its official name.⁶⁷ Against a backdrop of images of Roman legions, *Centuria* held its first public presentation with Ihor Mykhailenko, the former head of the Azov movement's National Squads, as its main speaker. This move signaled that the National Squads had been replaced by *Centuria*.⁶⁸

⁵⁹ "Natsional'nyy 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-mozhlyvist-studentiv-zhovtih-vod-navchatisja-u-rdnomu-msti/>.

⁶⁰ "Tysiachi liudey prykhaly na Khortytsiu sadyty duby v pam'iat' pro zahyblykh voiniv," *Natsional'nyy Korpus*, 22 April 2018, <https://youtu.be/BVH4axKZIJU>.

⁶¹ "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/.

⁶² "Avakov khoche zalyshytys' hlavoivu MVS – Chernenko pro napad na Poroshenka," *Prm.ua*, 19 July 2019, <https://prm.ua/avakov-hoche-zalishitis-glavoyu-mvs-cherenko-pro-napad-na-poroshenka/>.

⁶³ 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/>.

⁶⁴ 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>.

⁶⁵ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

⁶⁶ There is apparently also an older military officers' organization of the same name whose members have had contacts with the Azov movement, yet are not closely linked to it.

⁶⁷ Denis Rafal'skii, "Podrazhanie Tsezariu: Zachem u Biletskogo sozdaiut 'Tsenturii' i chto teper' budet s 'Natsdruzhinami'," *Strana.ua*, 4 August 2020, <https://strana.ua/articles/analysis/282421-tsenturija-biletskoho-chto-izvestno-o-novoj-orhanizatsii-natsionalistov.html>.

⁶⁸ Rafal'skii, "Podrazhanie Tsezariu."

Centuria's website announced that their organization represents "a group of organized youth based on the world view of Ukrainian Stateness and European tradition."⁶⁹ Since 2020 *Centuria* has been involved in a variety of public activities such as participating in the annual march on October 14 in Kyiv honoring the UPA,⁷⁰ rallies against illegal logging,⁷¹ court hearings on right-wing activists, and the promotion of Ukraine's medieval heritage.⁷² Thereby, the organization duplicates the activism of its predecessor, the National Squads. While not formally subordinated to the National Corps, most of *Centuria*'s members are connected to the Azov movement.⁷³

Centuria describes itself as a group of "Warriors of Light and Order" in the fight against Ukraine's "internal enemy."⁷⁴ While the former National Squads posed as an unofficial law enforcement militia, *Centuria* has a more open range of interests and is primarily engaged in anti-Russian activities throughout Ukraine.⁷⁵ For instance, in L'viv in August 2020 *Centuria* activists attacked Mykhailo Shpira, a pro-Russian political observer,⁷⁶ and in October 2020 blocked a rally in Vinnytsia for the pro-Russian Shariy Party.⁷⁷

One of the largest actions of the movement so far was supporting 16 convicts, mainly from Kharkiv, who attacked a bus in 2020 carrying MP Illia Kyva's pro-Russian Ukrainian youth organization "Patriots – For Life!"⁷⁸ (More on Kyva, below.) Since then, actions in support of the convicted Kharkiv nationalists have made up the majority of *Centuria*'s actions.⁷⁹ There have also been further attacks on pro-Russian actors, one of which led to mass clashes on September 21, 2020, in Odesa.⁸⁰

Centuria uses military paraphernalia and prepares its members for military service. It trains its own territorial defense groups, in effect duplicating the operation of similar units within the reserves of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.⁸¹ The number of members of the organization is currently unknown

⁶⁹ *Centuria.ua*, <https://centuria-ua.com/>.

⁷⁰ "CENTURIA. Marsh zakhysnykiv Ukrainy," *Centuria*, 15 October 2020, <https://youtu.be/HShvUliDe2w>.

⁷¹ "Nezakonna vyrubka lisu," *Centuria.ua*, 11 December 2020, <https://centuria-ua.com/nezakonna-vyrubka-lisu/>.

⁷² "Spadshchyna. Terebovlyans'kyi zamok. Chastyna-1," *Centuria*, 28 October 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgsPztsoex4&ab_channel=Centuria.

⁷³ Rafal'skii, "Podrazhanie Tsezariu."

⁷⁴ *Centuria.ua*, <https://centuria-ua.com/>.

⁷⁵ Griffin, "From Slime Mould to Rhizome."

⁷⁶ "U L'vovi pobyly 'polittekhnohoh' prorosii'skykh ZMI (video)," *UNIAN*, 26 June 2020, <https://www.unian.ua/incidents/mihaylo-shpir-u-lvovi-pobili-polittehnologa-prorosyiskih-zmi-shcho-vidomo-foto-novini-lvova-11124815.html>.

⁷⁷ "U Vinnytsi natsionalisty zablokuvaly avtoprobih partii Shariiia," *Centuria*, 10 October 2020, <https://t.me/Centuriaua/197>.

⁷⁸ "Svobodu kharkivs'kym robinhudam: 9 veresnya v Kyevi vidbudet'sia pres-konferentsia-nahorodzhennia patriotiv," *Natsional'nyy Korpus*, 7 September 2020, <https://nationalcorps.org/svobodu-harkivskim-robogudam-9-veresnya-v-kyevi-vidbudetsya-pres-konferenciya-nagorodzhennya-patriotiv/>.

⁷⁹ "V sudi pravdy ne shukaiut," *Centuria*, 31 July 2020, <https://centuria-ua.com/v-sudi-pravdy-ne-shukayut/>.

⁸⁰ Evhen Solonina, "Bytva 'patriotiv': shcho oznachaiut' sutycky mizh orhanizatsiamy Bilets'koho ta Kyvy," *Radio Svoboda*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30818339.html>.

⁸¹ "Vyshkil do Pershoho zymovoho pokhodu Armii UNR. Biitsi Tsenturii z Chernihovi, Kyieva, Vinnytsi, Kharkova...," *Youtube*, 10 December 2020, https://youtu.be/JYtR_kMW9-o.

but is suspected to correspond with or surpass the strength of its predecessor, Azov's National Squads, which had approximately 1,000 active members.⁸²

The Right Sector

The *Pravyi sektor* (Right Sector, PS) was originally formed in late 2013 during the early Euromaidan protests as an informal umbrella organization of several minor political and paramilitary far-right groups. For about half a year, until approximately mid-2014, it looked as if PS was becoming a serious competitor of the older *Svoboda* party.⁸³ The Right Sector became famous during the events of January-February 2014 in Ukraine's capital when its then leader, Dmytro Yarosh (b. 1971), took public responsibility for clashes with governmental forces on Hrushevs'kyy Street in central Kyiv. The confrontation there was a key escalation in the development of the protests.⁸⁴ However, beyond a high public visibility, not the least via Russian and pro-Russian media, the degree of substantive impact of the far right on the emergence, progress, escalation, and conclusion of the protests are contested issues among researchers of these events.⁸⁵

With the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine, the Right Sector formed the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps (*Dobrovol'chyy ukrains'kyy korpus* – DUK), a small irregular military unit for which the term “corps” is hyperbolic. In 2015, the Right Sector claimed publicly to have nearly 20,000 active participants, a seemingly vast exaggeration.⁸⁶ In reality, the overall number of permanently involved members of the decentralized movement was about several hundred men and some women. By 2014, the name “Right Sector” had become a popular brand label for several small groupings which were emerging across Ukraine, though some had little to do with the original Right Sector, with its headquarters in Kyiv.

Early on the Right Sector became publicly discredited by a number of local events such as an armed clash in Mukachevo in 2015 when several members of its local branch were involved in a shoot-out with a local criminal group.⁸⁷ Earlier, in March 2014, the former leader of the Rivne Right Sector branch in western Ukraine and convicted criminal Oleksandr Muzychko (1962-2014), also known

⁸² Rafal'skii, “Podrazhanie Tsezariu.”

⁸³ “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.

⁸⁴ “5 rokov pislia Maidanu: khronika narodnoho povstannia,” *Deutsche Welle*, 20 November 2019.

⁸⁵ William Jay Risch, “What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us about the Maidan,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16:1 (2015): 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): 216-237; Kostiantyn Fedorenko, “The Two Movements: Liberals and Nationalists during Euromaidan,” *The Ideology and Politics Journal* 1:5 (2015): 4-35; Ishchenko, “Uchastie kraine pravykh v protestnykh sobyitiakh Maidana,” 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/>; Taras Bilous, “Pravoradikaly, hromadians'ke suspil'stvo y demokratiia: replika do diskusii,” *Spil'ne*, 9 July 2018, commons.com.ua/ru/far-right-civil-society/; Ivan Katchanovski, “The Far Right, the Euromaidan, and the Maidan Massacre in Ukraine,” *Journal of Labor and Society* 23:1 (2020), 5-36.

⁸⁶ “Pravyi sektor: skil'ky batal'oniv u Iarosha?” *BBC Ukraine*, 15 July 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/07/150714_right_sector_now_vc.

⁸⁷ “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/>.

as “Sashko Bilyy,” was shot and killed in a confrontation with the police. In the 1990s, “Bilyy” had been among the paramilitary UNSO volunteers in Chechnya and wanted in Russia since.

In 2015 the original organization split when its popular leader Dmytro Yarosh (b. 1971) resigned as the head of the Right Sector. He founded his own micro-group called “Statist Initiative of Dmytro Yarosh.” His departure led to a marginalization of the Right Sector that has since not had any prominent leaders. Whereas it was highly prominent in Ukrainian, Russian, and Western mass media in 2014, the Right Sector today is not even mentioned in many opinion polls and, when it is listed, generates minimal support from respondents. Nevertheless, the Right Sector has remained a registered party and has operated, for the last years, in close cooperation with *Svoboda*, the National Corps, and other right-wing structures.⁸⁸

Ukrainian “Uncivil Society”

Many of the widely known Ukrainian radical right activists are members of one of the relevant right-wing political parties. There are also a number of activists, however, whose activities are focused on direct action in the societal and cultural realm rather than on electoral participation. The main organizations active within Ukrainian civil society—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 most well-known leaders Dmytro Korchyns'kyi became mainly a publicist and commentator.⁸⁹ In 1999, he founded a new organization called *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood).⁹⁰ Presenting itself as a “Christian Hezbollah,” *Bratstvo* has sought its own niche as a demonstratively radical party. Yet, it is still mostly perceived as a lunatic-fringe group.⁹¹

Bratstvo was one of the few far-right movements which did not support the Orange Revolution of 2004. Instead, for a time, it cooperated with pro-Russian and pro-Putin structures – on which more below.⁹² However, during the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, Korchyns'kyi's groups was visible early on. In particular, *Bratstvo* was involved in a dubious violent demonstration and confrontation with the police in front of the Presidential Administration building on December 1, 2013.⁹³ At the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, Korchyns'kyi was briefly involved with the Azov Battalion before he created his own armed paramilitary unit, the Saint Mary Battalion.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ “Manifest ukrayins'kykh natsionalistiv ob'ednav ‘Natsional’nyy korpus’, ‘Svobodu’ ta ‘Pravyi sektor’,” *Hromadske*, 16 March 2017, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/lidery-natsionalistychnykh-partii-pidpysaly-manifest-pro-spilnu-diialnist>.

⁸⁹ “Dos'e. Korchinskii Dmitrii,” *Liga.net*, 21 Januray 2020, <https://file.liga.net/persons/korchinskiy-dmitriy>.

⁹⁰ “Dos'e. Korchinskii Dmitrii.”

⁹¹ “Korchyns'kyi-‘satanist’ pryikhav u TSVK na bron'ovyku,” *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 19 July 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/07/19/3001239/>.

⁹² “Dmitrii Korchinskii: ‘Ia khochu v Ukraine khristianskuiu Khizballu’,” *Glavred.info*, 8 April 2011, <https://glavred.info/politics/3817-dmitriy-korchinskiy-ya-hochu-v-ukraine-hristianskuyu-hizballu.html>; “Vitrenko z Korchyns'kym stvoriuiut' narodnu opozytzii i klychut' Yanukovycha z Medvedchukom,” *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 22 February 2005, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2005/02/22/3007322/>.

⁹³ “Korchyns'kyi pro podii 1 hrudnia,” *24tv.ua*, 1 December 2014, https://24tv.ua/korchinskiy_pro_podiyi_1_grudnya_n515481.

⁹⁴ “Dos'e. Korchinskii Dmitrii.”

The neo-Nazi group C14 was established in 2009 in Kyiv by Evhen Karas' (b. 1987).⁹⁵ It consists of a few hundred members, mainly young men and women.⁹⁶ Its name's letter "C" or "S" (according to different decoding) is said to refer to the term of a Cossack forest fort "sich." The number 14 is a code for an infamous quote from the US white supremacist David Eden Lane who coined the 14-word slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." Having been entirely marginal until 2013, C14 gained publicity via its involvement in the Revolution of Dignity.⁹⁷ It also became infamous for its actions against anarchist, leftist, liberal, and pro-Russian groups. It was also notorious for attacking LGBTQ+ groups and their supporters during the Kyiv Pride parades between 2015-2018.⁹⁸

The Carpathian Sich

The Uzhhorod-based far-right group called the Transcarpathian Military-Patriotic Union "*Karpats'ka Sich*" ("Carpathian Fort"), was created as a non-registered informal group in 2010 under the leadership of Taras Deiak (b. 1992).⁹⁹ It is lesser known than the other groups discussed in this paper. The Sich cooperated with or was temporarily part of the Right Sector and maintained contacts with *Svoboda* as well as the international department of the Azov movement.¹⁰⁰ Almost all the activities and members of the organization are concentrated in the Transcarpathian Oblast of Ukraine.

Since 2017, the Carpathian Sich has participated in counterprotests during Kyiv's annual Equality March.¹⁰¹ They also reject the Istanbul Convention on Human Rights.¹⁰² In addition, they have developed links to several European, far-right micro-organizations and publicly support white supremacist terrorist acts. In August 2019, the Carpathian Sich posted on social media a Ukrainian translation of the manifesto written by Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant, the mass murderer of Muslims at Christchurch in New Zealand.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ "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/>.

⁹⁶ Iryna Shtohryn, "'S14'. Natsionalisty-radykaly chy neonatsysty?" *Radio Svoboda*, 19 March 2018, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29109819.html>.

⁹⁷ Serhiy Movchan, "Nestandart BBC, abo sorom"iazlyvi terorysty," *Politychna krytyka*, 19 July 2017, <http://ukraine.politicalcritique.org/2017/07/19/nestandart-bbc-abo-sorom-yazlyvi-teroristi/>.

⁹⁸ "Bellingcat: Ul'trapravi hotuiut' anty-LHBT aktsii do praydu-2019," *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 16 June 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/06/16/7218311/>.

⁹⁹ *Karpats'ka Sich*, 20 April 2020, <https://karpatskasich.com/>.

¹⁰⁰ "Karpats'ka Sich," *FOIA Research*, 14 January 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/karpatska-sich>; "2nd Paneuropa Conference," *FOIA Research*, 3 March 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/article/2nd-paneuropa-conference>.

¹⁰¹ "Kyiv-Pride: pidsumky," *Karpats'ka Sich*, 2 June 2019, <https://karpatskasich.com/news/item/74-kyiivprayd-pidsumky>.

¹⁰² "V Uzhhorodi natsionalisty 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/.

¹⁰³ "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/>.

“Tradition and Order”

According to its leaders, the Kyiv-based, ultra-conservative groupuscule *“Tradytsiia i poriadok”* (“Tradition and Order,” TiP) is “a champion of Christianity.”¹⁰⁴ In Kyiv, it has become an active post-Maidan right-wing organization and is often visible during rallies against the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ community.¹⁰⁵ “Tradition and Order” also claims to have an irregular paramilitary unit.¹⁰⁶

Many of its members supposedly fought in the Donbas as participants of volunteer battalions against the Russia-led separatists. Some activists of the group claim to have ties to the newly united autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine established in 2019.¹⁰⁷ According to TiP’s announcements, the model organization of the “Tradition and Order” group is the Iron Legion—a fascist Romanian party from the inter-war period.¹⁰⁸

TiP has been involved in far-right attacks on the yearly Kyiv Pride demonstrations, trying to disrupt the marches.¹⁰⁹ Perceiving themselves as Christian fundamentalists, the members of TiP consider foreign influence on Ukraine as harmful and are especially opposed to left-liberal values.¹¹⁰ TiP identifies 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.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Interview of Taras Tarasiuk with members of TiP.

¹⁰⁵ “Zakhystymo ditei vid pederastiv: U Kyevi prokhodyt’ aktsiia protestu na shliakhu khody Kyiv Praidu,” *Ukrains’ki Novyny*, 23 June 2019, <https://ukranews.com/ua/news/638287-aktsiya-protestu-tradytsiyi-i-poryadku-prohodyt-na-shlyahu-hody-kolony-v-pidtrymku-lgbt-v-kyievi>.

¹⁰⁶ “‘Lehiony Poriadku’: v Ukrayini z’iavylasia chervova paramilitarna orhanizatsiia,” *Kontrakty.ua*, 17 April 2019, <http://m.kontrakty.ua/photo/7976/4>.

¹⁰⁷ Interview of Taras Tarasiuk with members of TiP.

¹⁰⁸ Interview of Taras Tarasiuk with members of TiP.

¹⁰⁹ “Zakhystymo ditei vid pederastiv: U Kyevi prokhodyt’ aktsiia protestu na shliakhu khody Kyiv Praydu.”

¹¹⁰ Interview of Taras Tarasiuk with members of TiP.

¹¹¹ Interview of Taras Tarasiuk with members of TiP.

Interactions of Ukraine's Ultra-Nationalists with Russian Actors

Post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist discourses are often loudly and radically anti-Russian. Yet, both Ukrainian and Russian ultra-nationalism developed after the fall of the Iron Curtain and within the context of wider, interconnected East European, all-European, or global far-right trends. Thus, there are similarities in the ideas, concepts, and tactics of these transnational ideological movements and cross-border organizational networks—whether fundamentalist, ultra-conservative, neo-Nazi, Identitarian, pan-nationalist or other. As a result, there was and is not only certain mutual interest among the respective Russian and Ukrainian groups. Occasionally this has also led to contacts and even collaboration between sections of both ultra-nationalist movements.

The historically and currently predominant tendency between Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms is, to be sure, opposition. The already high estrangement between the Ukrainian and Russian far right surged further in the 2000s when most of the Ukrainian right-wing forces supported pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko's (b. 1954) election in late 2004.¹¹² For the Russian far right, Ukrainian ultra-nationalist support for Yushchenko's pro-Western course as well as his diaspora-linked, U.S.-born second wife, Kateryna Yushchenko (b. 1961, née Chumachenko), became additional sources of irritation. This polarization escalated during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich (b. 1950) in 2010-2014. Yanukovich's shift away from the pro-European vector of Ukraine's political development as well as his relatively pro-Russian position became a for all Ukrainian patriots, whether radical or not.¹¹³

Yanukovich's pro-Russian foreign and cultural policies led to a temporary broadening of Ukrainian support for outspoken nationalism. During this period from 2010, certain Russian ultra-nationalists began to flee Russia for countries like Ukraine. This migration accelerated during and after the Euromaidan revolution of 2013-2014. Somewhat overstating the magnitude of the phenomenon, Michael Colborne and Oleksiy 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.¹¹⁴

This phenomenon was not, however, entirely new in Russian-Ukrainian relations.

¹¹² Alla Hurska, "Far-right Movements and Ideology in Contemporary Ukraine: Formidable Image vs. Weak Essence," *Notes internacionals CIDOB* 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.

¹¹³ Moser, *Language Policy and Discourse on Languages in Ukraine Under President Viktor Yanukovich*.

¹¹⁴ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

Ukrainian Far Right Contacts with Russian Ultra-Nationalists

In the early 1990s, the first indirectly pro-Russian activity of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists was their participation in the separatist war in Moldova on the side of local Ukrainians (as mentioned above). As indicated, the UNA-UNSO, for a short period of time, fought on the same side as Moscow's military in Transnistria.¹¹⁵ However, this incident of armed collaboration has remained an exception. Because the primary interest of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists in Transnistria was the Ukrainian population it cannot count as an expression of support by the UNA-UNSO for Russian imperialism.

In the mid-1990s, one of the friendliest encounters in Ukraine between Ukrainian and anti-Kremlin Russian ultra-nationalists occurred between the UNA-UNSO and the marginal People's National Party of Russia (*Narodnaia ational'naia partiia Rossii* – NNPR). According to Albert Shatrov,

[i]n 1996 in Kyiv, at a [joint] conference of the UNA-UNSO and People's National Party of Russia (NNPR), [its leader] Alexander Ivanov-Sukharevsky (b. 1950) 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.¹¹⁶

This amounted to an attempted collaboration of non-imperial ultra-nationalists to counter Russian imperialism during the Yel'tsin era.

Under President Putin, such contacts became more frequent. Natalia Yudina has summarized some of them:

Ukraine has [been] a refuge for Russian right-wing radicals since the early 2000s. Pyotr Khomyakov, the ideological mastermind of the Northern Brotherhood (*Severnoe bratstvo*), spent some time hiding there; so did Yuri Belyaev, the leader of the neo-Nazi Freedom Party (*Partiia svobody*). Also hiding in Ukraine were Alexander Parinov and Alexei Korshunov, former members of the neo-Nazi groups United Brigades-88 (*Ob'edinennye Brigady-88, OB-88*), and the Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists (*Boevaia organizatsiia russkikh natsionalistov, BORN*). Korshunov was killed by his own grenade in Zaporozhye in October 2011. BORN co-founder Nikita Tikhonov, later convicted for the murders of lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, was also hiding in Ukraine for some time [...]. [Mikhail] Oreshnikov [from the Russian town of Cheboksary] was involved in the creation of the Ukrainian cell of the international neo-Nazi association called The Misanthropic Division. The Misanthropic Division is not a centralized organization: it does not have permanent leaders or a rigid structure. There are branches in Germany, the Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal, the United States, and, it seems, even in Belarus. The Ukrainian branch was organized in 2013 under the

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

¹¹⁶ Albert Shatrov, "Neonatsisty i separatisty: Ukrainskikh ekstremistov po-prezhnemu pritiagivaet Kavkaz," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 30 June 1998, https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/NG_97_99/1149381.htm.

[Social-National Assembly's] auspices with the active participation of Russian nationalists.¹¹⁷

A new wave of cooperation between parts of the two ultra-nationalist camps started during and after the Euromaidan of 2013-2014 when Russian ultra-nationalists with pro-Ukrainian views participated in the uprising in Kyiv and beginning war in the Donbas.¹¹⁸ The biggest accumulation of active Russian, and presumably anti-Putinist, right-wing radicals in Ukraine were within the Azov movement, including in its battalion/regiment. Yudina explained that the

Misanthropic Division's Russian activists participated on the Maidan demonstrations, in clashes with Maidan opponents in Kharkov, and some of them took part in the Donbas hostilities on Kyiv's side. Over a dozen of its Russian members fought in Azov [...]. Russian Azov fighters included Serhey ("Malyuta") Korotkikh, one of the leaders of the National Socialist Society (*Natsional-sotsialisticheskoe obshchestvo*, NSO); Alexander Valov from Murmansk; Roman "Zukhel" Zheleznov of the *Restrukt!* Association; and neo-Nazi leader Mikhail Oreshnikov from Cheboksary. [...] After the end of the active phase of the hostilities in Ukraine, almost all of them stayed in Ukraine. Some of them integrated into Ukrainian society, received Ukrainian citizenship, and now take part in local political life.¹¹⁹

Moreover, some Russian neo-Nazi groupuscules are represented, with their Ukrainian branches, in the Azov movement's various structures.¹²⁰ Michael Colborne and Oleksiy Kuzmenko discussed one such group:

Wotanjugend ["Youth of Wotan"] was born in Russia, and publishes its online content almost exclusively in Russian. Today the self-described "hammer of National Socialism" is 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, 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.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Yudina, "The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists" (transliteration of Cyrillic words and transcription of names here and elsewhere, as in the original source).

¹¹⁸ Natalia Yudina, "Russian Nationalists Fight Ukrainian War," *Journal on Baltic Security* 1:1 (2015): 47-61.

¹¹⁹ Yudina, "The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists."

¹²⁰ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home." See also: John Færseth, "Ukraine's Far-Right Forces," *Hate Speech International*, 3 February 2015, www.hate-speech.org/ukraines-far-right-forces/.

¹²¹ Colborne and Kuzmenko, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home."

Natalia Yudina added that “Ilya Bogdanov, a former member of the *Wotanjugend* community and a former FSB officer, left for Ukraine in 2014 and fought in the Right Sector [i.e., seemingly, in the above introduced DUK].”¹²²

Because of foreign, including Russian, fighters’ service in the Azov Regiment, the National Corps has become one of the main lobbyists for the legalization of the status (as permanent residents or citizens) of foreigners who fought against pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.¹²³ Several such foreigners, including some Russian ultra-nationalist immigrants, received citizenship during the 2014-2019 presidency of Petro Poroshenko (b. 1965). Sometimes such status was granted in explicit gratitude of their contribution to the Ukrainian defense effort in the Donbas.

The most infamous case involved a former member of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity party and Belarusian People’s Front Sergei Korotkikh (b. 1974) who, after his move to Ukraine in 2014, became a key figure in the Azov movement.¹²⁴ Yudina detailed the case:

Korotkikh received his Ukrainian passport from president Petro Poroshenko personally on December 5, 2014. He worked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, heading the Special Objects Protection Unit, but he left this post in late 2017. Along with his fellow Azov member Nikita Makeev, Korotkikh was suspected of involvement in the attack against Petro Poroshenko in August 2019. However, Korotkikh never faced responsibility for this case. In the spring of 2020, he continued to act as a representative of the National Corps (*Natsional'nyy korpus*), Azov’s political wing.¹²⁵

Another such figure was Aleksei Levkin, a former member of the Russian group *Wotanjugend*, who immigrated from Russia and also gained some importance in the Azov movement. He called himself a “political ideologist” for Azov’s former vigilante branch, *Natsional'nyy druzhyny* (National Squads). The Ukrainian political careers of Korotkikh, Levkin, and others indicate considerable influence of Russian former neo-Nazis within the Azov movement.¹²⁶

The ideological basis for such seemingly paradoxical contacts and even partial merger is a particular type of racist pan-Slavism. In this context the 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 community of Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians. Unlike most other permutations of Russian ultra-nationalism, these subsections do not always assert, however, a “Great Russian” supremacy vis-à-vis “Little” and “White Russians” within the triple Eastern Slavic family of peoples. They are instead obsessed with preventing large-scale non-Christian, specifically Muslim, immigration that would create a racial-cultural subversion by non-white people in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. They are also concerned with the rise of LGBTQ+ movements in these countries.

¹²² Yudina, “The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists.”

¹²³ “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/>.

¹²⁴ “Belorus iz batal'ona ‘Azov’ – geroi, avantiurist ili natsist? Istoriia Sergeia Korotkikh,” *Belorusskii partizan*, 16 January 2015, <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/292580/>.

¹²⁵ Yudina, “The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists.”

¹²⁶ Colborne and Kuzmenko, “The ‘Hardcore’ Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home.”

At the same time, as illustrated by the heavy involvement of *Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo* (Russian National Unity, RNE) in the start of the Donbas war, the majority 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.¹²⁷ Within the latter one can also occasionally find isolated individuals or minor subsections that accept Ukraine's nationality, sovereignty, and integrity. However, most pro-Ukrainian thinking within Russian ultra-nationalism is found in various Russian groupuscules espousing biological racism. Often these groups—whether in Russia, in Ukraine, or elsewhere—see their nations as being part of a “white” or “Aryan” pan-national community. They thus espouse sympathy towards all those who they regard as being within this larger “racial” collective.

Among the small pro-Ukrainian section of Russian political extremism, whether biologically racist or not, there is regret about Moscow's actions in Ukraine since 2014 and considerable verbal solidarity with Ukraine's fight for independence from Russia. Several individuals and certain groupuscules, like the *Wotanjugend*, have moved to Ukraine. Other such activists have more or less successfully also tried to take part in the Russian-Ukrainian war, supporting the Ukrainian side.

The Russian Insurgent Army and Russian Center

An expression of this type of Russian-Ukrainian far-right interaction came together to form the quasi-party Russian Center and its paramilitary arm, the Russian Insurgent Army. The latter is the hyperbolic name for a miniscule group apparently made up of several dozen young adults. So far this small, irregular, and supposedly armed entity's activity has been largely virtual.

The group was created in 2015 by Andrei Kuznetsov (aka “Orange”), a relatively well-known Russian opposition blogger who had emigrated from Russia to Ukraine.¹²⁸ Together with some other immigrants from Russia, he formed what was suggestively called the *Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiia* (Russian Insurgent Army). The title alludes to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a western Ukrainian nationalist, partisan movement during and after World War II that fought Soviet and Nazi troops but was tainted by some of its units committing mass murder of Polish and Jewish civilians in western Ukraine.¹²⁹ The name, Russian Insurgent Army, may also refer to the Russian Liberation Army, the unfamous Vlasov Russian unit that fought alongside the *Wehrmacht* against the Soviet Union during World War II.¹³⁰

The Russian Insurgent Army claims to have participated on the Ukrainian side against pro-Russian forces in the Donbas war.¹³¹ It has also been rumored to have conducted clandestine activity within

¹²⁷ Nikolay Mitrokhin, “Im Namen des Staates: Russische Nationalisten im Ukraine-Einsatz,” *Osteuropa* 69:3-4 (2019): 103–121.

¹²⁸ “V batal'one OUN voiuut rossiiane, kotorykh na rodine obviniaut v separatizme,” *Obozrevatel'*, 10 April 2015, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/65823-v-batalone-oun-voyuyut-rossiyane-kotoryih-na-rodine-obvinyayut-v-separatizme.htm>.

¹²⁹ Most recently on some aspects of this problematic history: John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941–1944* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2021).

¹³⁰ *Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiia*, 20 April 2020, <http://dobrovoletz.blogspot.com/>.

¹³¹ Andrei Kuznetsov, Viktor Smalii and Bogdan Titskii, “Dlia chego sozdaetsia Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiia,” *ALIVEMEDIA*, 30 December 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_66RhYXK7X0.

Russia, a supposition that seems implausible.¹³² The Russian Insurgent Army was first presented to the public on December 29, 2014 at a press conference in Kyiv. The young anti-Kremlin activist Andrei Kuznetsov made an appeal for the unification of anti-Putinist Russian forces. He addressed “all adequate Russians, [...] descendants of white immigrants [...] who do not want Russian culture to disappear from the world.”¹³³

The movement rejects Eurasianism and officially espouses an ethno-centric, yet supposedly “moderate,” right-wing ideology. It mostly uses concepts and symbols representing radical rather than liberal nationalist discourses. While the group may be made up of a variety of individuals of different persuasions, it is seemingly dominated by racist activists, as various entries on its website illustrate.¹³⁴

The formation of the Russian Insurgent Army led to creation of an ethnic Russian political organization in Ukraine called the Russian Center, linked to the Azov movement. Its existence was announced on October 11, 2015 in Kyiv.¹³⁵ The Russian Center is another minor organization made up of Russian nationalist political immigrants in Ukraine. Natalia Yudina detailed that the Russian Center was

created in September 2015 by members of *Wotanjugend*, an ultra-right online group, and by activists of the Kirov cell of the Movement against Illegal Immigration (*Dvizhenie protiv nelegal'noi immigratsii*, DPNI-Vyatka), now banned in Russia. The Russian Center positions itself specifically as pan-Slavist, calling for the unity of all Slavs, and seeking to reach beyond Russia and Ukraine. They cooperate with nationalists in other countries, primarily with Polish nationalists from *Zadruga* (a Polish neo-pagan organization created in 2006 in Wroclaw) and People's Free Poland (a radical Polish group that became famous in 2015 after the destruction of a Ukrainian cultural center in Warsaw). In September 2018, they conducted an event “to strengthen the Polish-Russian ties” in partnership with People's Free Poland. They also participated in the nationalist “independence march” in Warsaw on November 11, 2018. The Russian Center from Ukraine marched along with the Black Bloc, chanting “White Revolution” slogans (“Europe, Youth, Revolution” and “Honor and Glory to the Heroes”), and they burned the LGBT+ and EU flags [...]. In February 2019, some of its activists participated in the torchlight procession on the 101st anniversary of Estonia's independence and the *Etnofutur* third international nationalist conference in Tallinn.

The Russian Center has contacts to several right-wing radical groups in Ukraine, such as the Carpathian Sich in Uzhhorod.¹³⁶ Both the Russian Center and the Carpathian Sich were co-hosts, for

¹³² “Zaiavila o prichastnosti k ubiistvu deputata Shevtsova ‘Russkaia povstancheskaia armii,’” *Kur'er-Sreda*, 4 February 2017, <https://kurer-sreda.ru/2017/02/04/275075-zayavila-o-prichastnosti-k-ubiistvu-deputata-shevcova-russkaya-povstancheskaia-armiya>.

¹³³ Kuznetsov, Smalii and Titskii, “Dlia chego sozdaetsia Russkaia Povstancheskaya Armiiia.”

¹³⁴ *Russkaia Povstancheskaia Armiiia*, 20 April 2020, <http://dobrovoletz.blogspot.com/>.

¹³⁵ “Prezidium,” *UNIAN Fotobank*, 11 May 2015, <https://photo.unian.net/photo/664249-prezidium>;
“Repressii erefii protiv russkikh,” *A-Radio*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TEQOSepWRQ>.

¹³⁶ “Russkaia delegatsiia na konferentsii ‘Mech Evropy’ i marshe ‘Radikal'nogo Al'iansa,’” *Russkii Tsentri*, 16 June 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/russkaya-delegaciya-na-konferencii-mech-evropy-i-marshe-radikal-nogo-al-yansa>.

instance, of the 2019 Hungarian *Festung Budapest* (Fortress Budapest), an international meeting of far-right activists organized by *Legio Hungaria* that included representatives from Hammerskins Hungaria, Combat 18 Hungaria, Skins4Skins, and *Betyársereg*. The meeting's alleged 600 participants were, among other things, honoring and remembering the "fighters who fell in the long-ago year of 1945 in an unequal battle against the Red International" (i.e. Nazi soldiers and their allies who fought Soviet troops for Budapest at the end of World War II).¹³⁷ The Russian Center also participated in the Carpathian Sich's "Sword of Europe" conference on April 13-14, 2019 in Uzhhorod and in a joint march of the Radical Alliance.¹³⁸

The Russian Center's closest Ukrainian contact is, however, the Azov movement. Since 2016 members of the Russian Center have taken part in several conferences organized by the international department of Azov's National Corps. These meetings were typically devoted to the promotion of international cooperation among European radically right-wing groups and carried such slogans as "Reconstruction of Europe."¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the Russian Insurgent Army and Russian Center, it should be emphasized, have remained so marginal within in Ukraine's politics and society that even many Ukrainian political analysts may have never heard of them.

The Russian Insurgent Army's leader, Andrei Kuznetsov, claims that many Russian political refugees are in contact with his network of Russians in Ukraine. According to him, other Russian immigrants are in independent and direct contact with the Azov movement. Their links to the Azov Regiment and/or National Corps have allowed them to become, in one way or another, involved in the struggle against the Putin regime that they had fled from. The National Corps apparently helps them navigate the bureaucratic process to acquire temporary or permanent resident status in Ukraine or even Ukrainian citizenship.¹⁴⁰

Overall, Russian right-wing radical circles in Ukraine are small and under-institutionalized. Some may not be operating in public. One reason for that is that all Russian political émigrés and organizations in Ukraine—even if they are outspokenly anti-Putinist—are watched upon with mistrust in Ukraine. They often are suspected to be involved in covert operations for Moscow's security services. For instance, it has been alleged that the Belarusian KGB and/or the Russian FSB may be directing one of the most notorious recent far-right immigrants in Ukraine, the above Azov movement's Sergei Korotkikh; considerable research has been published about Korotkikh's possible links to security services.¹⁴¹ Russian right-wing radicals who moved from Russia to Ukraine have largely migrated as individuals or families rather than in groups. If they do join the Ukrainian far right, most to do so individually rather than through their former Russian organizations.

¹³⁷ "Russkie soratniki na Festung Budapest 2019," *Russkiy Tsentr*, 19 March 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/russkie-soratniki-na-festung-budapest-2019>.

¹³⁸ "Russkaia delegatsiia na konferentsii 'Mech Evropy' i marshe 'Radikal'nogo Al'iansa'."

¹³⁹ "Konferentsiia Intermarium v Kieve," *Russkii Tsentr*, 1 July 2019, <http://russ.center/ru/konferenciya-intermarium-v-kieve>.

¹⁴⁰ "Kuznetsov Andrei: imenno v emigratsii proiskhodit ta splavka rossiiskoi oppozitsii, kotoraiia byla na ukrainskom maidane," *Eurorussians*, 8 September 2015, <http://eurorussians.com/russian-rebel-army/>.

¹⁴¹ "Zakliuchenie komissii 'Izucheniiia agentov vliianiia' pri Mezhdunarodnoi assotsiatsii 'Institut Natsional'noi Politiki' po Korotkikh Sergeiu Arkad'evichu \Korotkykh Serhiy Arkadiyovych \Korotkykh Serhii Arkadiiovych, 13 avgusta 1974 g.r.," *Institute of National Politics*, 30 October 2020, <https://www.institutenp.com/zakliuchenie-korotkykh-30-10-2020>.

To accommodate and attract combat-ready right-wing Russian émigrés who have moved to Ukraine, the Azov Regiment created a special Russian Corps within its structure. Azov's affiliated political party, National Corps, has become a major medium for Russian nationals' entry into Ukraine's far-right political milieu. The leadership of the Azov movement recognizes itself publicly in its role as a facilitator of the legalization of foreign volunteers —not only Russian ones—serving, either as legal residents or as new citizens of Ukraine, in the Ukrainian armed forces.¹⁴²

Contacts of the Azov Movement with BORN

For a short time there was also a relationship between Ukraine's Azov movement and the remnants of the notorious Russian right-wing terrorist groupuscule *Boevaia organizatsiia russkikh natsionalistov* (Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists – BORN). This semi-clandestine organization was founded by the Russian far-right activists Nikita Tikhonov and Iliia Goriachev in 2008 as a paramilitary branch of the Russian ultra-nationalist political party *Russkii Obraz* (Russian Image). As Yudina explained, “BORN members committed a number of political murders; their victims included Judge Eduard Chuvashov of the Moscow City Court, lawyer Stanislav Markelov (1974-2009), and several prominent Antifa activists. BORN discontinued its activities after the arrest of Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis in November 2009 and was [officially] eliminated in 2010.”¹⁴³

The Ukrainian collaboration with this grouping of former BORN members is surprising as BORN's political wing, Russian Image, once had been a project promoted by the Kremlin. According to Robert Horvath,

[D]espite its extremism, *Russkii Obraz* played an important role in the Kremlin's “managed nationalism,” a set of measures to manipulate the nationalist sector of the political arena. During 2008-2009, *Russkii Obraz* collaborated closely with pro-Kremlin youth organizations and enjoyed privileged access to Russia's tightly controlled public sphere [...]. *Russkii Obraz*'s integration into managed nationalism was consecrated by [among others] SPAS, a cable television station dedicated to the promotion of ‘Russian Orthodox values. Founded [in 2005] by [the later United Russia functionary and Russian Presidential Administration department head] Ivan Demidov, SPAS provided a platform for pro-Kremlin ideologues like Nataliya Narochnitskaya and Aleksandr Dugin [see below]. But SPAS also offered employment to two leaders of *Russkii Obraz*: [Russian Image ideologue Dmitrii] Taratorin, who was appointed head of political programming; and [Ilya] Goryachev, who served as head of public relations and hosted his own program, “Network Wars.” The institutional prestige of SPAS enabled them to engage in televised discussion with high-ranking state functionaries like Sergei Popov, an influential Duma deputy, and Major-General Leonid Vedenov, the head of the Interior Ministry's firearm licensing service.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² “Aktsiia: Pasport dobrovol'tsu,” *Russkii Tsentri*, 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.”

¹⁴³ Yudina, “The New Exile Strategy of Russian Nationalists.”

¹⁴⁴ Robert Horvath, “*Russkii Obraz* and the Politics of ‘Managed Nationalism’,” *Nationalities Papers* 42:3 (2014): 469-488, here pp. 469 and 476.

Moreover, since 2014, some far-right activists linked to BORN and Russian Image have been active in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, i.e. the Moscow-created eastern Ukrainian separatist entity.¹⁴⁵ Hanna Hrytsenko detailed the ties between the now defunct BORN and the Azov movement.¹⁴⁶ For instance, Hrytsenko describes the cases of the Russian neo-Nazis Aleksandr Parinov and Roman Zheleznov, who were formerly linked to Tikhonov. Parinov had permanently moved to Ukraine years before the Euromaidan, possibly in 2009.¹⁴⁷

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 had also collaborated with [BORN cofounder Ilia] Goriachev, Roman Zheleznov with the nickname "Zukhel'." [...] Zheleznov is not a member of the military service, but a volunteer of the Azov press service.¹⁴⁸

Zheleznov moved from Russia to Ukraine in June 2014. While still in Russia, from 2007, he had been involved with a circle of fascists that later formed BORN. As part of this group, he was asked to gather information about Russian anti-fascists. According to Hrytsenko, Zheleznov's accomplice, Ilia Goriachev, who later became a leader of BORN, used this information for establishing a cooperation with Nikita Ivanov and Pavel Karpov, two employees of the Presidential Administration who were interested in such intelligence.¹⁴⁹ Hrytsenko further explained that

[a]ccording to Anna Sennik, the leader of the information service of the regiment (and then battalion) "Azov," and "Patriot of Ukraine" [PU] activist Ihor Kryvoruchko, [Roman] Zheleznov's successful entry into Ukraine was facilitated by Ihor Mosiichuk, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian far right organization, Social-National Assembly [SNA] (of which the PU is a member). At the time [in summer 2014, Mosiichuk] was an [elected] member of the Kyiv City Council and [the Azov Battalion] deputy commander [...]. Zheleznov was met at the Kyiv airport Boryspil by representatives of the SNA [...]. In January 2016, Zheleznov and the Azov Civil Corps (an association of civil sympathizers of the unit) disrupted a rally in Kyiv in memory of Markelov as well as Baburova and tried to disrupt the ensuing press conference on right-wing radicalism.¹⁵⁰

Hrytsenko has also described another episode about Russian involvement in the Azov movement:

Aleksei Baranovskii, a friend of the Tikhonov and Khasis family, a journalist and coordinator of the right-wing human rights center "Russian Verdict" as well as an expert on national issues for the pro-Kremlin and anti-migrant youth movement "Mestnye" [The Locals], left to live in Ukraine. Baranovskii celebrated the murder of

¹⁴⁵ Anna Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov: kontakty i konteksty v do-i postmaidannoi Ukraine," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 13:1 (2016): 180-193.

¹⁴⁶ Anna Grytsenko, "Ot Donbassa do 'Azova': Ukrainskoe dos'e BORN," *Politychna krytyka*, 24 February 2015, <https://politykrytyka.org/2015/02/24/ot-azova-do-donbassa-ukraynskoe-dose-born/>.

¹⁴⁷ Pavel Nikulin and Egor Skorovoda, "Okolo 'Azova'," *Mediazona*, 26 December 2014, <https://zona.media/article/2014/12/26/parinov>.

¹⁴⁸ Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov."

¹⁴⁹ Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov."

¹⁵⁰ Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov."

lawyer Markelov with champagne and was a witness in the murder case. Baranovskii moved to Kyiv in the fall of 2013 and has worked as a Ukrainian journalist ever since—until March 2014 at *Kommersant-Ukraina*, and, after the Ukrainian edition of the publication had closed, for *Delo.ua*. Baranovskii traveled to the Azov [Battalion] as a journalist stressing in his report about the battalion for *Delo.ua* that he himself did not take part in military operations.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Grytsenko, “Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov.”

The Special Case of the Pseudo-UNA of Eduard Kovalenko

A different instance of Russian involvement with a seemingly Ukrainian ultra-nationalist group did not involve genuine far-right cooperation, as described above and below, but rather was a disinformation operation likely guided from Moscow. In the mid-2000s, the Kremlin and/or Ukrainian pro-Kremlin forces tried to instrumentalize an artificially created, supposedly fascist organization to discredit Ukraine's pro-democratic electoral uprisings, liberal nationalism, and resistance against Russia. The principal protagonist of this affair was the dubious Ukrainian political activist Eduard Kovalenko (b. 1965) who was, at one point, introduced as party chairman of the seemingly virtual group Social-Patriotic Assembly of Slavs.¹⁵² The Kovalenko episode touches upon a variety of topics in Russian-Ukrainian relations during the last 20 years and connects certain aspects of the Orange Revolution of 2004 with the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014, as well as with the prisoners exchanges between the Ukrainian government and Russian satellite statelets in the Donets Basin in 2019-2020.

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

In the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, which resulted in a dramatic stand-off between Viktor Yanukovich 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 themselves from Kovalenko's sordid initiative. Yet Yushchenko's office could not hamper that march and, 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 favor of pro-Russian Yanukovich 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.¹⁵³

¹⁵² "Kovalenko Eduard Vladimirovich," *Politrada*, n.d., politrada.com/dossier/Eduard-Vladimirovich-Kovalenko/

¹⁵³ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Pro-Russian network behind the anti-Ukrainian defamation campaign," *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*, 3 February 2014, anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/02/pro-russian-network-behind-anti.html.

After the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donbas in spring 2014, the supposed pro-Ukrainian, ultra-nationalist, and Yushchenko supporter Kovalenko turned, despite his earlier actions, into an anti-government and anti-war activist. He was arrested for his calls to Ukrainians to abstain from military service and the fight in the Donbas.¹⁵⁴ According to a report by Halya Coynash from May 2017,

[a] court in the Kherson oblast [...] 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 and seize control of the military recruitment office, police and administrative buildings. In November 2016, [Kovalenko] was reported as being behind a petition to Serhei 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.¹⁵⁵

Kovalenko's political turn partly resembled that of Ruslan Kotsaba (b. 1966). In 2019 Kotsaba, a West Ukrainian and a formerly anti-Semitic journalist, was scheduled to receive the Aachen Peace Prize—a controversial award given by a German non-governmental organization for pacifist activism. Kotsaba had been selected because of his public calls to Ukrainian men to hide from obligatory military service during the ongoing war in the Donbas. He was subsequently accused of and wanted for illegal propaganda by the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies.

As a result, Kotsaba temporarily moved to Germany and became acquainted with left-wing political circles. Among his contacts was *Die Linke* (The Left) Bundestag deputy Andrej Hunko, who has links to the "Donetsk People's Republic" and co-nominated Kotsaba for the Aachen Peace Prize. After his nomination, an older video resurfaced on the internet, however, in which Kotsaba outlined his rabidly anti-Semitic views. Publicly embarrassed, the Aachen prize committee withdrew Kotsaba's nomination for the peace award.¹⁵⁶

Kovalenko's case is even more bizarre than Kotsaba's as Kovalenko had more than occasionally voiced far-right views. Before the Orange Revolution, Kovalenko had obtained a certain public

¹⁵⁴ "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/.

¹⁵⁵ 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.

¹⁵⁶ Roman Goncharenko, "Kontroverse um Aachener Friedenspreisträger," *Deutsche Welle*, 9 May 2019, www.dw.com/de/kontroverse-um-aachener-friedenspreisträger/a-48678625.

profile as an official Ukrainian ultra-nationalist leading a “Ukrainian National Assembly.”¹⁵⁷ Since 2014, the real UNA-UNSO that Kovalenko had been claiming to represent in 2004, participated with its own volunteer battalion in Ukraine’s armed defense in the Donbas. In late 2019, Kovalenko’s case took an even stranger turn when he was then arrested and once demonstratively fascist Ukrainian activist was transferred to Russia as part of one of the official prisoners’ exchanges enacted as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian negotiations known as the Minsk Process. Halya Coynash 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 Korchynsky, 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 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.¹⁵⁸

The Kovalenko case is an illustration of the Kremlin’s so-called “polit-technological” mingling in Ukrainian domestic affairs rather than of genuine Ukrainian far-right cooperation with Russian actors. The obviously desired effects of Kovalenko’s various activities were, to an unusually high degree, related to purposeful disinformation and manipulation.

In contrast to the Kovalenko affair, the case of Russian engagement with Dmytro Korchynsky—whom Coynash mentioned above—was less instrumental in nature. It is more illustrative of certain touching points between Ukrainian far-right world views and the Putin regime’s ideology. Korchynsky’s ties and approach to Russia are suspicious, to be sure, too. Yet, they are more ambivalent in character than Kovalenko’s straightforward case of an obviously hired pro-Russian agent. Korchynsky’s various actions are less easy to explain and are ideologically contradictory.

¹⁵⁷ Denis Kazanskyi, “Zachem Rossiia zabrala po obmenu ukrainskogo fashista iz UNA-UNSO,” *Denis Kazanskyi*, 3 January 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2q8FAznF_w.

¹⁵⁸ 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.

Ukraine's Far Right and the Kremlin: The Korchyns'kyi Case

The above-mentioned contacts between pro-Ukrainian Russian neo-Nazi activists within the Ukrainian far right are—when viewed as part of the contextualization proposed here—altogether not that surprising. A peculiarly non-imperialist brand of racism held by Russians fleeing to Ukraine explain their cooperation with the Ukrainian far right. Moreover, such cooperation happened between politically marginal, numerically small, and rather new Russian émigré groups in Ukraine on one side and some fringe actors in Ukrainian politics on the other. Dmytro Korchyns'kyi's case constitutes, in contrast, an ideologically and motivationally more complicated story. It links a Ukrainian ultra-nationalist grouping, *Bratstvo*, and its well-known political leader, Korchyns'kyi, to certain relevant (and not merely marginal) anti-Ukrainian Russian political actors within Russia. In the aftermath of the 2004 Orange Revolution, there was for about two years a curious association between the UNA-UNSO co-founder and once prominent Ukrainian far-right leader Korchyns'kyi and the International Eurasianist Movement's leader Aleksandr Dugin, a notorious Russian fascist ideologue.¹⁵⁹

Already before this official temporary alliance in 2005-2006, Korchyns'kyi had established contacts in Russia, as he disclosed in a 2017 television interview: “We have cooperated with the *moskals* [pejorative term for Muscovites or 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.”¹⁶⁰ When the surprised interviewer asked what the purpose of this cooperation was, Korchyns'kyi replied that he wanted to encourage Cossack separatism inside Russia. However, as mentioned above, during the period that Korchyns'kyi refers to here (the early 1990s) his UNA-UNSO was across the southwestern Ukrainian border in Moldova, protecting Ukrainians living in Transnistria and incidentally supporting pro-Russian Transnistrian separatism in the region.

Korchyns'kyi's contacts and visits to Moscow in the 2000s were also odd since in the 1990s he had made a multitude of anti-Russian announcements and, for instance, proclaimed that “Crimea will be either Ukrainian or unpopulated.”¹⁶¹ The late researcher of Russian nationalism Vladimir Pribylovskii wrote, “In 1996, [Korchyn'skyi] fought in Chechnya for the Chechen separatists. In his memoirs of the Chechen War, published in 2005 (in his book *Revolution Haute Couture*), [Korchyns'kyi] 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).”¹⁶²

Moreover, after Korchyns'kyi's intense cooperation with Dugin (more on this later), there was another curious episode. During the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-2014, there were allegations in the Ukrainian press that after an arrest warrant had been issued for Korchyns'kyi following his

¹⁵⁹ Earlier on Dugin's and Korchyn'skyi's cooperation, Andreas Umland, “Dobrovol'cheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniya i radikal'nyi natsionalizm v poslemaidanoi Ukraine: nekotorye osobennosti vozniknoveniia polka 'Azov',” *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeskoii istorii i kul'tury* 12:1 (2016): 141-178. The following paras are partly based on: Umland, “Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine.”

¹⁶⁰ “Hard z Vlashchenko: Dmytro Korchyns'kyi, literator,” *ZIK channel*, 3 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-s5nIIL40s>.

¹⁶¹ M. Balutenko and V. Pribylovskii, *Kto est' kto v politike na Ukraine: Biograficheskii sbornik* (Moskva: Panorama, 2007): 141-143.

¹⁶² Balutenko and Pribylovskii, *Kto est' kto v politike na Ukraine*, p. 143. See also: A. Pridonov, “Dmitrii Korchinskii otvetit za Chechniu,” *Utro.ru*, 20 March 2006, <http://ukraina.utro.ru/articles/2006/03/20/531851.shtml>.

involvement in a violent clash in front of Ukraine's Presidential Administration building on December 1, 2013, the Ukrainian ultra-nationalist temporarily went into hiding. According to different reports, he moved either to Russia and/or Transnistria (controlled by a pro-Russian satellite regime).¹⁶³ According to a press report, he gave a Skype interview from a Russian asylum shelter to a Ukrainian television station.¹⁶⁴

If his location at that point – which Korchyns'kyi later denied – were to be confirmed, this would be remarkable. During late 2013 and early 2014 the Kremlin media was already conducting its large-scale disinformation campaign about a grave threat which radical Ukrainian nationalism was allegedly posing to Russian speakers in Ukraine. Russian state television and newspapers presented the Euromaidan as a fascist, anti-Russian uprising and started to especially demonize the leader of the Right Sector, Dmytro Yarosh, as a fascist and allegedly decisive figure in the events playing out in Kyiv.

While Yarosh was wanted for arrest in Russia, it may have been that another Ukrainian ultra-nationalist, Korchyns'kyi, had been given the chance to evade Ukrainian arrest by taking refuge in Russia and/or Transnistria. Yet another dubious aspect of Korchyns'kyi's contacts with Moscow and pro-Russian actors since the 1990s is that during that time—from the founding of the UNA-UNSO in the early 1990s until today—Korchyns'kyi has periodically 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 UPA and one-time head of the radical Bandera wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.¹⁶⁵ In 2014-2019, Yuriy Shukhevych, together with two MPs linked to Korchyns'kyi (one of them Korchyns'kyi's wife), was a member of a faction of Oleh Lyashko's loudly patriotic, so-called Radical Party in the *Verkhovna Rada*.¹⁶⁶

Despite such a seemingly unequivocal background, Korchyns'kyi as leader of *Bratstvo* became a member of the Highest Council of the International Eurasianist Movement in Moscow in 2004-2006.¹⁶⁷ The only other Ukrainian included in this group was the head of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine and doctor of economic sciences, Nataliia Vitrenko (b. 1951). Vitrenko's "Popular Opposition Bloc" party went on to win 2.93% of the official turnout in the 2006 parliamentary elections. She was then the premier representative of radical anti-Westernism in Ukraine and has been known for her pro-Russian views as well as frequent invectives against Ukrainian mainstream politicians whom she regularly calls "*fashisty*" (fascists).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ "Korchyns'kyi pislia shturmu Bankovoi vyikhav do Rosii, a polkovnyk 'Berkutu' mih zaymatysia provokatsiiamy," *TSN*, 5 December 2013, <http://tsn.ua/politika/korchynskiy-pislya-shturmu-bankovoyi-viyihav-do-rosiyi-a-polkovnik-berkutu-mig-zaymatysya-provokatsiyami-323778.html>; "Lidera 'Bratstva' Dmitriia Korchynskogo zaderzhali v Izraile," *UNIAN*, 7 February 2014, <http://www.unian.net/politics/881762-lidera-bratstva-dmitriya-korchynskogo-zaderjali-v-izraile.html>.

¹⁶⁴ "Dmytro Korchynsky skype," *YouTube*, 8 December 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzGabLUMcQM> (not publicly accessible any more).

¹⁶⁵ Rudling, "The Cult of Roman Shukhevych in Ukraine."

¹⁶⁶ Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine."

¹⁶⁷ "Evraziiskii antioranzhevyi front," *EvrAsia.org* 23 May 2005, <http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2242>.

¹⁶⁸ Andreas Umland, "Fashistskii drug Vitrenko: strannyi soiuz mezhdou ukrainskim 'progressivnym sotsializmom' i rossiiskim 'neoevraziistvom'," *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, 26 October 2006, <http://pravda.com.ua/ru/news/2006/9/27/46953.htm>; *idem*, "Aleksandr Dugin, evropeiskii fashizm i

In 2004-2006, Vitrenko and Korchyns'kyi, though formally being on opposite sides of Ukraine's political spectrum and manifestly different in their approaches to Russia, were together listed in the directory of members of the Highest Council of the Moscow-based International Eurasianist Movement.¹⁶⁹ It was also announced in February 2005 that Vitrenko and Korchyns'kyi had joined the Highest Council of the newly created Eurasianist Union of Youth.¹⁷⁰ The new organization represented the International Eurasianist Movement's youth section and was part of a larger "paratotalitarian" reconfiguration of the Russian public sphere in reaction to Ukraine's Orange Revolution by way of, among others, creation of several pro-Kremlin youth movements.¹⁷¹ Both of these organizations, the International Eurasianist Movement and Eurasianist Youth Union, are led by and entirely devoted to the ideas of the notorious Russian fascist publicist and doctor of political sciences, Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962).¹⁷²

Vitrenko: chto obshchego?" *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, 20 July 2007, <http://pravda.com.ua/news/2007/7/20/61687.htm>.

¹⁶⁹ On 11 May 2020, Vitrenko was, among others, still mentioned on the IEM Highest Council's members list: <http://med.org.ru/article/1908>.

¹⁷⁰ "Korchinskii i Vitrenko budut gal'vanizirovat polutrupy," *Ukrainskaia pravda*, 18 February 2015. www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2005/02/18/4385803/; "Korchinskii and Vitrenko v vysshem sovete Evraziiskogo Soiuzha Molodezhyi," *Politicheskoe obozrenie*, n. d., <https://politobzor.net/27801-korchinskii-i-vitrenko-v-vysshem-sovete-evraziiskogo-soyuza-molodezhi.html>.

¹⁷¹ Andreas Umland, "Russia's New 'Special Path' After the Orange Revolution: Radical Anti-Westernism and Paratotalitarian Neo-Authoritarianism in 2005-8," *Russian Politics & Law* 50:6 (2012): 19-40.

¹⁷² On Dugin, in chronological order, in the 2000s: Leonid Liuks [Luks], "'Tretii put', ili nazad v Tretii Reikh?" *Voprosy filosofii* 5 (2000): 33-44; *idem*, "Zum 'geopolitischen' Programm Aleksandr Dugins und der Zeitschrift *Éléments* – eine manichäische Versuchung," *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 6:1 (2002): 43-58; Andreas Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society? Contextualizing the Recent Decline of Parties of the Extreme Right Wing in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 10:3 (2002): 362-391; *idem*, "Formirovanie fashistskogo 'neoevraziiskogo' dvizheniia v Rossii: Put' Aleksandra Dugina ot marginal'nogo ekstremista do ideologa postsovetskoi akademicheskoi i politicheskoi elity, 1989-2001 gg.," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2002): 289-304; *idem*, "Kulturhegemoniale Strategien der russischen extremen Rechten: Die Verbindung von faschistischer Ideologie und gramscistischer Taktik im 'Neoeurasismus' des Aleksandr Dugin," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 33:4 (2004): 437-54; Leonid Luks, "Eurasien aus neototalitärer Sicht – Zur Renaissance einer Ideologie im heutigen Rußland," *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 1:1 (2004): 63-76; Andreas Umland, "Postsowjetische Gegeneliten und ihr wachsender Einfluss auf Jugendkultur und Intellektuellendiskurs in Russland: Der Fall Aleksandr Dugin 1991-2004," *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 10:1 (2006): 115-47; John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook and Dmitrii Trenin's Ambivalent Response," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25:1-2 (2001): 91-127; Markus Mathyl, "Der 'unaufhaltsame Aufstieg' des Aleksandr Dugin: Neo-Nationalbolschewismus und Neue Rechte in Russland," *Osteuropa* 52:7 (2002): 885-900; *idem*, "The National-Bolshevik Party and Arctogaia: Two Neo-fascist Groupuscules in the Post-Soviet Political Space," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:3 (2003): 62-76; Stefan Wiederkehr, "'Kontinent Evrasija' – Klassischer Eurasismus und Geopolitik in der Lesart Alexander Dugins," in: Markus Kaiser, ed., *Auf der Suche nach Eurasien: Politik, Religion und Alltagskultur zwischen Russland und Europa* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004): 25-138; Marlen Lariuel' [Marlène Laruelle], "Aleksandr Dugin, ideologicheskii posrednik," in: Aleksandr Verkhovskii, ed., *Tsena nenavisti: Natsionalizm v Rossii i protivodeistvie rasistskim prestupleniim* (Moskva: Sova, 2005), 226-253; Marlène Laruelle, "Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?" *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers* 294 (2006) <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/news/docs/OP294.pdf>; *idem*, "(Neo)evraziitsy i politika: 'vkhozhdenie' v gosstruktury i bezrazlichie k obshchestvennomu mneniiu?" *Vestnik Evrazii - Acta Eurasica* 1(31) (2006): 30-43; Alexander Höllwerth, *Das sakrale eurasische Imperium des Aleksandr Dugin: Eine Diskursanalyse zum postsowjetischen russischen Rechtsextremismus* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2007); Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Palingenetic Thrust of Russian Neo-Eurasianism: Ideas of Rebirth in Aleksandr Dugin's Worldview," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9:4 (2008): 491-506; Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press/The

Dugin's name became widely known in Ukraine in 2007 in connection with a scandal that arose when then Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykola Zhulynsky was barred from entering Russia during a private trip to St. Petersburg. This move was in retaliation for Ukraine's refusal to permit Dugin to enter Ukraine a few months before. In June 2006, Ukraine had declared Dugin *persona non grata* until 2011 for violating Ukrainian law. When he arrived at Simferopol airport in early June 2007 to attend the festival "The Great Russian Word" organized by the Russian Community of Crimea, he was deported back to Russia.¹⁷³

Dugin has made himself known as a "neo-Eurasianist" and fanatic anti-American.¹⁷⁴ Dugin describes himself as a "National Bolshevik," referencing the German anti-democratic publicist Ernst Niekisch; a "traditionalist," the French esotericist René Guénon and Italian fascist Dadaist Julius Evola; and a "conservative revolutionary," referencing a German inter-war intellectual movement.¹⁷⁵ He has also made affirmative references to other non-Russian sources including British Satanism, European occultism, France's *Nouvelle Droite*, and Japanese mysticism. Dugin's worldview is largely a variation of anti-Western ideas that had their origins outside Russia. Posing as a devout Orthodox believer, his major concepts are imported from various Catholic and protestant thinkers from the inter- and post-war era in Western Europe.

Despite such – within the Russian nationalist tradition – dubious sources, Dugin, during his affiliation with Korchynsky and Vitrenko,¹⁷⁶ was in the company of a number of highly placed

John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Anton Shekhovtsov, "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: The New Right à la Russe," *Religion Compass* 3:4 (2009): 697-716.

¹⁷³ Andreas Umland, "Vitrenko's Flirtation with Russian 'Neo-Eurasianism'," *Kyiv Post*, 4 June 2007.

www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/vitrenkos-flirtation-with-russian-neo-urasianism-26787.html

¹⁷⁴ Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thorburn, "Putin's Brain: Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea," *Foreign Affairs*, 31 March 2014. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-31/putins-brain>; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Putin's Brain?" *Eurozine*, 12 September 2014.

www.eurozine.com/putins-brain/; Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (Lanhan, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Kirill Kalinin, "Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian Elite: The Irrelevance of Aleksandr Dugin's Geopolitics," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35:5-6 (2019): 461-470; Andreas Umland, "Alexandr Dugin: Kreuzzug gegen den Liberalismus und Verbindungen nach Deutschland," in: Christoph Becker and Ralf Fücks, eds., *Das alte Denken der Neuen Rechten: Die langen Linien der antiliberalen Revolte* (Berlin: Zentrum Liberale Moderne, 2019): 109-120.

¹⁷⁵ On, for instance, Evola's fascism and importance for Dugin, see the discussion in: Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); A. James Gregor, "The Problem," in: Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman, eds., *Fascism. Vol. I: The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 339-340; Andreas Umland, "Dugin kein Faschist? Eine Erwiderung an Professor A. James Gregor;" A. James Gregor, "Andreas Umland and the 'Fascism' of Alexander Dugin;" Andreas Umland, "Some Addenda on the Relevance of Extremely Right-Wing Ideas in Putin's New Russia;" A. James Gregor, "Response to Dr. Andreas Umland;" Andreas Umland, "Classification, Julius Evola and the Nature of Dugin's Ideology;" A. James Gregor, "Once Again on Fascism, Classification, and Aleksandr Dugin," in: Roger Griffin, Werner Loh and Andreas Umland, eds., *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2006): 459-499; Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland. "Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and Perennial Philosophy," *The Russian Review* 68:4 (2009): 662-678.

¹⁷⁶ There was also a contact between Dugin and one of the Azov movement's ideological theoreticians, the philosopher Olena Semeniaka. However, there seems to have been only one meeting and brief communication between Dugin and Semeniaka which is why this connection is not further explored here. See: Leonids Ragozins [Leonid Ragozin], "Why did we write this," *Re:Baltica*, 13 December 2019, en.rebaltica.lv/2019/12/why-did-we-write-this/; Nonjon, "Olena Semenyaka."

Russian political and social figures, such as 2004-2008 Minister of Culture Aleksandr Sokolov, 2001-2015 Federation Council Deputy Speaker Aleksandr Torshin, and Presidential Advisor Aslambek Aslakhonov. These officials, like Vitrenko, Korchyyn'skyy, and other post-Soviet figures, were (and partly still are) members the International Eurasianist Movement's Highest Council.¹⁷⁷

During the 1990s, Dugin repeatedly and affirmatively wrote about West European fascism. He criticized German, Italian, and other fascisms in his article "Fascism—borderless and red," which became a chapter of the electronic version of his 1997 book, *Templars of the Proletariat*.¹⁷⁸ In the article Dugin blamed the fascist movements and regimes of inter-war Europe for being too moderate, too incoherent, too soft, and not truly revolutionary. Fascism, argued Dugin, is in principle a good idea; but it has never been consistently implemented. According to Dugin, in Russia there will emerge a truly "fascist fascism." In his earlier articles, such as "Conservative Revolution" (1991), "The Great War of the Continents" (1991-1992), or "Left Nationalism" (1992), Dugin elaborated on why he thinks Russian fascism is a benevolent ideology. He presented the SS as an organization with positive characteristics and lamented the break-up of the 1939 alliance between Hitler and Stalin as an unfortunate event. The banner of the notorious National-Bolshevik Party that Dugin co-founded and led in 1994-1998, together with notorious writer Eduard Limonov (1943-2020), was 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 known for his especially strident statements on the future of Ukraine. Though they were—even by Russian nationalist standards of that time—rather extravagant, they turned out to be prophetic in regard to Putin's later policies vis-à-vis Ukraine.¹⁷⁹ For instance, Dugin wrote in his major textbook, *Foundations of Geopolitics*, first published in 1997 and reprinted in 2000, that

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, no 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." [...] An 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.¹⁸⁰

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 January 26, 2005, stating that

Russia has lost Ukraine, and it is not necessary to cover up this sad fact. It will not be possible to develop positive relations with the Kyiv of [Viktor] Yushchenko, it is

¹⁷⁷ Andreas Umland, "Pathological Tendencies in Russian 'Neo-Eurasianism': The Significance of the Rise of Aleksandr Dugin for the Interpretation of Public Life in Contemporary Russia," *Russian Politics and Law* 47:1 (2009): 76-89.

¹⁷⁸ Aleksandr Dugin, *Tamplery proletariata* (Moskva: Arktogeia, 1997), <http://www.my.arcto.ru/public/templars/>.

¹⁷⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitik: Geopoliticheskie budushchee Rossii. Myslit' prostranstvom* (Moskva: Evraziia, 2000): 348-349, 799.

¹⁸⁰ Aleksandr Dugin, "Chast' 5. Vnutrennyaya geopolitika Rossii," *Tsentr konservativnykh issledovaniy*, 13 September 2009, <http://konservatizm.org/konservatizm/books/130909011417.xhtml>.

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, 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 Kyiv. 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.¹⁸¹

In 2006, Dugin 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 part of Russia.¹⁸²

Dugin’s explicit anti-Ukrainian statements make his temporarily official cooperation with the prominent Ukrainian ultra-nationalist Korchyns’kyi and his *Bratstvo* party seem paradoxical. This connection was unnatural in terms of both Russian and Ukrainian extreme right ideologies, in general, and the two notorious protagonists’ announcements and actions, in particular. Viktor Shnirel’man noted that, nevertheless, Korchyns’kyi appeared publicly “at [Dugin’s] Eurasianist Youth Union rally on September 21, 2005 on Slavic Square in Moscow on the 625th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo [where Korchyns’kyi] called for a relentless war against Atlantic civilization declaring that war was closer than ever.”¹⁸³ In a 2005 interview with an inquisitive investigator from the website *Censor.net*, Korchyns’kyi defended his connections in Moscow:

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

Korchyns’kyi: The Eurasianist 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’kyi: 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 relations is determined first of all by the fact that Slavs are discriminated against in the modern world [...]. The big

¹⁸¹ Aleksandr Dugin, “Viktor Yushchenko kak zerkalo rossiyskoi geopolitiki,” *RG.ru*, 26 January 2005, <https://rg.ru/2005/01/26/yushenko-geopolitika.html>.

¹⁸² Aleksandr Dugin, “Razmezhevanie Ukrainy – geopoliticheskaia neobkhodimost’,” *Mezhdunarodne evraziiskoe dvizhenie*, 22 August 2006. med.org.ru/article/3223.

¹⁸³ Viktor Shnirel’man, “Evraziya ili Evropa? Rol’ Ukrainy v evraziiskom i Evrazii v ukrainskom diskurse,” *Forum noveshei vostochnoevropeskoj istorii i kul’tury* 5:1 (2009): 141.

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.¹⁸⁴

In summer 2005, the *Bratstvo* leader together with Putin's future coordinator of Ukrainian affairs Dmitrii Surkov, pro-Putinist political technologist Gleb Pavlovskii, and the leader of the pro-Putin youth GONGO "*Nashi*" (Ours) Vasyl Yakymenko held a series of lectures for *Nashi's* yearly summer camp on Lake Seliger.¹⁸⁵ The topic of Korchyns'kyi's presentation was how to counter "color" protests, i.e. how to prevent actions of civil disobedience similar to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine or Rose Revolution in Georgia.¹⁸⁶ This was an unusual engagement of Korchyns'kyi within the context of Ukrainian far right politics.

It was also a problem for the Ukraine-born writer, former leader of the National-Bolshevik Party of Russia, and Dugin's long-term collaborator, Eduard Limonov. In 2003, Korchyns'kyi and Eduard Limonov were arrested together after a joint street protest in Moscow.¹⁸⁷ At that time, Limonov was part of the Russian opposition and proclaimed anti-Putinist positions. Thus, Korchyns'kyi's collaboration with *Nashi* in 2005 led Limonov to discontinue his contacts with *Bratstvo*. Ironically, it was not Korchyns'kyi's *Ukrainian* nationalism that made Limonov cut ties, but Korchyns'kyi's collaboration with a particular – i.e. the Putinist – branch of *Russian* nationalism. Interestingly enough, Limonov later himself turned pro-Putinist after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁸⁸

About these contacts between Ukrainian and Russian ultra-nationalists, Hanna Hrytsenko reports a further detail related to Oleksandr Matiushin, a former coordinator of a local Donetsk' branch of Limonov's Moscow-based National-Bolshevik Party and one-time activist for the above-mentioned "Russian Image" micro-party, secretly cooperating with the Russian Presidential Administration:

Matiushin, formerly also a member of the 'Brotherhood' of Dmytro Korchyns'kyi and the Eurasianist 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 "Variag 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].¹⁸⁹

Yet another curious facet of this zigzag story is that, in his quoted 2005 interview for *Censor.net*, Korchyns'kyi indicated that he had been in preliminary coalition talks with Viktor Yanukovich to

¹⁸⁴ "Korchinskii: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est'," *Censor.net*, 11 November 2005, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/2162/korchinskiyi_u_slavyan_obschee_budushee_esli_ono_voobshe_est_rosbalt.

¹⁸⁵ "Korchinskii nachil rossiiskikh 'nashikh' borot'sia s revoliutsiei," *Censor.net*, 27 July 2005, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/1689/korchinskiyi_nauchil_rossiyiskih_quotnashihquot_borotsya_s_revolvyutsiei_gazetaru.

¹⁸⁶ "Korchinskii nachil rossiiskikh 'nashikh' borot'sia s revoliutsiei."

¹⁸⁷ "V Moskve zaderzhany Limonov, Korchinskiy i s'emochnaia gruppa telekanala '1+1'," *Podrobnosti*, 2003, <https://podrobnosti.ua/91773-v-moskve-zaderzhany-limonov-korchinskij-i-semochnaja-gruppa-telekanala-11.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Eduard Limonov, "Izvini, Dmitro!" *Livejournal*, 6 December 2013, <https://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/402436.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Grytsenko, "Ukrainskie sviazi Boevoi organizatsii russkikh natsionalistov."

jointly confront the “Orange” political camp. The allegedly envisaged alliance, however, failed to emerge. Korchyns’kyy explained: “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, we wanted to create at least a radical-opposition electoral bloc.”¹⁹⁰ In this interview Korchyns’kyy also agreed to an extension of the lease of Russia’s naval base on the Black Sea in the Ukrainian port city of Sevastopol—an idea most Ukrainian nationalists opposed.¹⁹¹

Later, Korchyns’kyy repeatedly assured that his dubious contacts in Russia are in the past. Despite his one-time declarative support for Yanukovych, when Yanukovych became president in 2010, Korchyns’kyy and members of *Bratstvo* ended up with criminal cases brought to court against them. In Russia, Korchyns’kyy has been wanted since 2005 because of his previously mentioned alleged misdeeds in Chechnya. His friendly relationship with Dugin, in Korchyns’kyy’s words, ended with “burning Dugin’s office in Moscow” implying that he or his people had set a fire at the headquarters of Dugin’s movement.¹⁹² Whether true or not, *Bratstvo* and Korchyns’kyy officially left the International Eurasianist Movement after three members of the Eurasianist Youth Union desecrated Ukrainian state symbols on Mount Hoverla in western Ukraine in October 2007.¹⁹³ Since then, Korchyns’kyy seems not to have had any public ties to representatives close to the Kremlin and has returned to traditional Ukrainian right-wing activism and publicism.

¹⁹⁰ “Korchinskii: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est’.”

¹⁹¹ “Korchinskii: U slavian - obshchee budushchee, esli ono voobshche est’.”

¹⁹² “HARD z Vlashchenko: Dmytro Korchyns’kyy, literator,” *Telekanal ZIK*, 3 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-s5nIL40s>.

¹⁹³ “‘Bratstvo’ ob’iavilo rozysk vandalov iz Evraziyskogo soiuzha molodezhi,” *Liga.net*, October 2007, <https://news.liga.net/politics/news/bratstvo-obyavilo-rozysk-vandalov-iz-evraziyskogo-soyuzha-molodezhi>.

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

Korchyns'kyi's and some of his followers' cooperation with anti-Ukrainian Russian actors was an exceptional episode. Yet, it has not been the only such instance within Ukraine's far right. It has also not been a characteristic that only marked Korchyns'kyi & Co. in contrast to other Ukrainian ultra-nationalists whose actions and announcements have also been contradictory. The following episodes illustrate the sometimes confusing public stances of Ukraine's ultra-nationalists.

Ukraine's Far Right and Russia-Related Oligarchs

The Azov Movement, Medvedchuk, Muraev and Others

In March 2018, members of Korchyns'kyi's *Bratstvo* and some other activists were trying to block the entrance to the main office of the TV channel *ZIK* in Kyiv.¹⁹⁴ These nationalists were protesting the sale of this formerly pro-Ukrainian television station to an entity related to Ukrainian politician and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk (b. 1954). Medvedchuk is well known for his close ties to the Kremlin: his daughter's godfather is Vladimir Putin. In reaction to the ultra-nationalist protest against the transfer of *ZIK*, police forces along with a vigilante group appeared at the station's building. The ultra-nationalist *Natsional'nyy druzhyny* (National Squads)—affiliated with the Azov movement's National Corps—came not to protest but to defend the operation of the TV channel under its new owners and with its new programmatic orientation. According to the Azov movement's leadership, the channel management had asked the National Squads for protection.¹⁹⁵ Protection services are, to be sure, a common practice among Ukraine's paramilitary nationalist groups. Yet, this action was peculiar as a notorious representative of Putin in Ukraine, Medvedchuk, had become the new de facto owner of the TV channel (and the station was closed in 2021 for this reason).¹⁹⁶

Two years after this episode, in May 2020, the same National Corps that had protected Medvedchuk's TV channel in 2018, attacked the Kyiv office of Medvedchuk's party, "Opposition Platform — For Life" (see below).¹⁹⁷ In fact, Ukrainian right-wing radicals, in contrast to the Azov movement's 2018 action protecting a Medvedchuk-affiliated station, have repeatedly attacked pro-

¹⁹⁴ "Blokuvannia telekanalu ZIK: Iak vse rozpochynalosia," *ZIK*, 3 March 2018, https://zik.ua/news/2018/03/28/blokuvannya_telekanalu_ziku_yak_vse_rozpochynalosya_1294755; "Korchyns'kyi zaiavyv pro piketuvannia telekanalu ZIK," *Slovo i Dilo*, 3 March 2018, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2018/03/28/novyna/suspilstvo/korchynskiy-zayavyv-pro-piketuvannya-telekanalu-zik>.

¹⁹⁵ "Natsional'ni Druzhyny' vzialy pid okhoronu telekanal ZIK," *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 3 March 2018, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/03/27/7175935/>; Evhen Krapyvin, "Telekanal ZIK pid okhoronoiu 'Natsdruzhyh': iaki povnovazhennia ta shcho dozvoleno aktyvistam?" *Slovo i Dilo*, 3 March 2018, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2018/03/28/pogljad/suspilstvo/telekanal-zik-oxoronoyu-naczdruzhyh-yaki-povnovazhennia-ta-dozvoleno-aktyvistam>.

¹⁹⁶ "Vlasnyk '112' i NewsOne Kozak kupyv Zik – kil'ka zhurnalistiv zaiavyly pro zvil'nennia," *Radio Svoboda*, 9 June 2019, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kozak-kupyv-zik/29999891.html>; "Vlasnyk '112' Ukraina' ta NewsOne kupyv 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>.

¹⁹⁷ Valeriy Saakov, "Aktsiu pid ofisom Viktora Medvedchuka provodyv 'Natskorpus'," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 May 2020, <https://www.dw.com/uk/aktsiu-pid-ofisom-viktora-medvedchuka-provodyv-natskorpus/a-53545845>.

Russian TV channels. For instance, in 2016 due to pro-Russian rhetoric on the popular *Inter* TV channel, representatives of the Azov movement blocked its building and organized actions against it across Ukraine.

A similarly contradictory pattern reveals itself in the Azov movement's other relationships with media outlets related to pro-Russian oligarchs and politicians. Among the latter, for example, is Dmytro Muraev who was a frequent guest on *ZIK* after its pro-Russian turn and was or is co-owner of other pro-Russian TV channels *112.ua* (shut down in 2021), *Nash (Ours)*, and *NewsOne* (shut down in 2021). In spite of their generally anti-nationalist and partly anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, these media conglomerates, along with other TV channels linked to various Ukrainian oligarchs with ambivalent political stances, have for several years given considerable airtime to Azov movement representatives.¹⁹⁸

Such attention is curious due to the National Corps's constant low rating in public opinion polls and national electoral results that is usually far below the 5% threshold necessary to enter the *Verkhovna Rada*. In fact, some press releases by Ukraine's polling agencies do not even list the National Corps and its leader Andriy Bilets'kyi as separate entries due to their negligible support of 1% or less among the survey respondents.¹⁹⁹ The contradiction between the National Corps's high TV exposure and low political weight repeats an earlier pattern of heavy media presence of the then extra-parliamentary and nationally marginal *Svoboda* party on various TV channels close to the Party of Regions during the period 2010-2012 (see below).

Moreover, the surprisingly high interest of pro-Russian and ambivalent oligarchic mass media for the National Corps, as a minor Ukrainian party, has led not only to a disproportionate presence of the Azov movement's leadership, including Andriy Bilets'kyi, in these TV channels daily reporting and discussion shows.²⁰⁰ One of the especially notorious informal leaders of the Azov movement, the above-mentioned former Belarusian and Russian neo-Nazi activist and émigré Sergei Korotkiikh (Ukr.: Serhiy Korotkiykh) too has been benefitting, over the last years, from unusually high attention in relatively pro-Russian mass media.²⁰¹ As indicated, this surprising collaboration is reminiscent of an earlier strange episode in the history of post-Soviet Ukraine's far right.

Svoboda and Yanukovich

In connection with the US presidential elections of 2016, the activities of Donald Trump's election campaign manager, Paul Manafort, in Ukraine came under scrutiny.²⁰² Manafort had advised

¹⁹⁸ E.g.: *NewsOne*. <https://www.youtube.com/c/newsoneua/search?query=азов>;

¹⁹⁹ E.g.: "Otsinka hromadianam sytuatsii v kraini, riven' doviry do sotsial'nykh instytutiv ta politykiv, elektoral'ni orientatsii hromadian (zhovten'-lystopad 2020 r.)," *Razumkov tsentr*, 10 November 2020, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-gromadianamy-sytuatsii-v-kraini-riven-doviry-do-sotsialnykh-instytutiv-ta-politykiv-elektoralni-orientatsii-gromadian-zhovten-lystopad-2020r>.

²⁰⁰ E.g.: "'Azov' ne soglasen s provdeniem vyborov na okkupirovannykh territoriakh," *NewsOne*, 20 May 2016 www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt0DhHKQGKQ.

²⁰¹ See: *Natsional'nyi korpus*, <https://nationalcorps.org/?s=коротких>.

²⁰² 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#lf_comment=500595474; "Ukrains'ki 'druzi' Manaforta: khto, koly i za iaki hroshi naymay polittekhnohloha," *BBC Ukraine*, 30 July 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-45003132>; "The

Yanukovych in 2007-2009 in preparation for his successful 2010 Ukrainian presidential election bid. Manafort apparently recommended, among other things, to play on political polarization in Ukraine. He seems to have recommended to the Party of Regions to use anti-Semitic and anti-Russian rhetoric of Ukraine's ultra-nationalists to its advantage during Yanukovych's campaign. This tactic was intended to create an image of a radical nationalist threat to Ukraine's integration with the West and to mobilize Yanukovych's core electorate in Ukraine's Russophone eastern and southern regions to vote for pro-Russian candidates and the Party of Regions.²⁰³

Yanukovych's strategy—perhaps inspired by Manafort—involved even direct financial support from the Party of Regions to Ukraine's far right via “dark accounting.” Such an operation has been suspected ever since the rise of *Svoboda* in 2012. Yet, it was only documented and fully came to light after Viktor Yanukovych's February 2014 escape from Ukraine.²⁰⁴

In August 2016, Serhiy Leshchenko—a well-known Ukrainian investigative journalist, anticorruption activist, and then member of parliament—made public evidence from the black bookkeeping of the Party of Regions. The evidence had been found at Yanukovych's former estate at Mezhihiria near Kyiv in 2014. Leshchenko posted the photograph of a table of unofficial expenses of the Party of Regions that listed payments not only to Manafort, but also recorded a 2010 transfer of US\$200,000 to the *Svoboda* party, its most vicious political opponent. When publishing this document, Leshchenko indicated that this was not the only such incident and that there may be evidence of additional payments during the years of 2007-2009 before Yanukovych became President in spring 2010.²⁰⁵

Following Yanukovych's victory in the 2010 presidential elections, several commentators, including an editor of the left-wing Kyiv *Commons* magazine, already started to publicly accuse *Svoboda* and the Party of Regions of unofficial cooperation.²⁰⁶ That was because – perhaps, also on Manafort's recommendation – Yanukovych and his party not only supported, in secret, *Svoboda* with direct financial transfers. The Party of Regions and its affiliated oligarchs with their influential TV channels markedly increased the media presence of *Svoboda*.²⁰⁷ The purpose of promoting a marginal and, to many voters, yet unknown party was to shake up the entire political party spectrum of Ukraine and thereby complement Yanukovych's 2010 presidential election victory with a 2012 parliamentary election victory for his Party of Regions.

Apparently, there was a comprehensive plan by the Party of Regions' “political technologists” to strengthen *Svoboda* and thereby split the nationalist opposition into moderate and extremist camps. The rise of *Svoboda* was also supposed to create a scarecrow for the Party of Regions'

Mueller Report's Secret Memos,” *BuzzFeed.News*, 3 November 2019,

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jasonleopold/mueller-report-secret-memos-1>.

²⁰³ 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>.

²⁰⁴ “Khroniky ‘Svobody’,” *Chesno*, 1 Januray 2020, <https://www.chesno.org/post/3763/>.

²⁰⁵ “Leshchenko: U ‘chorniy bukhhalterii’ Partii rehioniv e platezhi dlia partii ‘Svoboda’,” *Hromadske.ua*, 19 August 2016, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/leshchenko-u-chornii-bukhhalterii-partii-rehioniv-ie-platezhi-dlia-partii-svoboda>.

²⁰⁶ Vitaliy Atanasov, “Osoblyvosti natsional-radykal'noi dzhynsy,” *Spil'ne*, 13 May 2011, <https://commons.com.ua/uk/osoblyvosti-natsional-radikalnoyi-dzh/>.

²⁰⁷ Serhei Shcherbina, “Politychni tok-shou: Iak vony tse robliat'?” *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 7 June 2011, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2011/06/7/6275793/>.

Russian-speaking core electorate and mobilize them to vote. Regarding Ukraine's relations to the West, *Svoboda's* ultra-nationalism would provide a convenient deflection from Yanukovych's own anti-Westernism and authoritarianism. There appears 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 in 2015. The calculation was that Yanukovych might not be able to win a second time against a *moderate* nationalist in the run-off, but he would be able to do so against a *radical* nationalist.

In 2010-2012, the most visible sign of this strategy was a rapid rise in the presence of the *Svoboda* party in Ukrainian mass media controlled by various oligarchs. This concerned, above all, the various popular political evening TV talk shows where representatives of the extra-parliamentary and largely Galicia-based *Svoboda* became regular guests. As Table 2 composed by Anton Shekhovtsov indicates: Once Yanukovych became president in spring 2010 and until November 2012, the number of appearances of *Svoboda* representatives on popular TV talk shows of the two channels under his most direct influence increased rapidly.

Table 2. Popular political talk-shows that prominently included at least one participant from the Svoboda party in 2005-2012²⁰⁸

<i>Period</i>	<i>"Svoboda Slova"</i> (<i>"Freedom of the Word,"</i> channel ICTV)	<i>"Velyka polityka z Evheniem Kysel'ovym"</i> (<i>"Big Politics with Yevgenii Kiselev,"</i> channel "Inter")	<i>"Shuster LIVE"</i> (channels "Ukraina"/First National)
2nd half of 2005	1	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2006	1	No shows	No shows
2nd half of 2006	0	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2007	0	No shows	No shows
2nd half of 2007	0	No shows	No shows
1st half of 2008	1	No shows	No shows
2nd half of 2008	0	No shows	0
1st half of 2009	0	No shows	2
2nd half of 2009	1	1	2
1st half of 2010	0	6	6
2nd half of 2010	3	10	7
1st half of 2011	3	11	10
2nd half of 2011	4	5	5
1st half of 2012	3	3	7
In sum	17	36	39

This growth in media attention came even though Tiahnybok had performed unimpressively in the 2010 presidential election; he received 1.43% of the vote. To be sure, his party had been more successful in some 2009-2010 regional and local elections than in previous national parliamentary elections (See Table 1). Yet, any notable gains in *Svoboda's* popularity, whether expressed in elections or measured in opinion polls, before the start of its national promotion by Yanukovych-influenced TV channels had been confined to the three Galician oblasts of Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivs'k, and L'viv with a combined population of approximately 5 million people. These early regional improvements in western Ukraine did not translate into wider Ukrainian support for the party's chairman in the 2010 presidential elections.

²⁰⁸ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Vseukrainskoe ob'edinenie 'Svoboda': Problema legitimnosti bor'by za vlast'," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 10:1 (2013): 22-63. Data collection ended on 5 May 2012.

Two years later, *Svoboda* was able to reap the gains from the manifest media support by TV channels connected to the new President Yanukovich, the party's secretly improved financial situation, and some other political circumstances favorable to it. *Svoboda* sharply increased its national share in the elections to the *Verkhovna Rada* of October 2012. While typically garnering less than 1% of electoral support in previous parliamentary polls, its vote share jumped to 10.44% in the proportional part of the 2012 Rada elections.²⁰⁹

Svoboda's support, however, halved twice in the following 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections. It first fell to 4.71% in the October 2014 *Verkhovna Rada* poll. And then, despite a unification of all major Ukrainian far right parties under the umbrella of *Svoboda* within a single list, its voter support further declined to 2.15% in the July 2019 snap parliamentary election. This embarrassing drop in numbers occurred despite new more favorable electoral demographic conditions. In 2014 and 2019, a large part of those Ukrainian citizens who would have overwhelmingly not voted for the Galicia-based *Svoboda* party were living in Crimea, the occupied territories of the Donbas, or Russia where they could not participate in the elections. Thus, the overall decline in popular support for Ukraine's largest ultra-nationalist party was even steeper than indicated by the percentages reported for the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections.

Since then, *Svoboda* has not quite fallen to the lows of its pre-2012 electoral performance in national elections. Yet, Ukraine's ultra-nationalists have returned to the fringes of Ukrainian politics.²¹⁰ Paradoxically, in the post-Soviet Ukrainian far right's history, it was only during the reign of Ukraine's most pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, that *Svoboda* received briefly support higher than the 5% entrance barrier for parliament. It was only during the presidency of a man who had the support of Vladimir Putin that Ukraine's far right was able to form its own faction in the *Verkhovna Rada*. During all other national elections, its support remained regional and scanty.

Svoboda and Ukraine's Moscow-connected Oligarchs

There were other dubious episodes in the history of Tiahnybok's party. For instance, about a year before Yanukovich fell, in early 2013, *Svoboda* had come publicly out against exploitation of shale gas reserves in Ukraine. This was a position that aligned closely with above-introduced Viktor Medvedchuk's concurrent defense of the Russian gas industry's interests in Ukraine.²¹¹ When the Western companies Shell and American ExxonMobil started exploring shale gas development, *Svoboda* organized protests "defending the ecosystem from Western exploitation."²¹² Some observers speculated that *Svoboda's* actions may have been designed to promote the interests of the notorious pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch, Dmytro Firtash. It was known that Firtash was a

²⁰⁹ Serhiy Vasylychenko, "'Svoboda' proty vsikh: korotkyy ohliad 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/>.

²¹⁰ Umland, "The Far Right in Pre- and Post-Euromaidan Ukraine."

²¹¹ Dmytro Shurkhalo, "Slantsevyi haz nepokoit' 'Svobodu' i... Medvedchuka," *Radio Svoboda*, 1 February 2013, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/24890573.html>.

²¹² "'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>.

business partner of one of the biggest donors of the *Svoboda* party and its 2012-2014 *Verkhovna Rada* deputy, Ihor Kryvets'kyy (b. 1972).²¹³

Certain forms of indirect collaboration between *Svoboda* and pro-Russian politicians as well as Moscow-connected businesspeople continued after the victory of the Euromaidan. In September 2015, Ukrainian journalist Oleksandr Paskhover published an investigation on the *Svoboda* party:

In May 2015, in connection with the opening of the [legal] case against Serhii Kliuev, Poroshenko Bloc People's Deputy Serhiy 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'kyy when he headed [Ukraine's] Prosecutor General's Office in the spring of 2014 [i.e. 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 *Svoboda's* Makhnits'kyy]. And here is 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 Ivaniushchenko and Eduard Stavyts'kyy). But such odious figures as former head of the presidential administration Serhiy L'ovoch'kin, the Kremlin's gas magnate and partner of RosUkrEnergo Dmytro Firtash, former deputy prime minister Yuriy Boyko, who had “distinguished himself” with a deal to acquire drilling rigs for oil production (the multimillion-dollar case of the so-called ‘Boyko rigs’), and Serhiy Kliuev were not included in the blacklist provided by Makhnits'kyy [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 Makhnits'kyy's list, in March 2014, blocked funds and assets of Yanukovych's comrades-in-arms – those who fell under the suspicion of ‘stealing state funds.’ But Firtash, L'ovoch'kin, Boyko and Kliuev remained – as if they were ‘Caesar's squads’ – beyond suspicion.”²¹⁴

To be sure, the protection of business interests by a country'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'kyy from *Svoboda*, was apparently shielding from sanctions certain oligarchs and politicians who had publicly pro-Russian profiles and known relations to Moscow.

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 existing international contacts, including those with partners in Russia, were aborted. Soon, however, new foreign relations started being established, mainly by the increasingly ambitious Azov movement. There are various reasons for

²¹³ Oleksandr Paskhover, “Shcho soboiu predstavliae VO Svoboda - doslidzhennia NV,” *Novoe vremia*, 7 September 2015, <https://nv.ua/ukr/publications/shcho-soboiu-predstavljaje-vo-svoboda-doslidzhennja-nv-67371.html>.

²¹⁴ Paskhover, “Shcho soboiu predstavliae VO Svoboda - doslidzhennia NV.”

this novel development and role of the Azov movement as the Ukrainian far right's prime international networker. It can be, among others, explained by the relative youthfulness of its leaders, non-conformity of its modern discourse, and separateness of the Azov movement's outlook from Ukraine's more traditionalist and introverted mainstream nationalist discourse.

Shariy and Azov

A curious facet of the Azov movement's behavior was, for a while, its surprisingly neutral treatment in the Russian-language videoblogs of the notorious anti-Maidan blogger Anatoliy Shariy. The popular commentator has his own party named after him in Ukraine. Yet he lives outside the country and is often accused of implementing a Kremlin-inspired political agenda via the internet.²¹⁵

In spite of Shariy's otherwise radically anti-nationalist and, some would say, anti-Ukrainian positions, his early comments on the Azov Regiment were, in stark contrast to the general ideology of his widely watched video shows, ambivalent, documental, and nonjudgmental. Shariy has also criticized the Azov movement's opponents and provided a platform for Azov representatives to respond to negative assessments of the movement's activities.²¹⁶ In early 2018, Shariy's program conducted an interview with Eduard Yurchenko, one of the Azov movement's main ideologists.²¹⁷ Yurchenko heads the conservative wing of the movement, *Orden* (Order), which also has connections with the *Svoboda* party and the Tradition and Order (TiP) group.

In 2017, Shariy released two videoblogs that may be seen as partial apologies for the Azov movement's unarmed extra-governmental vigilante group, the National Squads. One of his videos included a brief interview with Russian political émigré Aleksei Levkin, a member of the Russian Center and a self-titled ideologist of the National Squads (see above). Before moving to Ukraine, Levkin had been a member of the party *Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo*. The RNE was founded in the 1990s and was Russia's most well-known openly neo-Nazi political organization which used a red swastika as its main symbol.²¹⁸

Numerous Russian paramilitary volunteers from RNE have actively taken part in the Donbas war.²¹⁹ One of the earliest Ukrainian leaders of the eastern Ukrainian separatist movement in spring 2014 and first so-called "people's governor" of Donetsk was Pavlo Hubarev (Russian: Pavel Gubarev). While born in Ukraine and a Ukrainian citizen, Hubarev is a Russian ultra-nationalist. He was previously a member of the Russian 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.²²⁰

²¹⁵ "Feiki Shariia. Kak Sharii pokryvaet ubiits ukrainitsev. Chast' 1," *Mil.in.ua*, 18 July 2019, <https://mil.in.ua/uk/blogs/fejky-sharyya-kak-sharyj-pokr-d1-8bvaet-ubyjcz-ukraynczev-chast-1/>; "Feyki Shariia. Kak Sharii pokryvaet ubiits ukrainitsev. Chast' 2," *Mil.in.ua*, 18 July 2019, <https://mil.in.ua/uk/blogs/fejky-sharyya-razoblachenye-propagandysta-chast-2/>.

²¹⁶ "Azov' otvechaet Sergeiu," *Anatoliy Shariy*, 5 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qp5ybzq5rg.

²¹⁷ "Natskorpuz iznutri Ch1," *Anatoliy Shariy*, 24 February 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY5u4duvMDI>.

²¹⁸ "Natsional'nye druzhiny'. To, chego vam ne pokazali," *Anatoliy Shariy*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ36dxjY4cg&t=112s>.

²¹⁹ Vyacheslav Likhachev, "The Far Right in the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine," *Notes del l'Ifri: Russie.Nei.Visons* 95 (2016), <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russieneivisions/far-right-conflict-between-russia-and-ukraine>.

²²⁰ Mitrokhin, "Im Namen des Staates: Russische Nationalisten im Ukraine-Einsatz."

Since arriving in Ukraine, the former RNE members and current Azov movement activists, Levkin and Korotkikh, have apparently left behind the anti-Ukrainian aspects of the RNE ideology. During the phase of his high interest for Bilets'kyi's movement, Shariy mostly interviewed Azov affiliates less prominent than Levkin or Yurchenko. He spoke to low-ranking Azov members who may have talked to him with or without approval from the movement's leadership.²²¹ Since 2018, however, Shariy has switched to actively criticizing the Azov movement. Since 2020, after the formation and activation of the Shariy Party, a whole number of conflicts and skirmishes have, moreover, taken place between Azov and Shariy supporters in various parts of Ukraine. These confrontations were more in line with Azov's and Shariy's official ideologies and did not represent paradoxical phenomena anymore.

Another peculiarity has been the relatively low degree of the Azov movement's public activism countering communist and pro-Russian demonstrations in Ukraine. For example, from May 2015 to October 2018 there were 1,535 public actions of the Azov movement, as recorded in a research project by an author of this study. Yet only 51 were directed against communist and pro-Russian forces or values in Ukraine. This is, in relative terms, a surprisingly small number of such actions for an ultra-nationalist Ukrainian movement.²²²

It is further worth noting that the Azov movement has received attention and publicity from Dmytro Hordon (Russian: Dmitrii Gordon), a famous Ukrainian journalist in the post-Soviet media space. In an episode of his program, "Evening with Dmitrii Gordon," the journalist extensively interviewed Andriy Bilets'kyi,²²³ the leader of the Azov movement, whom Hordon described "as a clever and wise man." Hordon conducts his interviews in Russian, and was an active commentator for the previously mentioned Russian-leaning TV channels, *NewsOne* and *112.ua*.²²⁴ These now shut down media outlets were under direct or indirect control of pro-Russian oligarchs. In his assessments concerning Ukrainian right-wing radicalism, Hordon has criticized the *Svoboda* party and Right Sector. In contrast, Bilets'kyi has been characterized by Hordon 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 Bilets'kyi, for example."²²⁵

Illia Kyva, the OPZZh, and Ukraine's Far Right

Another case of paradoxical cooperation between Ukrainian right-wing radicals and pro-Russian actors in Ukraine concerns Illia Kyva, a *Verkhovna Rada* deputy since 2019 from the party *Opozytsiyna platforma - Za zhyttia* (Opposition Platform - For Life, *OPZZh*). Since 2019, Kyva has become widely known in Ukraine in connection with numerous scandals (one of them a video tape showing Kyva masturbating in parliament). In 2014, Kyva received the rank of police major and was appointed commander of the Special Patrol Police Service Battalion "Poltava" later renamed

²²¹ "Natsional'nye druzhiny'."

²²² Unpublished data collected by Taras Tarasiuk and colleagues. The issue problematized here has been discussed in such outlets as *Ukrains'ka Pravda* or *Obozrevatel'*, as well as on the sites of the Azov movement's social networks with Facebook and Telegram. Note that there are no data on the dynamics for the period from January to September of 2015 and from January to May of 2018.

²²³ "Andrei Biletskii. 'V gostiakh u Dmitriia Gordona' (2019)," *V gostiakh u Gordona*, n. d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paQBJdAmbY>.

²²⁴ "Gordon: Nas mogu zhdat' bol'shie potriaseniia – Ukraina mozh et raspast'sia," *Nash*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w4n6magrqU>.

²²⁵ "Gordon: Bol'shinstvo natsionalistov normal'nye liudi," *112.UA*, 17 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LlGgflS8e8>.

into “Poltavshchyna.”²²⁶ On December 10, 2014, by order of the Interior Minister Arsen Avakov (in office 2014-2021), Kyva was appointed deputy chief of the Regional Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in the Donetsk region.²²⁷ In this position, he was one of the first among the management of the territorial departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who actively used the operational database of the notorious project “*Myrotvorets*” (Peacemaker) which lists persons regarded as enemies of Ukraine.²²⁸

In the following years, Kyva publicly boasted about his friendship with *Bratstvo’s* Dmytro Korchyns’kyy, with whom he had become acquainted in 2014.²²⁹ For instance, Kyva traveled with Korchyns’kyy to Florence, calling him his “friend.”²³⁰ In 2017, Kyva stated in an interview with Oleksandr Lirchuk that he is “ready to resort to violence under [Minister of Interior Arsen] Avakov and [Dmytro] Korchyns’kyy.”²³¹ In a TV interview with Nataliia Vlashchenko aired on April 1, 2017, Kyva revealed, “Generally I like to talk to Korchyns’kyy [...]. If I have free time, I try to spend my time with him [...]. He is not only a friend for me, he is a teacher for me also to some extent.”²³²

In March 2014, Kyva started to head the Poltava branch of the Right Sector and also became a regional leader of the Right Sector for eastern Ukraine, encompassing the Poltava, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhans’k Oblasts.²³³ At the same time, he also functioned as a representative of presidential candidate Dmytro Yarosh to public authorities, local governments, and other legal entities in Ukraine during the election campaign.²³⁴ Then from October 2016 to June 2017, Kyva was an advisor to the hawkish Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov.²³⁵

Later, Kyva’s political career took a U-turn, however. In the parliamentary elections of July 21, 2019, he was listed under the most important pro-Russian party: the “Opposition Platform - For

²²⁶ Nadiia Kucher, “Korsun porivniav novostvorenny batal’ion ‘Poltavshchyna’ iz shtrafbatom,” *Kolo.Poltava*, 8 September 2014, <http://kolo.poltava.ua/novini-poltava/kiva-22726.html>.

²²⁷ “Ministr pryznachyv poltavtsia Illiu Kyvu Zastupnykom holovnoho militsionera Donechchyny,” *Poltava.to*, 10 December 2014, <https://poltava.to/news/31462/>.

²²⁸ “Roman Zaytsev: ‘Dlia Kremliia my kost’ v gorle. Oghromnye sily i resursy brosheny na nashe unichtozhenie’,” *Fakty*, 4 November 2015, <https://ukrainenews.fakty.ua/208139-roman-zajcev-dlya-kremliya-my-kost-v-gorle-oghromnye-sily-i-resursy-brosheny-na-nashe-unichtozhenie>.

²²⁹ “Illia Kyva rozpoviv pro stosunky z Korchyns’kym,” *Telekanal ZIK*, 1 September 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwbqMRfKR3w&ab_channel=%D0%A2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BBZIK.

²³⁰ “Illia Kyva rozpoviv, khoto dlia n’oho Korchyns’kyy i kudy vin z nym podorozhuie,” *Telekanal ZIK*, 1 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kjzva8kw1no&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=%D0%A2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BBZIK.

²³¹ “Illia Kyva: Za Korchyns’koho ta Avakova ia perehryzu horlo,” *Online.UA*, 24 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLAvY3K6b9k&ab_channel=ONLINE.UA.

²³² “Illia Kyva rozpoviv, khoto dlia n’oho Korchyns’kyy i kudy vin z nym podorozhuie.”

²³³ “Iarosh formue novyi pidrozdil ‘Pravoho sektoru’ na skhodi Ukrainy,” *UNIAN*, 12 March 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/895587-yarosh-formue-noviy-pidrozdil-pravogo-sektoru-na-shodi-ukrajini.html>.

²³⁴ “Kyva soldatom nikoly ne buv’: holova ‘NatsKorpusu’ rozpoviv, khoto z politykiv zaymavsia ‘viis’kovym turyzmmom’,” *5.ua*, 4 June 2020, <https://www.5.ua/suspilstvo/kyva-soldatom-nikoly-ne-buv-holova-natskorpusu-rozpoviv-khoto-z-politykiv-zaimavsia-viiskovym-turyzmmom-216584.html>.

²³⁵ “Avakov, Kyva i pryvatnyy zahin pid krylom MVS (‘SKHEMY’ | VYPUSK № 186),” *Radio Svoboda*, 25 September 2018, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/schemes/29509362.html>.

Life" (*OPZZh*).²³⁶ This was, in view of Kyva's earlier political career, a peculiar move since the *OPZZh*'s internal "Political Council" and "Strategic Council" are headed by Viktor Medvedchuk (for more on him, see above). From July 24 to August 2019, Kyva hosted the show, "Ask Kyva," on the TV channel *ZIK*—a station that was said to be controlled by Medvedchuk.²³⁷ On January 21, 2020 during a conference in Poltava attended by the Opposition Platform's leaders Medvedchuk and Vadym Rabinovych, Kyva was elected head of the *OPZZh*'s Poltava branch.²³⁸

On June 15, 2020 in Kyiv, Kyva presented his new social movement, "Patriots – For Life," a paramilitary youth wing of the *OPZZh*.²³⁹ Since its foundation in June 2020, the "Patriots – For Life" have been involved in several clashes with members of the Azov movement.²⁴⁰ As mentioned above, on February 3, 2021, the National Corps attacked a bus with "Patriots – For Life" activists near Kharkiv.²⁴¹ In summer 2021, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) launched an investigation into Kyva's organization.²⁴²

²³⁶ "Kyva Illia Volodymyrovych", *CVK.gov.ua*,

<https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp407pt001f01=919pf7201=16838.html>.

²³⁷ "Prem'era: Zapytay Kyvu", *Telekanal ZIK*, 24 September 2019,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehHn5VOvCI0>.

²³⁸ "Il'ia Kiva izbran glavoi partiinoi organizatsii g. Poltava," *Zagittya.com.ua*, 21 January 2020,

https://zagittya.com.ua/news/novosti/ilja_kiva_izbran_glavoj_partijnoj_organizacii_glpoltava.html.

²³⁹ "Odioznyi Kiva khochet sozdat' dvizhenie 'Patrioty — Za zhizn': podrobnosti i video," *Dsnews.ua*, 15 June 2020, <https://www.dsnews.ua/politics/odioznyy-kiva-hochet-sozdat-dvizhenie-patrioty-za-zhizn--15062020192100>.

²⁴⁰ Evhen Solonyna, "'Bytva 'patriotiv': shcho oznachaiut' sutycky mizh orhanizatsiiamy Bilets'koho ta Kyvy,'" *Radio Svoboda*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30818339.html>.

²⁴¹ "Pid Kharkovom aktyvisty Natskorpusu zablokuvaly avtobus z 'titushkamy Kyvy', iaki ikhaly na protesty na pidtrymku 112 Ukraina, NewsOne ta ZIK," *NV.ua*, 3 Februray 2020, <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/nackorpus-ne-vipustiv-z-harkova-avtobus-z-titushkami-opzzh-foto-video-novini-ukrajini-50139445.html>.

²⁴² Liza Semko, "SBU exposes pro-Kremlin organization allegedly connected to Ukrainian MP," *Kyiv Post*, 3 August 2021, www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/sbu-exposes-pro-kremlin-organization-allegedly-connected-to-ukrainian-mp.html.

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

Direct contacts of Ukraine's far right with the Kremlin are, for obvious reasons, rare. Any contacts would, if for some reason desired, be risky for the far right and, if conducted, be hidden as much as possible. Post-2014 Ukrainian mainstream politics does not tolerate any collaboration with pro-Moscow forces, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The above listed cases remained situational alliances that do not by themselves suggest stable contacts between pro-Russian forces in Ukraine and Ukrainian right-wing radical movements. However, the situation with the Ukrainian far right's partners in the European Union and North America is less clear, in that regard.

Most lines of communication between the Ukrainian far right and pro-Kremlin actors abroad were cut after the Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea, and beginning of the conflict in the Donbas. Some groups have, nevertheless, since managed to build new or deepen older connections with non-Russian European far-right groups. However, for Ukraine's radical nationalists the problem with these old and new connections is that many, if not the majority, of Europe's right-wing radical formations have sympathies for, or even contacts with, Putin's Russia.²⁴³ Many Western European radical nationalist groups espouse openly pro-Kremlin views and some even have a special allegiance to Vladimir Putin. 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 expanded its contacts to groups in East-Central Europe (Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary), Western Europe (France, Germany, Sweden and Italy), and in the United States.

Ukraine's Far Right and Anti-Western Groups in Eastern Europe

The Azov Movement and Its Intermarium Support Group

After *Svoboda* severed most of its foreign ties in 2014, the Azov movement has become the Ukrainian far right's leader in terms of international cooperation. It has mostly obtained new partners abroad rather than continuing older foreign links. The main branch of Azov conducting its international affairs is a semi-intellectual off-shot of the movement called the Intermarium Support Group.²⁴⁴ The word *Intermarium* is the Latin variant of the Polish *Międzymorze* (Between the Seas). A geopolitical scheme of this name was promoted after World War I by 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.²⁴⁵

Azov's Intermarium Support Group has become a medium for Ukrainian right-wing communication with Croatian, Belarusian, Polish, Hungarian, and Baltic radical nationalists.²⁴⁶ The groups meet through conferences about the future of the *Trymor'ia* (Three Seas) or *Mizhmor'ia* (Between the

²⁴³ Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

²⁴⁴ "Intermarium Support Group," *FOIA Research*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/intermarium-support-group>.

²⁴⁵ Marlène Laruelle and Ellen Rivera, "Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium," *IERES Occasional Papers*, March 2019. www.ifri.org/en/publications/publications-ifri/articles-ifri/imagined-geographies-central-and-eastern-europe-concept.

²⁴⁶ "'Intermarium' krokue Evropoiu," *Natsional'nyi korpus*, 8 February 2019, nationalcorps.org/intermarium-kroku-evropoju/.

Seas) projects.²⁴⁷ Today's Eastern European far-right discourses go beyond the original Intermarium plans and seeks to establish a separate civilizational realm in East-Central Europe that would be distinct from both the liberal EU and authoritarian Russia. Croatian, Polish, and Ukrainian nationalists are also re-envisioning the old Intermarium framework into a novel concept of a multi-national defense and economic bloc between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas that would be oppose both the pluralist West and imperial Eurasia.²⁴⁸

Based on such visions, the Intermarium Support Group has been engaged in a variety of activities including discussions and commemorative events. One of the largest events is the annual Intermarium conference in Kyiv.²⁴⁹ Through these and similar initiatives, the international department of the Azov movement has become a notable actor in the Eastern European far-right intellectual discourse. Over the last years, the Intermarium conferences have brought together representatives and participants from 13 Central and Eastern European countries.²⁵⁰

This activity is by itself unremarkable in the context of the present study and does not fall outside the framework of predictable Ukrainian nationalist ideology and behavior. However, within this international network, Ukraine's far right sometimes works with certain non-Ukrainian, right-radical organizations with possible ties to the Kremlin. Since 2014, most international contacts of Ukraine's far right have become risky enterprises in view of widespread sympathies for Putin's Russia in Western and non-Western anti-democratic groups across the globe. The official position of Ukraine's nationalists is, to be sure, that they do not cooperate with foreign partners who support Moscow. Yet, this is not what is always happening in practice, even after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014.

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.²⁵¹ According to the archive "Dark Side of the Kremlin," the Belarus-born political entrepreneur Aleksandr Usovskii proposed to well-known State Duma deputy and head of the CIS Institute, Konstantin Zatulin, a project for creating a network of anti-Ukrainian forces in Eastern Europe.²⁵² Usovskii offered to hold rallies in the Visegrád Four's capital cities during Eastern Partnership Summits. In Poland the project was approved, so that Usovskii requested funding.²⁵³

According to the project's plan, Usovskii wanted to utilize and raise public "condemnation of Bandera" by Polish political movements. This included explicitly pro-Russian organizations as well as far-right groups including *Szturm* and *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* (ONR), the latter one of the

²⁴⁷ "Natskorpus vidvidav Khorvatiuu: rozbudova Intermariumu nabyrae obertiv," *Natsional'nyi korpus* 12 July 2019, <https://nationalcorps.org/nackorpus-vdvdav-horvatju-rozbudova-intermarumu-nabira-obertv/>.

²⁴⁸ Nonjon, "Olena Semenyaka."

²⁴⁹ "Intermarium Support Group."

²⁵⁰ "Intermarium Support Group."

²⁵¹ "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>.

²⁵² Paweł Reszk and Pavla Holcova, "The Man who Wanted more October," *StopFake*, 18 October 2017, www.stopfake.org/en/the-man-who-wanted-more/.

²⁵³ Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš, *Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin's Russia: Legacies, Forms and Threats* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019): 214.

largest right-wing radical organizations in Poland.²⁵⁴ These groups agreed to sign a joint declaration condemning Ukraine's European integration because of widespread support for the "ideology of Banderism" in the country.

This was by itself an unsurprising episode and fits in with the scheme of similar Russian operations with other foreign actors. One such operation involved the late Manuel Ochsенreiter (1976-2021), a prolific German affiliate of Aleksandr Dugin's International Eurasianist Movement and former employee of the German Bundestag. In 2018, Ochsенreiter employed two Polish far-right activists to stage a provocation against Ukraine. In the West Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod, Ochsенreiter's agents conducted an arson attack on a Hungarian cultural center with the aim to raise tensions between the local ethnic Hungarian and Ukrainian population.²⁵⁵ Usovskii's project thereby continued a Soviet-era tradition of clandestine operations by Moscow in the West with the help of foreign radical nationalists.²⁵⁶

Noteworthy in the Usovskii case was that while the ONR was working to prevent Ukraine's entry into the EU, some of its members were in contact with and participated in actions of the Azov movement.²⁵⁷ Similarly, *Szturm* had been relatively pro-Ukrainian in comparison to other nationalist movements in the Polish far right. It had well-established contacts with the Azov movement in the framework of projects with the Intermarium Support Group.²⁵⁸ At the same time, both Polish ultra-nationalist groups became unwitting targets of a Russian secret operation conducted by Usovskii who, moreover, was also in contact the National Corps's functionary Korotkikh.

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

Azov and CasaPound

One of the new foreign contacts of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists has been the Italian extra-parliamentary fascist group *CasaPound*, which espouses an ambivalent position on the Russian-Ukrainian war. This movement, largely unknown outside of Italy, started as a commune in Rome for "true Italians," welcoming the families of their ideological supporters. Over time, this practice spread throughout Italy, and the group became a notable neo-fascist actor in Western Europe.²⁵⁹ Some members of *CasaPound* have voiced their support for Ukraine in its war against Russia, while

²⁵⁴ Ryszard Machnikowski and Arkadiusz Legieć, "The Favored Conflicts of Foreign Fighters From Central Europe," *Terrorism Monitor* 15:19 (2017). jamestown.org/program/favored-conflicts-foreign-fighters-central-europe/.

²⁵⁵ Sabine am Orde, "Brandanschlag in der Ukraine: Spur nach Deutschland," *Taz.de*, 24 March 2020, taz.de/Brandanschlag-in-der-Ukraine/!5673875/.

²⁵⁶ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*.

²⁵⁷ 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.

²⁵⁸ 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>.

²⁵⁹ Caterina Froio, Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Giorgia Bulli, Matteo Albanese, *CasaPound Italia: Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics* (London: Routledge 2020).

others support the Kremlin and have even fought on the side of pro-Russian militants in Eastern Ukraine.²⁶⁰

Since 2014, the Carpathian Sich together with the international department of the Azov movement have conducted joint conferences in Uzhgorod and L'viv with *CasaPound*. According to *FOIA Research*, representatives of the Intermarium Support Group and *CasaPound* participated in an Acca Larentia commemoration in 2019.²⁶¹ The multi-national meeting of the European far-right representatives, including representatives of the Azov movement, was part of a series of yearly events held in Rome commemorating the death of three young neo-fascist activists in 1978 in violent clashes on the street Acca Larentia.²⁶²

As in other such cases, the close cooperation of the Ukrainian far right with *CasaPound* was paradoxical in view the organization's ambivalent stance towards Russia and Ukraine. On the one hand, the leadership of *CasaPound* had supported the Right Sector during the Maidan revolution.²⁶³ But it had also manifested sympathies for Putin's Russia before and after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war.²⁶⁴ Anton Shekhovtsov recounted 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."²⁶⁵ In 2018, *CasaPound* organized a public discussion in Rome with Aleksandr Dugin. At the occasion, a *CasaPound* representative spoke to the audience, and the Italian far right website *The Primacy of the National* reported,

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."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ "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>.

²⁶¹ "Karpats'ka Sich," *FOIA Research*, 14 January 2019. www.foiaresearch.net/organization/karpatska-sich.

²⁶² "'Presente!' Nationalrevolutionäre Aktivisten beim 'Acca Larentia' Gedenken in Rom," *Der Dritte Weg*, 12 January 2019, <https://der-dritte-weg.info/2019/01/presente-nationalrevolutionaere-aktivisten-beim-accalarentia-gedenken/>.

²⁶³ 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): 97-124, here p. 114.

²⁶⁴ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 184.

²⁶⁵ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 186.

²⁶⁶ La Redazione, "Dugin a CasaPound: 'Il populismo è la sfida al pensiero unico'," *Il Primato Nazionale*, 23 June 2018, www.ilprimatonazionale.it/primo-piano/dugin-a-casapound-il-populismo-e-la-sfida-al-pensiero-unico-88026/

Svoboda and West European Rightists

As the oldest relevant Ukrainian far right party, *Svoboda's* relations with other European far-right groups go back to the 1990s when it still operated under its original name, the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). Early on, the SNPU became affiliated with EuroNat—a semi-formal association of European far-right parties founded by the French National Front in 1997 and today defunct.²⁶⁷ It was then that the SNPU established contact with Jean-Marie Le Pen and the French National Front. Meanwhile, the French National Front was also developing relations with the imperialist Russian Liberal-Democratic Party led by Vladimir Zhirinovskii.²⁶⁸ For instance, in 2000, at the invitation of the SNPU, Le Pen—then still chairman of the *Front National*—visited Ukraine.²⁶⁹ Artem Yovenko has detailed:

The cooperation [between the two parties] has also evolved on the level of youth organizations. A French training camp [...], in addition to the French and Ukrainian parties' youth organization representatives, included 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 included parties, music, sport and French boxing.²⁷⁰

The French far-right activists may have also helped *Svoboda*—as a party from a non-EU country—gain observer status in the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), founded in 2009.²⁷¹ The AENM was, for a while, an official roof organization of some of the EU's major radical right-wing, populist parties. Its creation was initiated by the Hungarian *Jobbik* Party (when it was still ultra-nationalist) which assembled like-minded EU parties at its 2009 sixth congress in Budapest.²⁷² After entering parliament in 2012 and before the start of the Euromaidan in late 2013, *Svoboda*, however, had already been expelled from the AENM.²⁷³ The expulsion was apparently inspired by complaints from *Jobbik* about *Svoboda's* “anti-Hungarian statements.”²⁷⁴ This early expulsion was, perhaps, a fortunate development for *Svoboda*. In 2014, the AENM declared that the new Kyiv

²⁶⁷ 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>

²⁶⁸ Shekhovtsov, “The old and new European friends of Ukraine’s far-right Svoboda party.”

²⁶⁹ “Molodizhnyy Natsionalistychnyy Front Frantsii v hostiakh u ukrains'kykh patriotiv,” *Narodnyy Ohliadach* 22 August 2003, <https://www.ar25.org/article/molodizhnyi-nacionalistychnyi-front-franciyi-v-gostyah-u-ukrayinskyh-patriotiv.html>; R. Zelyk, “Istoriia SNPU – VO ‘Svoboda’,” in: *Kurs I. Osnovy natsionalizmu* (Ivano-Frankivs’k: Instytut politychnoi osvity VO “Svoboda,” 2008): 56-71; Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Ukrainian far-right Natsional’nyi Korpus 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/.

²⁷⁰ 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* 48:2-3 (2015): 229–237, here p. 233.

²⁷¹ Vitaliy Chervonenko, “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.

²⁷² Shekhovtsov, “The old and new European friends of Ukraine’s far-right Svoboda party.”

²⁷³ 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>.

²⁷⁴ Shekhovtsov, “The old and new European friends of Ukraine’s far-right Svoboda party.”

government, which included *Svoboda*'s members, has no legitimacy and that the AENM supports Russia's annexation of Crimea.²⁷⁵

Svoboda had also various bilateral contacts with Western European far right parties, including Italian neo-fascists. In April 2013, two *Svoboda* leaders, Andriy Il'enko and Taras Osaulenko, visited Italy at the official invitation of the Italian right-wing extremist party *Forza Nuova* (New Force) to discuss possible cooperation between the two parties. A month earlier, in March 2013, Taras Osaulenko, who was responsible for *Svoboda*'s international relations, had taken part in the conference "Vision Europa" in Stockholm, organized by the Party of the Swedes—a neo-Nazi group.²⁷⁶ Roberto Fiore, leader of the *Forza Nuova*, was among the speakers at this conference.²⁷⁷

The first informal contacts between *Svoboda* and Fiore had already begun in 2009. That year Tiahnybok encountered Fiore in Strasbourg while meeting with far-right members of the European Parliament. In 2013, Fiore invited Osaulenko and Il'enko to Rome to discuss cooperation between *Svoboda* and *Forza Nuova*.²⁷⁸ *Svoboda*'s delegation also visited a *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."²⁷⁹ 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."²⁸⁰

And yet since 2014 some of *Svoboda*'s erstwhile closest partners—Hungary's *Jobbik*, France's *Front National*, and Italy's *Forza Nuova*—have come out as some of the most vocal Western supporters of Putin's policies vis-à-vis Ukraine.²⁸¹ In December 2014, Fiore participated in the conference, "Ukraine. *Novorossia* [New Russia]. Russia," in Russian-occupied Yalta. There he expressed support for Russia's interests in Ukraine.²⁸² Reportedly, *Forza Nuova* has even sent volunteers to the Donbas to fight with pro-Russian separatists against Ukrainian governmental forces.²⁸³ Today, *Svoboda* claims to have no links with pro-Putin European parties anymore. One can only suspect that *Svoboda*'s leaders must be embarrassed by their earlier contacts with various European far-right parties in Italy, France, Hungary, Britain (British National Party), and Germany (National-Democratic Party). Most of them have publicly and repeatedly voiced their sympathy or even strong support of Putin's Russia since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014.

²⁷⁵ Chervonenko, "Le Pen i Tiahnybok: chomu druzi staly vorohamy?"

²⁷⁶ Jens Rydgren "Radical Right-wing Populism in Denmark and Sweden: Explaining Party System Change and Stability," *SAIS Review* 30:1 (2010): 57-71.

²⁷⁷ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party."

²⁷⁸ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party."

²⁷⁹ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party."

²⁸⁰ Shekhovtsov, "The old and new European friends of Ukraine's far-right Svoboda party."

²⁸¹ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, p. 184.

²⁸² "Politicheskaia partiya 'Novaia sila.' ('Forza Nuova')," *CACDS.Posipaka*, 25 July 2017, <https://www.posipaka.org/uk/baza-posipak/organizatsii/politicheskaya-partiya-novaya-sila-forza-nuova/>.

²⁸³ 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/.

Vagaries of Racist Internationalism: Asgardei and Plomin'

Since 2014 the National Corps has, after *Svoboda* severed most of its older relations to the West, taken a leading role in the Ukrainian far right's foreign contacts.²⁸⁴ As most of Western Europe's larger ultra-nationalist parties hold pro-Russian positions, much of this international cooperation has moved from the political to the subcultural far-right realm. However, this has proven to be almost as risky a minefield for Ukrainian ultra-nationalists as the party sphere. Much of the Western racist underground is also enchanted by Putin and supports Russian foreign policies as well as the Kremlin's right-wing domestic rhetoric and measures.

A prime example of the new format for foreign cooperation is "Asgardei," a yearly hard rock festival of far-right metal music in Kyiv organized by the Azov movement since 2015. In 2019, American white supremacist Greg Johnson and German neo-Nazi Hendrik Möbus visited the concert.²⁸⁵ The festival also includes political discussions; Möbus gave a lecture in 2018.²⁸⁶ The bands performing at the festival include the Italian band Bronson, affiliated with *CasaPound*;²⁸⁷ the German neo-Nazi band *Path of Resistance*; anti-Semitic Slovak band *Krátky Proces*; and Aleksei Levkin's M8L8TH, a Russian neo-Nazi hardcore group.²⁸⁸ These and similar groups have not become publicly known for making 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 reputational risks that engagement with Western European fascist subcultures poses for the Ukrainian far right in a post-EuroMaidan world.²⁸⁹ In December 2019, the Ukrainian far-right literary club *Plomin'* (Flame), which also functions as a cultural-intellectual branch of the Azov movement, organized a public presentation on Franco Freda (b. 1941), an Italian neo-Fascist and white supremacist. Freda's book, *The Disintegration of the System*, had been translated into Ukrainian and was being sold by *Plomin'*.²⁹⁰

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 within the international far-right subcultural scene. Kyiv's young far right activists were thus eager to bring a translation of his major book to the attention of a wider audience in Ukraine. However, as Michael Colborne noted, Freda's vision of an ideal state is 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

²⁸⁴ Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Ukrainian Far-right National'nyi Korpus 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/>.

²⁸⁵ "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/>.

²⁸⁶ "Asgardsrei festival," *FOIA Research* (2019). <https://www.foiaresearch.net/event/asgardsrei-festival>.

²⁸⁷ "Dispatches from Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival."

²⁸⁸ "Dispatches from Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival."

²⁸⁹ 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/.

²⁹⁰ Franko Dzh. Freda [Franco J. Freda], *Dezintehratiia systemy* (Kyiv: Nuovi Arditi, 2019).

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.²⁹¹

Worse, Freda’s decades of advocacy for the disintegration of the Western system led him to approve of Vladimir Putin and Moscow’s various anti-Western efforts. 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 2014.²⁹²

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 his work translated by activists of Ukraine’s far right. Furthermore, the translated book was presented at the renowned Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, a university highly regarded by moderate and radical Ukrainian nationalists alike. The university’s administration had tried to prevent the presentation, but the activists went on with their plans. They occupied a lecture room in the Academy’s museum where they assembled some 40 people and presented the book, creating a scandal within and outside the university.

²⁹¹ Colborne, “Ukraine’s Far Right Is Boosting a Pro-Putin Fascist.”

²⁹² 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-alla-razza/; “Intervista a Franco G. Freda a cura di Karel Veliky, 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.

Conclusions: Contradictions and Risks of International Cooperation among Far-Right Groupings

Our outline does not cover all lines of direct and indirect connection between Ukraine's post-Soviet radical nationalism and Russia. In particular, the Ukrainian far right's links to non-Russian Russophile right-wing groups were only scantily presented here and need further research. However, our study illustrates diverging backgrounds and modes of paradoxical cooperation between Ukrainian radical nationalists and Russian or Russia-related actors.

Our sketch points to the changing contexts of the Ukrainian far-right's cooperation with Russian nationals, with Moscow, or with pro-Kremlin actors in the different historical phases of (a) the transitional 1990s, (b) the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko in 2005-2010, (c) the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich 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 relations between the newly independent Ukrainian and Russian states were not yet determined. This fluid situation allowed for the UNA-UNSO's almost simultaneous paramilitary 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 since 2000, the stakes of the Ukrainian far right's engagement with Russian actors have risen. When the pro-Western politician Viktor Yushchenko became Ukrainian President on January 23, 2005, both Russia's state bureaucracy and the country's extra-governmental nationalists began to see Ukraine even more critically than before. Even before Yushchenko's electoral victory in late 2004, pro-Kremlin forces had launched a major "active measure" operation, which included the Kovalenko affair, 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'kyi's engagement with Dugin and with the Kremlin during Yushchenko's presidency illustrated that, for some Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, Ukraine's radical turn to the West was difficult to stomach. It was, from certain neo-fascist points of view, such a negative development that it drove Korchyns'kyi's group into an alliance with Dugin's anti-Ukrainian neo-Eurasianists.

At about the same time, some pro-Russian forces within Ukraine saw the *Svoboda* party as an opportunity to influence Ukrainian politics. They began what seemed like a counterintuitive promotion in the Ukrainian media of the radically anti-Russian party in order to bolster their cause in Ukraine's domestic affairs. *Svoboda* had the potential to play many positive roles for Ukrainian pro-Moscow forces, including (a) a subversive actor splitting Ukraine's nationalist political camp, (b) an ultra-nationalist scarecrow for the West, and (c) a convenient sparring partner in various political competitions, especially during a presidential election. Possibly at the advice of Paul Manafort, Yanukovich's Party of Regions and various oligarchs loyal to Yanukovich used their media empires to promote the rise of *Svoboda*.

After Yanukovich's victory in the 2010 presidential elections, *Svoboda* started to benefit both directly and indirectly from the manipulations by the new president, his government, and the Party of Regions' scheming "political technologists." Eventually, the various factors and secret schemes

that had been helping *Svoboda* since approximately 2009 led to its most successful electoral performance to date in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

Svoboda's contradictory associations—as Ukraine's most loudly anti-Russian party—go beyond the direct and indirect support it received until 2013 from the pro-Russian Party of Regions. It also built a multitude of foreign relations with once latently and later manifestly Russophile 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 came to an abrupt halt. *Svoboda*'s secret former supporter, the Party of Regions, disappeared, and most of *Svoboda*'s foreign partners became, in view of their demonstrative pro-Putinist coming-outs since 2014, sources of embarrassment for Ukraine's nationalists.

The Euromaidan's victory and Russian-Ukrainian war opened in 2014 a new chapter of history leading to a realignment within the Russian far right that split along the lines of supporters and enemies of Ukrainian territorial integrity and national independence. As a result, a number of pro-Ukrainian Russian ultra-nationalists moved to Ukraine. In certain cases, they turned into armed fighters, joining the fight for Ukrainian sovereignty in the Donbas. Some also managed to integrate into the newly emerging Azov movement.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has also meant that open contacts between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian actors—like those resembling Korchyns'kyi and Dugin's relationship in 2005-2007—have become impossible. Nevertheless, the Azov movement has come to occupy a new niche in absorbing many Russian émigré ultra-nationalists into its various armed and unarmed wings as well as its front organization, the Russian Center. The Azov movement also had or still has a peculiar relationship with politically ambivalent journalists, including Anatolii Shariy and Dmytro Hordon, as well as with TV channels under the control of pro-Moscow oligarchs like Viktor Medvedchuk. The benevolent treatment of the Azov movement by these media actors was and still is in stark contrast to these outlet's adversarial stance towards *Svoboda*, the Right Sector, and other Ukrainian ultra-nationalist groups.

Whether the Azov movement's absorption of Russian immigrants and its peculiar presence in Ukraine's media sphere indicates a "political-technological" pattern remains, so far, an open question. There could be a coordinated scheme behind the disproportionate public presence of the marginal Azov group, which garners electoral support around or below one percent. If such a secret operation were true, the scheme would resemble the phenomenon of the unusual high publicity of *Svoboda* on popular talk shows from 2010 to 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. Some of the movement's branches are eager to become a fully respected part of the larger European far-right subcultural milieu. In its multi-faceted efforts to join with other European actors, the National Corps and its related NGOs, like *Svoboda* before 2014, entered into relationships with European partners that occupy 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, so far only with distinctly marginal, neo-fascist political groupuscules and relatively closed racist subcultures. These circles, unlike the parties in the former AENM, do not have much electoral potential or political weight, and are largely unknown to the public in both Ukraine and the West.

Using post-Soviet Ukraine as an example, our study illustrates the geographically broader, politically general, and, perhaps, altogether trivial observation that for young nation states ultra-nationalism is in some regards an even more problematic enterprise than for older countries. It is not only normatively destructive, potentially criminal, and internally subversive,²⁹³ but the fanaticism of ultra-nationalists is also risky for a nation's foreign relations, especially if that nation is, like Ukraine today, in a confrontation with an aggressive neighbor. Ultra-nationalists like to be seen as the nation's most principled defenders of the fatherland. The political practices of such organizations as *Svoboda*, *Bratstvo*, and *Azov* are, however, more complicated and often contradictory.

While such a conclusion is, in its substance, rather unsurprising, it has a strategic dimension worth noting. Our study indicates that seemingly pragmatic alignments between moderate and radical nationalists, such as the cross-factional anti-Yanukovych Committee Against Dictatorship that included *Svoboda*, can turn out to be problematic for democratic parties engaged in this type of cooperation. Such alliances across the dividing line between democratism and anti-democratism come with various risks due to ultra-nationalists' insufficient allegiance to liberal-democratic values.²⁹⁴

Radical political forces may often be ready to shape their foreign relations in more adventurous and less restrictive manners than their moderate counterparts. 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 can be erratic, as the example of post-Soviet Ukrainian far right groups highlighted here shows. Moderate political allies of radical nationalists may become hostages of their partners' limited allegiance to constitutional procedures.

Center-right parties can find themselves in situations where they become discredited by the dubious foreign connections of their radical domestic allies. The ultra-nationalists' choice of contacts abroad sometimes has little to do with a particular ideological stance. It may instead be the result of the fact that extremist parties operate within different international contexts and behavioral frames than moderate political forces. Extremists may not be particularly picky or sufficiently risk averse when building their foreign partnerships. The above story of Ukrainian ultra-nationalist connections to Russia as well as to various pro-Kremlin actors in Ukraine and elsewhere illustrates this facet of the international relations of the worldwide far right.

²⁹³ 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 elektoral'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* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015); Lenka Bustikova, *Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²⁹⁴ "Re-consider the Inclusion of Svoboda into the CAD: Open Letter to the Leaders of Ukraine's Democratic Opposition Regarding the Inclusion of the 'Svoboda' Party into the Committee Against Dictatorship," *Change.org*, 2011. www.change.org/p/committee-against-dictatorship-re-consider-the-inclusion-of-svoboda-into-the-cad.