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“Democracy” in Ukraine—What is NATO risking a war for?

State commemorations and public memorials to war criminals, mass murderers, anti-Semites and Nazi collaborators such as Symon Petliura, Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. The integration of fascist militias into the official armed forces and the networking and military training of neo-Nazis from all over the world under the protective hand of the state. Mafia-like struggles for state power between a handful of oligarchs and a corrupt judiciary and authorities. Screaming social inequality with an average monthly income of 412 euros (April 2021). These are the most salient features of Ukrainian “democracy,” for which the US and its European NATO allies are risking war against the nuclear power Russia.



Armored vehicles of the Azov regiment in Mariupol [Credit: Wanderer777/CC BY-SA 4.0/Wikimedia]

“Now, as ever, it is up to Ukrainians and no one else to decide their own future and the future of this country,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday during a visit to Kiev. “The Ukrainian people chose a democratic and European path in 1991. They took to the Maidan to defend that choice in 2013. And unfortunately, ever since, you’ve faced relentless aggression from Moscow. Russia invaded territory in the Crimea, ginned up a conflict in eastern Ukraine, and has systematically sought to undermine and divide Ukraine’s democracy.” Similar expressions are coming from the capitals of Europe.

Every single word of his statement is a lie.

It was not the “Ukrainian people” who decided in 1991 to dissolve the Soviet Union, of which Ukraine was an integral part, but three Stalinist officials: Boris Yeltsin (Russia), Stanislav Shushkevich (Belarus) and Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine). They met while hunting on December 7 at a dacha where, after considerable consumption of vodka, they decided without any public discussion to dissolve the state that had emerged from the October Revolution of 1917.

There followed a decade of savage privatisation in which former Communist Party functionaries and their youth organisations looted socialised property and smashed up the highly developed education and health systems.

Rule of the oligarchs

The oligarchs who made it rich in the aftermath still dominate Ukraine’s political life today. They control the economy and the media, buy up judges and MPs and maintain their own parties and militias.

Even the European Union, which has been supporting its “strategic partner” Ukraine with funds and advisers for more than two decades, concludes: “Oligarchs, high-ranking civil servants and corrupt prosecutors and judges are still dividing up the state among themselves, billions are disappearing abroad; Ukraine, with few exceptions, has made as little progress in building a constitutional state as it has in the fight against corruption.”

This is how the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* summarises the special report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on “Fighting Grand Corruption in Ukraine” from September last year.

The Ukrainian oligarchs change their political orientation and their international alliances as required.

For example, the richest man in the country, Rinat Akhmetov (estimated wealth by Forbes: \$7.6 billion), was long considered pro-Russian. Among other things, he controlled the Donetsk Basin’s coal and steel industry, which has since been largely destroyed, and was for a time a deputy of the “Party of Regions” of President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted in 2014. This did not prevent him from continuing to increase his fortune even after Yanukovich’s fall.

The fourth richest Ukrainian, Ihor Kolomoyskyi (\$1.8 billion), is considered a promoter and mastermind of the current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who won the 2019 presidential election on an anti-corruption ticket. Kolomoyskyi stands accused in the US and other countries of looting a bank he owns of more than five billion euros in “the biggest financial fraud of the 21st century.” The Pandora Papers have since revealed that apparently Zelensky also profited from this fraud. He and his entourage own several shell companies in international tax havens, into which funds in the tens of millions have flowed.

Petro Poroshenko, the seventh richest Ukrainian with \$1.6 billion, was the country’s president from 2014 to 2019. He made his fortune exporting sweets to Russia, was a minister for a time under President Yanukovich, and then turned ultranationalist and darling of the West. Now he stands accused of treason. He is alleged to have made lucrative deals with the separatists in eastern Ukraine while fueling the civil war against them as president. Poroshenko denies this and accuses Zelensky of wanting to get rid of a political opponent.

Nationalism always served the oligarchs as a means to an end. They have fomented national conflicts and promoted fascist currents to divert attention from social tensions and to divide the working class, which was politically disoriented after decades of Stalinist repression and falsification of history. This had been the case since the dissolution of the Soviet Union but took on new dimensions after the Maidan coup of 2014. Since then, the

far-right nationalists and fascists have been systematically integrated into the state apparatus.

The Maidan coup

Contrary to what Blinken claims, the events on the Maidan were not a choice for democracy, but a right-wing coup. The elected president, Yanukovych, who had been manoeuvring between Russia and the Western powers, was hounded out of office with the help of fascist militias and with the open support of Washington and Berlin and replaced by Poroshenko.

Victoria Nuland, then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs and now number three in the US State Department, personally paraded on the Maidan to cheer on the protests against Yanukovych. She publicly boasted that the US had invested five billion dollars in regime change in Ukraine.

Germany's social democratic president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, then still foreign minister, also travelled to Kiev to negotiate Yanukovych's replacement with the opposition parties and Yanukovych himself. He worked directly with Oleh Tyahnybok, the leader of the fascist Svoboda party. Svoboda, which had little influence except in some areas of western Ukraine, stands in the tradition of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with the Nazis in World War II and was involved in mass murders. It maintains relations with the neo-Nazi German National Party (NP), among others.

The ink on Steinmeier's agreement was barely dry when Right Sector, a neo-fascist militia, seized the centre of Kiev and drove Yanukovych, who feared for his life, to flee.

Since then, such fascist militias have been an integral part of the country's political life. They terrorize political opponents and keep the war going against the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. For example, on May 2, 2014, over 40 opponents of the new regime were killed in the Odessa Trade Union House when fascists set fire to the building and prevented the victims from leaving.

The Azov Regiment

A key role among the 80 or so far-right militias built and equipped to fight the eastern Ukrainian separatists is played by the Azov Regiment. Founded by Andriy Biletsky, who was freed from prison during the events on the Maidan, where he was serving a sentence for murder, the Azov Regiment has never made a secret of its admiration for the Nazis. Biletsky professed his support for the “crusade of the white nations of the world against the Semitic-led subhumans.” The Azov Regiment's symbols—wolf's hook and black sun—were used by Hitler's SS in World War II.

Nevertheless, the militia was financed and equipped by the state and oligarchs. President Poroshenko praised them at an awards ceremony in 2014, declaring, “These are our best warriors.” Biletsky was celebrated on TV talk shows and elected to parliament in 2014. Eventually, the militia was officially integrated into the Ukrainian armed forces, where it forms its own regiment.

“That status came with an arsenal that no other far-right militia in the world could claim, including crates of explosives and battle gear for up to 1,000 troops,” reports the US magazine *Time*, which published an extensive report on the fascist militia a year ago.

Azov is far more than a militia. “It has its own political party; two publishing houses; summer camps for children; and a vigilante force known as the National Militia, which patrols the streets of Ukrainian cities alongside the police.” Its military wing has “at least two training bases and a vast arsenal of weapons, from drones and armoured vehicles to artillery pieces.”

The state sponsorship of fascist militias has made Ukraine a centre for military training and political networking by neo-Nazis from around the world. *Time* quotes security expert and former FBI agent Ali Soufan as estimating that “more than 17,000 foreign fighters have come to Ukraine over the past six years from 50 countries.” Forty US congressmen and women asked the US State Department to classify Azov as a foreign terrorist organisation, but were rebuffed.

The National Corps party, Azov's political wing, claims to have around 10,000 members and maintains intensive relations with fascist and neo-Nazi organisations around the

world—including Die Rechte, The Third Path and the Identitarians in Germany, CasaPound in Italy and Groupe Union Défense in France.

The National Corps' chief ideologue and international secretary is 34-year-old Olena Semenyaka. A study by George Washington University calls her the “First Lady of Ukrainian Nationalism.” Semenyaka studied philosophy, focusing on the models of the new right—Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Armin Mohler and others. Originally a supporter of Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin, she now advocates a pan-European alliance of ethno-states, much like the Identitarians and Steve Bannon, fascist and adviser of former US President Donald Trump.

At the beginning of last year, she got a six-month job as a researcher at the Institute of Humanities in Vienna. The university only withdrew her contract when a storm of outrage arose on social media after a photo of Semenyaka with a swastika flag and a Hitler salute had gone viral.

Fascism and war

The prominent role played by neo-Nazis and fascists in the Ukrainian state is no secret. No intelligence briefing is needed to spot them, a quick Google search is enough. The politicians and journalists who are hell-bent on risking war against Russia for Ukraine know what they are advocating. They have created the brown swamp themselves to build a bulwark against Russia and against the European working class.

The US has been supplying the Ukrainian armed forces and militias with weapons and trainers for years, knowing full well that fascist militias benefit from this. When US President Barack Obama signed legislation to this effect in 2015, it explicitly did not exclude financial and military support for the Azov Regiment, although this had been widely expected.

The *New York Times* has several times published richly illustrated reports on the arming and military instruction of civilians being trained for guerrilla warfare.

“Civilian defence is not unfamiliar in Ukraine; volunteer brigades formed the backbone of the country's force in the east in 2014, the first year of the war against Russian separatists, when the Ukrainian military was in shambles,” reads a report from December 26, 2021.

“This effort is now being formalized into units of the newly formed Territorial Defense Forces, a part of the military.” The training is carried out by both the state army and “private paramilitary groups like the Ukrainian Legion.”

It is obvious that a right-wing civil war army is being formed, which can also be used against opposition members or striking workers in their own country. Despite this—or precisely because of it—the call for arms deliveries to Ukraine is also growing louder in Germany and Europe. The German Greens in particular, who now have Annalena Baerbock as Foreign Minister, have been advocating this for a long time.

The preparations for war against Russia and the build-up of fascist militias are two sides of the same development. The capitalist system is in a hopeless crisis. Social inequality is at an all-time high. While more than 5.6 million have died of COVID-19 worldwide and hundreds of millions lost their income, the tops of society have enriched themselves enormously. This is also the case in Ukraine. According to Forbes, the wealth of the 100 richest Ukrainians grew by 42 percent in one year to \$44.5 billion.

The ruling class everywhere is expecting a social explosion and is responding as it did in the first half of the 20th century with fascism and war. Only an international movement of the working class, fighting for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a socialist society, rejecting any form of nationalism, can stop such a catastrophe.

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