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UNIWERSYTET MARII CURIE-SKŁODOWSKIEJ

Kostiantyn Fedorenko and Andreas Umland

**Between Frontline and Parliament: Ukrainian Political
Parties and Irregular Armed Groups since 2014**



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REDAKCJA TECHNICZNA:

Zespół CEW (W. Baluk, N. Gergało-Dąbek, B. Targońska)

ISBN 978-83-936406-2-1

OPRACOWANIE GRAFICZNE:

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PRACE CENTRUM EUROPY WSCHODNIEJ UMCS

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and Irregular Armed Groups since 2014**

LUBLIN, 2021

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“It must be like the Maidan, but with military means.”

*Arsen Avakov, Minister of Internal Affairs, on the emerging volunteer battalions in 2014*¹

Introduction

Why did Ukraine’s numerous new irregular *dobrovol’chi batal’iony* (volunteer battalions) that quickly emerged after the Revolution of Dignity not become major factors in Ukrainian politics? Our paper surveys the interaction between Ukraine’s main political parties after the 2013–2014 Euromaidan uprising, and the new irregular armed groups (IAGs) that sprung up in the spring-autumn of 2014. It focusses upon the parties’ role in the formation and absorption of individual and collective actors within the armed volunteer movement, and evaluates the presented empirical evidence against the background of some comparative literature on IAGs’ transition to electoral politics.

This paper surveys the interaction between Ukraine’s main political parties after the 2013–2014 Euromaidan uprising², and the new irregular armed groups (IAGs) that emerged in the spring-autumn of 2014³. It touches on the parties’ role in the formation and absorption of

* This paper is part of a larger research project on irregular armed groups (IAGs) in Eastern Ukraine funded by the *Volkswagenstiftung*, jointly implemented by the Bonn International Conversion Center (BICC) and the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Kyiv (IEAC), and directed by Professor Andreas Heinemann-Grüder (University of Bonn). Within this project, separate papers are being prepared on such issues as the pre-history, emergence, development, human rights abuses, media representation, veteran organisations, etc. of the IAGs. This is why this investigation is narrowly focussed on only one aspect of the Ukrainian armed volunteer movement, and leaves out various other relevant aspects of that phenomenon which are dealt with in other papers and forthcoming chapters, as a result the above larger project.

¹ Kateryna Hladka, Dmytro Hromakov, Veronika Myronova, Ol’ha Pluzhnyk, Oleh Pokal’chuk, Ihor Rudyk, Vasilisa Trofymovych & Artem Shevchenko, *Dobrobaty: Istoriia podvyhu batal’ioniv, shcho vriatuvaly krainu* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2016), 85.

² On recent developments in Ukraine’s party-political and national electoral landscape, see: Kostyantyn Fedorenko, Olena Rybiy & Andreas Umland, “The Ukrainian Party System before and after the 2013–2014 Euromaidan”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 4 (2016), pp. 609–630.

³ The latter topic has received considerable journalistic attention, but has not been much explored in academia so far. In the chronological order of their publication, some relevant papers include: Ekaterina Sergackova, “Freiwillig: Kleines Who’s Who ukrainischer Bataillonskommandeure”, *Osteuropa*, vol. 65, nos. 1–2 (2015), pp. 23–32; Tetjana Bezruk & Andreas Umland, “Der Fall Azov: Freiwilligenbataillone in der Ukraine”, *Osteuropa*, vol. 65, nos. 1–2 (2015), pp. 33–42; Rosaria Puglisi, “Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine”, *IAI Working Papers*, vol. 15, no. 8 (2015); *idem*, “General Zhukov and the Cyborgs: A Clash of Civilisation within the Ukrainian Armed Forces”, *IAI Working Papers*, vol. 15, no. 17 (2015); *idem*, “A People’s Army: Civil Society as a Security Actor in Post-Maidan Ukraine”, *IAI Working Papers*, vol. 15, no. 23 (2015); *idem*, “Geroi ili zlodei? Dobrovol’cheskie batal’iony v poslemaidannoï Ukraine”, *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropaiskoi istorii i kul’tury*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2015), pp. 79–98; Tetyana Malyarenko & David J. Galbreath, “Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine: Beyond Integration and Abolition”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2016), pp. 113–138; Emmanuel Karagiannis, “Ukrainian Volunteer Fighters in the Eastern Front: Ideas, Political-Social Norms and Emotions as Mobilization Mechanisms”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2016), pp. 139–153; Andreas Umland, “Dobrovol’cheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniia i radikal’nyi natsionalizm v poslemaidannoï Ukraine: nekotorye osobennosti

individual and collective actors within the armed volunteer movement. As the number of political and military organisations as well as of persons dealt with here is high, the paper only scratches the surface of each interaction between a party and an IAG. It often merely lists certain names and some selected facts, leaving out numerous episodes of varying importance. The paper is thus not a proper, in-depth investigation into this intriguing topic, which would demand a far larger and, perhaps, multi-author exploration. Rather, the paper is an outline of possible directions for further research on the course and interpretation of the various Ukrainian parties' relationship with the IAGs.

The conclusions evaluate the presented evidence, and reflect on it against the background of some comparative literature on IAGs' transition to electoral politics⁴. The short-lived Ukrainian armed volunteer movement and its interactions with electoral politics, in some regards, did and, in other regards, did not fit patterns observed in previous case studies and cross-cultural research of IAGs. The distinctly short life of the Ukrainian IAGs as more or less independent actors, and the swift integration of most of them into Ukraine's regular forces was unusual. This was one of the reasons for the relatively low political impact of the IAGs as such – a repercussion somewhat in contrast to the, as illustrated below, impressive political careers of some IAG commanders since 2014. The Ukrainian IAGs' interactions with political parties – not the least, the belowmentioned particularly close relationships of the Azov Regiment with the National Corps as well as of the Right Sector with the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps – demand further exploration and interpretation against the background of comparative investigations of para-military units' transitions to party politics.

From Social Activism to Armed Resistance – and Back

Ukraine's semi- and irregular volunteer units that, since the spring of 2014, had begun to form, in response to Kremlin-fuelled separatism in the Donets Basin (Donbas) and Russia's subsequently escalating crypto-war⁵, sprang from, and enjoyed the support of, a variety of

vozniknoveniia polka 'Azov'", *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropеiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2016), pp. 141–178; Denis Gorbach & Oles' Petik, "Azovskii shliakh: kak ul'trapravoe dvizhenie boretsia za mesto v politicheskom meinstrime Ukrainy", *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropеiskoi istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2016), pp. 179–192; Tamara Martsenyuk, Ganna Grytsenko & Anna Kvit, "The 'Invisible Battalion': Women in ATO Military Operations in Ukraine", *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, no. 2 (2016), pp. 171–187; Ilmari Käihkö, "A Nation-in-the-Making, in Arms: Control of Force, Strategy and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions", *Defence Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2018), pp. 147–166; Montana Hunter, "Crowdsourced War: The Political and Military Implications of Ukraine's Volunteer Battalions 2014–2015", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2018), pp. 78–124; Huseyn Aliyev, "Bewaffnete Freiwilligenbataillone: Informelle Machthaber in der Ukraine", *Ukraine-Analysen*, no. 205 (2018), pp. 2–5.

⁴ Ariel I. Ahram, *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Benjamin Acosta, "Bombs to Ballots: When Militant Organizations Transition to Political Parties", *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 76, no. 3 (2014), pp. 666–683; Huseyn Aliyev, "Strong Militias, Weak States, and Armed Violence: Towards a Theory of 'State-Parallel' Paramilitaries", *Security Dialogue*, no. 47, no. 6 (2016), pp. 498–516.

⁵ More on this in the conclusions.

sources⁶. These included civic groups, political parties, commercial companies and informal networks of former servicemen, novice protesters, experienced mercenaries, patriotic criminals, football hooligans, minority activists, and others. As the post-Euromaidan state was in a shambles, the irregular armed groups (IAGs) had – and, in select cases, still have – to sustain themselves through crowdfunding, private sponsoring and political support, from outside the government⁷.

Ukraine's IAGs emerged in 2014 as partly spontaneously and partly state-guided new paramilitary formations⁸. Soon after the main groups were established, the Ukrainian state started – from approximately late summer 2014 onwards – to co-opt, integrate, turn or/and disperse the new IAGs into regular companies, battalions, regiments and brigades subordinated to the Ministries of Defense and Interior. Only some minor, ideologically driven IAGs have survived this purposeful campaign, more or less, in their initial form, and maintained relative independence from the state. They include the *Orhanizatsiia ukrains'kykh natsionalistiv* (Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists, OUN) and *Dobrovol'chyi ukrains'kyi korpus* (Voluntary Ukrainian Corps, DUK)⁹. These small units are, however, exceptions to the rule that, by early 2016, the main story of the IAGs as notable non- or semi-governmental forces was essentially over. As exhilarating as the mushrooming of IAGs was throughout 2014, their nearly complete disappearance as a relatively separate and large phenomenon during 2015 was just as astonishing.

Nevertheless, the story about Ukraine's initially ir- or semiregular armed volunteer movement did not end with its almost full incorporation and partial dispersion into the regular Ukrainian armed forces. A whole number of the initial leaders that shaped and were shaped by the paramilitary units and their civic support groups kept in contact with, or even advanced within, those political, governmental, civil or commercial structures which had initially given birth to, or supported the formation of, the IAGs. Some selected volunteer units – most prominently the infamous Azov Regiment¹⁰, on which there is more below – kept a part of their staff, identity, symbols and exclusiveness after their incorporation into the troops of the Ministries of Interior or Defense. A number of decommissioned commanders and privates started to participate, or even became prominent in, the development of post-Maidan Ukrainian politics, government and society.

⁶ Ekaterina Sergatskova, "Looting, Torture, and Big Business: A Look at Volunteer Groups Fighting the Separatists in Ukraine", *Meduza*, 1 July 2015, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2015/07/01/looting-torture-and-big-business> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁷ Hunter, "Crowdsourced War".

⁸ The seemingly spontaneous creation of a whole number of IAGs was, in fact, encouraged, triggered, supported or even organised by various government officials. Interview with Viktor Chavalan, Kyiv, 13 January 2017.

⁹ Some observers have, for instance, claimed that President Petro Poroshenko deliberately aimed to incorporate the volunteer groups, out of fear for his position in power. See, for instance: S. Ruzhyns'kyi, "Navishcho Petro Poroshenko znyshchuie dobrovol'chi batal'iony?" *iPress.ua*, 21 August 2014,

http://ipress.ua/articles/navishcho_petro_poroshenko_znyshchuie_dobrovolchi_bataliony_81076.html (accessed: 8 February 2018).

¹⁰ Bezruk & Umland, "Der Fall Azov"; Umland, "Dobrovol'cheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniia"; Gorbach & Petik, "Azovskii shliakh".

In the words of one of the key original organisers of the IAGs, Viktor Chavalan, who was, in 2014–2015, Head of the Department for the Organization of the Activities of the Special Tasks Units within the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine,

“the people who formed the basis of the volunteer units in 2014 did not disappear, they are still there. Moreover, the informal ties that formed between them and were strengthened during the fights are rather strong. These are relatively powerful communities and these people support each other in peaceful life in the solution social and everyday-life issues. [...] That means that, apart from the fact that this is a fighting brotherhood steeled during the war, by joint victories, by joint losses and by joint heroic deeds, there are certain problems that keep this community together”¹¹.

To be sure, the larger segment of the irregular armed groups’ staff had, by 2018, returned to their pre-2014 professional lives. Some are suffering from various post-traumatic syndromes, after their experience of combat, loss, injury, detention, torture etc. Yet, numerous former irregular soldiers have continued to follow the career-paths they started, accelerated, modified or sustained within the early post-Maidan armed volunteer movement. They became military or police men and women, full-time politicians or political activists as well as organisers or leaders of Ukraine’s vibrant civil and uncivil societies¹².

The prominence that some activists from the armed volunteer movement have gained in post-Euromaidan Ukrainian national politics is, to considerable degree, build on the really or allegedly important role that this movement played or is said to have played during the early war period, especially in the volatile months from approximately April to circa September 2014. In spite of their improvised nature, the first volunteer troops – rather than the regular army, largely dysfunctional at that time – are credited to have, between the late spring and early autumn of 2014, saved Eastern Ukraine from being overrun by Russia-directed hybrid and, in late August – early September 2014, regular forces.

To be sure, the exact degree of the IAGs’ real military relevance is disputed. Yet, a notable impact of the IAGs has been asserted by Ukrainian governmental officials¹³, claimed by representatives of the involved right-wing groups¹⁴, and argued by certain experts alike¹⁵. At least, there is thus a widely shared cross-societal perception that the *dobrobaty* – the abbreviation for *dobrovolchii batal’ony* (volunteer battalions) – saved Ukraine as a state in mid-2014. This real or presumed savior-role of the IAGs, in 2014, elicited then and has since

¹¹ Viktor Chavalan, “Obezopasit’ sebia ot voennykh ugroz tol’ko kontraktnoi armiei nereal’no”, *ArgumentUA*, 4 January 2017, <http://argumentua.com/print/stati/viktor-chalavan-obezopasit-sebya-ot-voennykh-ugroz-tolko-kontraktnoi-armiei-nerealno>.

¹² Olga Burluk and Natalia Shapovalova, eds., *Civil Society in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: From Revolution to Consolidation* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2018).

¹³ E.g.: “Turchynov zhadav, iak u 2014 rotsi dobrovol’tsi zupynyly sproby armii Putina pryvesty ‘lehitymnoho’”, *UNIAN*, 27 January 2017, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/1746931-turchinov-zgadav-yak-u-2014-rotsi-dobrovoltsi-zupinili-sprobi-armiji-putina-pryvesti-legitimnogo.html> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

¹⁴ E.g.: “Ostriv Krym”, *Pravyi Sektor*, 27 May 2017, <https://pravyysektor.info/poglyad/ostrov-krym> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

¹⁵ E.g.: Diane M. Francis, “Ukraine’s Volunteers Saving the Day”, *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-m-francis/ukraines-volunteers-savin_b_7832224.html (accessed: 8 February 2018).

continued to elicit considerable social popularity, public trust and political support for the initially non-state fighters, in particular, as well as for all soldiers employed within Ukraine's Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), in general. This was so much so that the majority of competitive parties actively induced former or still active combatants to join their electoral lists for the October 2014 parliamentary and October 2015 local elections. For instance, according to a study by the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, support from and for ATO fighters was one of the most important topics in the electoral campaigns of the parties for the 2015 local elections¹⁶.

What follows is a cursory survey of Ukrainian parliamentary and other relevant parties as well as their engagement with the post-Euromaidan IAGs. We briefly introduce the parties and outline their interpenetration or/and interactions with IAGs¹⁷. In the conclusions, we extract from this overview some implications of the evidence for a broader assessment of their political role, and make some suggestions of how to interpret the Ukrainian experience, in light of and in view of the international comparative study of IAGs across various continents and time periods.

Right-Wing Parties and their Para-Military Arms

Although they continue to form a family of relatively minor Ukrainian political groupings¹⁸, such parties as the Right Sector, Svoboda (Freedom) party and National Corps as well as their involvement in the fighting in the Donbas are worth considering here first and foremost¹⁹. This is because the organisational connection between them and some new IAGs, as briefly sketch

¹⁶ "Osnovni vysnovky opytuvannia rehionalnykh ekspertiv KVVU 'Pivroku do mistsevykh vyboriv: novi hravtsi ta stari problemy'", *VHO "Komitet vybortsiv Ukrainy"*, 13 May 2015, http://cvu.org.ua/nodes/view/type:news/slug:Pivroku_do_miscevyh_vyboriv_novi_gravci_stari_problemy (accessed: 8 February 2018).

¹⁷ We also briefly mention, in the footnotes, their popular support according to opinion polls conducted in late 2017, in order to provide a sense of the significance of the parties. We will refer to these two polls: "Hromads'ka dumka, hruden'-2017: vyborchi reitynh i reitynhy doviry", *Demokratychni initsiatyvy*, <http://dif.org.ua/uploads/doc/11718337605a665adc7b97d3.95892743.doc>, pp. 7–8 (accessed: 13 February 2018); "Reitynh pidtrymky partii i politychnykh lideriv: hruden' 2017 roku", *Kyivs'kyi mizhnarodnyi instytut sotsiologii*, 19 December 2017, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=730&page=1> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁸ Andreas Umland & Anton Shekhovtsov, "Ultraright Party Politics in Post-Soviet Ukraine and the Puzzle of the Electoral Marginalism of Ukrainian Ultranationalists in 1994-2009", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 51, no. 5 (2013), pp. 33–58; Viacheslav Likhachev, "Right-Wing Extremism on the Rise in Ukraine", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 51, no. 5 (2013), pp. 59–74; Anton Shekhovtsov & Andreas Umland, "Ukraine's Radical Right", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2014), pp. 58–63; Alina Polyakova, "Parties and Subcultures in the Process of Mobilization: The Internal Dynamics of the Radical Right in Ukraine", in: Michael Minkenberg, ed. *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process, Extremism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 319–347; Viacheslav Likhachov, *Vid Maidanu pravoruch: Revoliutsiia, viyna i ul'trapravi v Ukraini (2013–2016 roky)* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2016).

¹⁹ In early 2018, popular support for the National Corps, as measured by opinion polls of the Democratic Initiatives (DI) Foundation and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), remained low. (The KIIS ratings calculate support among those who intend to vote and who have already decided on whom to support. The DI poll also excludes those who do not plan to vote, but includes an option "Hard to say"; 16.6% of those who intend to vote remained undecided as of December 2017.) The National Corps, Right Sector and Statesman Initiative of Iarosh were not even included in the last 2017 KIIS poll, in which only 0.8% of Ukrainians supported "other parties". In the December 2017 DI poll, the National Corps received 0.5%, Right Sector 0.3%, and the Statesman Initiative of Iarosh 1.0%. Only Svoboda, was, in these late 2017 polls, with 3.2% (DI) and 2% (KIIS) somewhat closer to passing the 5% threshold in the proportional part of hypothetical parliamentary elections. Taken together, the four of them stood then at exactly 5.0% (DI). "Hromads'ka dumka"; "Reitynh pidtrymky partii i politychnykh lideriv".

out below, was and partly still is particularly close. The Right Sector claims to have lost about 60–70 members in combat²⁰, Svoboda over 50 members²¹, and the Azov Battalion/Regiment 39 members²². Another reason for considering the far-right here at the beginning is that these Ukrainian parties as well as their armed wings were and still are playing a disproportionately large role in the Kremlin’s propaganda campaign against, as well as, to a lesser degree, in Western media reports about, Ukraine.

Finally, it is not inconceivable that this, by mid-2018, still marginal family of parties can, in the future, gain more influence on Ukrainian national-level politics and then warrant more scholarly attention than hitherto. In March 2017, Svoboda, the Right Sector and National Corps signed a joint “National Manifesto”. According to Svoboda leader Oleh Tiahnybok, the parties “will not just coordinate their efforts, they will reach their goals together”²³. As a united force, they could shape an entire new camp in Ukrainian politics, after the forthcoming autumn 2019 parliamentary elections. In such a case, the particularly close connections between the far-right and some of the below introduced current and former Ukrainian IAGs would also increase in relevance.

Pravyi Sektor (Right Sector)

Although the youngest of Ukraine’s three main far-right parties, the Right Sector received especially wide attention throughout 2014. It was initially a loose umbrella movement for various right-wing grouplets and nationalistically inclined individuals participating in the Euromaidan. At its inception as an informal network of activists in late November 2013, the Right Sector consisted of several dozen people, mainly men²⁴. As the protests unfolded and clashes with law enforcement officers became more frequent and violent, the character of the uprising and outlooks of the protesters changed²⁵. Nevertheless, the number of Right Sector members increased only moderately to about 300 to 500 people towards the end of the Euromaidan uprising²⁶. It was only after the Revolution of Dignity when the number of Right

²⁰ Interview with Artem Skoropads’kyi, Kyiv, 5 February 2017.

²¹ Interview with Iurii Syrotiuk, Kyiv, 7 February 2017.

²² Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018.

²³ “‘Svoboda’, PS i Natskorpus ob’iednuiut’sia – pidpysaly manifest”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 16 March 2017, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/03/16/7138320/> (accessed: 13 February 2018); Uliana Bezpal’ko, “Soiuz pravykh: Chi zmozhut’ ukrains’ki natsionalisty ob’ednatysia pered vyboramy”, *RBK-Ukraina*, 27 August 2018, daily.rbc.ua/ukr/show/soyuz-pravyh-smogut-ukrainskie-natsionalisty-1535031326.html (accessed: 9 September 2018).

²⁴ The later press secretary of the Right Sector stated that his group had around 70 members on 1 December 2013, mainly coming from the older far-right “Trident of Stepan Bandera” groupuscule led by Dmytro Iarosh. According to him, the active core of the group during the Euromaidan consisted of about 150 people. Interview with Artem Skoropadskii, Kyiv, 5 February 2017.

²⁵ “Vid Maidanu-taboru do Maidanu-sichi: shcho zminylosia?” *Demokratychni initsiatyvy*, 6 February 2014, <http://dif.org.ua/article/vid-maydanu-taboru-do-maydanu-sichi-shcho-zminilosya> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

²⁶ V’iacheslav Likhachov, “Chomu perebil’shennia roli ul’trapravykh v ukrains’kii revoliutsii ne mensh nebezpechne, nizh prymenshennia”, *Zaborona*, 3 May 2018, <https://zaborona.com/likhachov-column/> (accessed: 8 July 2018). The later press secretary of the Right Sector stated that this group had around 400 members, by January 19, 2014. Interview with Artem Skoropadskii, 5 February 2017.

Sector members and groups using this label started, for a while, to grow rapidly, in connection with the unfolding confrontation with Russia.

As in the case of the non- or less ideological self-defence units on the Euromaidan, the Right Sector's experience and bonding during the Euromaidan protests from December 2013 to February 2014 regained relevance, when the initially civil conflict in Eastern Ukraine started, with Russian help, gradually turning into an armed confrontation, from approximately mid-March 2014 onwards. The first Right Sector volunteers arrived in the ATO area in April 2014 and were largely associated with the "Dnipro-2" battalion²⁷, until the creation of a separate unit called the *Dobrovolchyi ukrains'kyi korpus "Pravyi sektor"* (Volunteer Ukrainian Corps "Right Sector", DUK), on July 17 of that year. The Right Sector's Euromaidan leader, Dmytro Iarosh, also became the DUK's first military commander. How serious the attempts by Iarosh were to integrate the DUK into the Ministry of Defense troops is disputed²⁸ as the Corps' fighters, on many occasions, accused the government of malevolence towards their unit²⁹.

At the time that the DUK was formed, Dmytro Iarosh also emerged as the presidential candidate of the, by then, properly registered new Right Sector party, created on March 22, 2014. However, Iarosh only received 0.7% in the presidential elections of May, 25 2014 while his party won 1.8% during the parliamentary elections on October 25, 2014. The Right Sector thus did not pass the 5% barrier, and was unable to form a faction in the *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council). Only Iarosh himself entered the parliament by virtue of winning a single-mandate district in the *Dnipropetrovs'ka oblast'*, his native region³⁰.

Early on, there were allegations that the Right Sector had ties with the infamous oligarchs Dmytro Firtash and Ihor Kolomois'kyi³¹. Concerning Kolomois'kyi at least, the claim about his initial financial support for the DUK is plausible³². Iarosh himself had once acknowledged that Borys Filatov and Hennadii Korban, Kolomois'kyi's close business partners, in cooperation with the regional Right Sector activist Andrii Denysenko, "made everything possible" to enable their first military operation³³. Filatov, the later mayor of the large city of Dnipro (formerly Dnipropetrovs'k), called the Right Sector "our partners and friends" and announced that they

²⁷ O. Korotash, "Pozyvnyi Mol'far: Pys'mennyk na viini", *Ukrains'ka Pravda: Zhyttia*, 6 February 2015, <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2015/02/6/188936> (accessed: 8 February 2018). The later press secretary of the Right Sector stated that this initial group of Right Sector fighters consisted of around 150 men. Interview with Artem Skoropadskii, Kyiv, 5 February 2017.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Ostriv Krym", *Pravyi Sektor*, 27 May 2017, <https://pravyysektor.info/poglyad/ostriv-krym> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³⁰ "Vidomosti pro pidrakhunok holosiv v odnomandatnomu vyborchomu okruzi: Odnomandatnyi vyborchyi okruh #39 (Dnipropetrovs'ka oblast')", *Tsentral'na vyborcha komisiia*,

<http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/WP040?PT001F01=910&pf7331=39> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³¹ Mustafa Naiem, "Za lashtunkamy Pravoho sektoru", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 1 April 2014,

<http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2014/04/1/7020952/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³² Dmytro Iarosh, "Ia by zaraz ne vidmovyvsia vid hroshei bud'-iakoho oliharkha", *Glavkom*, 28 July 2014, <http://glavkom.ua/publications/125703-dmitro-jarosh-ja-bi-zaraz-ne-vidmovivsja-vid-groshej-bud-jakogo-oligarha.html> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³³ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 282.

would “support each other” during the 2015 local elections³⁴. Yet, the Right Sector ultimately decided against participating in those elections³⁵.

The party program for the parliamentary elections promised to “grant state status to the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps”³⁶. The program of Iarosh as an SMD candidate was identical to that of the Right Sector. While these developments and Iarosh’s election were unremarkable in terms of Ukrainian domestic affairs, they had larger implications in view of the outsized role of the Right Sector in Russia’s propaganda war against Ukraine in 2014. According to deputy governor of the *Dnipropetrovs’ka oblast’*, Sviatoslav Oliinyk, the Right Sector’s central role in the Kremlin’s framing of post-Euromaidan Ukraine meant that “a decisive blow was dealt to [the separatists] when Iarosh was elected as an MP [in an East Ukrainian and Russian-speaking region]”. Iarosh’s successful electoral bid in Russophone Ukraine, in Oliinyk’s opinion, contradicted the propaganda describing Iarosh as a “fascist”³⁷.

The Right Sector is, in Russia especially, but also sometimes in the West, associated or even identified with Ukraine’s 2013–2014 uprising and the new post-Euromaidan regime. In fact, the relations between the post-revolutionary power-holders and Right Sector have been strained. On August 17, 2014, for instance, the Right Sector issued an ultimatum to Ukraine’s newly elected President Petro Poroshenko demanding to eliminate “revanchists” in the Ministry of Interior and liberate detained volunteer battalion members. The Right Sector warned that:

“[i]n the case of the non-compliance with our demands within 48 hours, we will be forced to withdraw all of our forces from the front-line, announce a general mobilisation of all reserve battalions and start a march on Kyiv with the aim of conducting ‘quick reforms’ in the Ministry of Interior. The march columns of the ‘Right Sector’ will be moving in full armor”³⁸.

In November 2015, Iarosh stepped down as party leader, following an internal conflict with other top party officials. The latter accused him of unwillingness to “return to a revolutionary path” of the party³⁹. Subsequently, Iarosh and his followers created a new party called *Derzhavnyts’ka initsiatyva Iarosha* (Statesman Initiative of Iarosh). Iarosh also left the DUK claiming that “95% of the volunteers” from the DUK went with him to join his newly-formed

³⁴ “UKROP i Pravyi Sektor pidut’ na mistsevi vybory okremo – Filatov”, *UKROP*, <http://www.ukrop.com.ua/uk/news/text/17-1031408458> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³⁵ “Pravyi Sektor ne pide na mistsevi vybory”, *BBC Ukraina*, 21 July 2015, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/07/150721_right_sector_elections_hk (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³⁶ “Pozacherhovi vybory narodnykh deputativ Ukrainy 26 zhovtnia 2014 roku: Prohrama politychnoi partii ‘Pravyi sektor’”, *Tsentral’na vyborcha komisiia*, <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/showdoc2?PF7171=158&PID409=27> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

³⁷ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 209.

³⁸ “Pravyi Sektor vydvinul ul’timatum Poroshenko i ugrozhaet provedeniem ‘bystrykh reform’ v MVD”, *UNIAN*, 17 August 2014, <https://www.unian.net/politics/952135-pravyiy-sektor-vyidvinul-ultimatum-poroshenko-i-ugrojaet-provedeniem-bystryih-reform-v-mvd.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

³⁹ “Pravyi sektor’: Vykhid Iarosha dozvolyt’ rukhovi peretvorytysia na ‘poslidovnu revoliutsiinu sylu’”, *112.ua*, 28 February 2015, <http://ua.112.ua/suspilstvo/pravyi-sektor-vykhid-iarosha-dozvolyt-rukhovi-peretvorytysia-v-poslidovnu-revoliutsiinu-sylu-281922.html> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

Ukrains'ka dobrovol'cha armiia (Ukrainian Volunteer Army, UDA)⁴⁰. In his capacity as an MP, Iarosh started to push a bill in parliament that would legalise the UDA as a separate unit preserving its internal hierarchy. At the same time, he stressed that the UDA is “fully subjugated to the [national military] command”, and that there are thus “no conflict situations”⁴¹. Whereas the remaining group calling itself Right Sector preserved its anti-systemic stance, Iarosh moved away from outrightly revolutionary rhetoric.

The parts of the DUK and Right Sector not leaving with Iarosh came under the commands of Andrii Stempits'kyi and Andrii Tarasenko, respectively. These were and are, in contrast to Iarosh, both unremarkable leaders and largely unknown figures in the Ukrainian public⁴². There has not been much official documentation from the DUK on its activities since. The Right Sector's website hosts only four entries regarding the DUK's military record until August 2015 when the respective rubric “Na fronti” (On the Frontlines), as a separate section, was eliminated⁴³.

The Right Sector's website labels the post-Euromaidan Ukrainian leadership an “internal occupant”⁴⁴. Artem Skoropads'kyi (alias Bychkov), the party's Russian-speaking press secretary from Sevastopol, writes that the Right Sector consists of “professional revolutionaries” ready to become “the vanguard of this revolution when it starts”⁴⁵. He explains that the Right Sector “parted with Iarosh” since, unlike him, the party views “parliamentary battles as absolutely secondary”, and “speaks about the need for revolution”⁴⁶. Among other public activities, the party appealed, for instance, in 2016 to “all battalions” to protest that year's LGBT pride parade in Kyiv⁴⁷. Otherwise, however, the Right Sector has – in stark contrast to 2014 – become a minor phenomenon in Ukrainian public life, by 2018.

Vseukrains'ke ob'ednannia “Svoboda” (All-Ukrainian Union “Freedom”)

The Freedom party, or Svoboda, is the oldest among the more or less significant Ukrainian far-right forces. In 2004, it emerged as a result of a purposeful rebranding of the East Galician ultra-

⁴⁰ Dmytro Iarosh, “Ja nikoly ne buv radykalom”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 7 November 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/11/7/7125992/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Andrii Stempits'kii: DUK PS i monopoliia derzhavy na sylu”, *Pravyi Sektor*, <https://pravyysektor.info/poglyad/andriy-stempickyy-duk-ps-i-monopoliya-derzhavy-na-sylu> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴³ “Na fronti”, *Pravyi Sektor*, 25 July 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170725213112/http://pravyysektor.info/section/na-fronti> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴⁴ “Druh ‘Sirko’ pro realii rosiis'ko-ukrains'koi viiny”, *Pravyi Sektor*, 18 January 2017, <https://pravyysektor.info/borotba/drug-sirko-pro-realiyi-rosiysko-ukrayinskoyi-viiny> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴⁵ “Skoropadskii Artem”, *Facenews*, 25 November 2015, <https://www.facenews.ua/file/2015/296174/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴⁶ “Spiker ‘Pravoho sektora’ Artem Skoropads'kyi: ‘...A za kil'ka rokiv u nas Khreshchatykom khodytymut’ holi muzhyky. Nam tse potribno chy ni? Nam tse ne potribno””, *Tsenzor.net*, 9 June 2016, https://ua.censor.net.ua/resonance/392561/spiker_pravogo_sektora_artem_skoropadskyyi_a_za_kilka_rokiv_u_nas_hreshchatyko_m_hodytymut_goli_muzyky (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

nationalist fringe groupuscule Social-National Party of Ukraine⁴⁸. The Freedom party came to prominence in 2012 when it entered, and formed its own faction in, Ukraine's Supreme Council, after a surprise result of 10.44% in the proportional part of that year's parliamentary elections⁴⁹. During the Euromaidan, Svoboda's chairman, Oleh Tiahnybok, was one of the most prominent speakers on Kyiv's Independence Square. In 2014, the Freedom Party was, for several months, a coalition party of Ukraine's first post-Euromaidan government.

In the October 2014 parliamentary elections, Svoboda won 4.71% in the proportional part of the voting. It thus, like the Right Sector, failed to pass the 5% threshold. While Svoboda managed to send six directly elected deputies to Ukraine's new post-Euromaidan Supreme Council, it lost not only its ministers in government, but also its faction in parliament. This was a disastrous result after the 10.44% it had received in the previous 2012 parliamentary elections⁵⁰.

As in the case of the Right Sector, supporters of the Svoboda party had taken active part in the Euromaidan's 2013–2014 peaceful protests and, to a somewhat lesser degree, violent clashes. In stark contrast to the Right Sector, there had, however, never been a Svoboda-created volunteer battalion – not to mention an eponymous battle unit – taking part in the Donbas conflict. Instead, Svoboda endorsed the volunteer Sich (i.e. Cossack unit) Special Troops Battalion created on June 12, 2014⁵¹ and sent to the Donbas on August 26, 2014⁵².

Viktor Chalavan referred to the example of Svoboda and its leader, Oleh Tiahnybok, in 2014, when reporting that “politicians and civic activists who wanted to help in creating these battalions approached us”, and that Sich was created as a result of such interaction⁵³. The above-mentioned Dnipro mayor, Filatov, claims to have supported Svoboda activists, in their engagement with Sich, with equipment in the early phases of the conflict⁵⁴. However, Oleksandr Pysarenko, Sich commander, clarified: “We are called ‘Svoboda's battalion’ because,

⁴⁸ Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Creeping Resurgence of the Ukrainian Radical Right? The Case of the Freedom Party”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2011), pp. 203–228; Viacheslav Likhachev, *Right-Wing Extremism in Ukraine: The Phenomenon of “Svoboda”* (Kyiv: Euro-Asiatic Jewish Congress, 2013); Andreas Umland, “A Typical Variety of European Right-Wing Radicalism?” *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 51, no. 5 (2013), pp. 86–95; Per A. Rudling, “The Return of the Ukrainian Far Right: The Case of VO Svoboda”, in: Ruth Wodak, J.E. Richardson, eds. *Analyzing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 228–255; Anton Shekhovtsov, “From Para-Militarism to Radical Right-Wing Populism: The Rise of the Ukrainian Far-Right Party Svoboda”, in: Ruth Wodak, Brigitte Mral, Majid KhosraviNik, eds. *Right Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 249–263; Alina Polyakova, “From the Provinces to the Parliament: How the Ukrainian Radical Right Mobilized in Galicia”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2014), pp. 211–225; Artem Iovenko, “The Ideology and Development of the Social-National Party of Ukraine, and its Transformation into the All-Ukrainian Union ‘Freedom’, in 1990–2004”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 229–237.

⁴⁹ Viacheslav Likhachev, “Social-Nationalists in the Ukrainian Parliament: How They got There and What We Can Expect of Them”, *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 51, no. 5 (2013), pp. 75–85.

⁵⁰ 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/> (accessed: 15 July 2016).

⁵¹ Oleh Tiahnybok. “Svoboda i Chest! “Sich” – rik u viini za Ukrainu”, *Svoboda*, 12 June 2015, <http://svoboda.org.ua/news/articles/00014078/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁵² “V zonu ATO z Kyieva vyrushaie batal’ion ‘Sich’”, *LB.ua*, 26 August 2014, http://ukr.lb.ua/news/2014/08/26/277259_zonu_ato_kieva_otpravlyaetsya.html (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁵³ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 92.

⁵⁴ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 201.

when we formed, Svoboda helped us a lot (...) [It was] not the state [that] gave us [the equipment], Svoboda bought it with their own money (...). Yet saying that Svoboda equals Sich is wrong. I have never been a Svoboda member”⁵⁵.

By February 2015, the party claimed that approximately 500 members were fighting in the Donbas within the Sich battalion, the *Karpats’ka Sich* (Carpathian Sich, see below) company and as individuals in other units⁵⁶, including Aidar (more on the latter below)⁵⁷. In late 2015, the Sich special troops battalion was re-founded as the 4th Company of the Kyiv Regiment – a police special unit subjugated to the Ministry of the Interior. The Sich group on the *Vkontakte* social network indicates that this happened on December 21, 2015⁵⁸. No informative public reports about this development have been provided either by the battalion or by the Ministry of Interior.

Karpats’ka Sich, a stormtroopers platoon, was created on August 27, 2014. Svoboda announced that it is “not the antitank devices, but the nationalist ideology which makes the ‘Carpathians’ the most dangerous enemy of the Russian forces”⁵⁹. The party admitted that the unit consisted of “nationalists who could not get into the National Guard, Sich or other units because of criminal cases related to (...) the Maidan, the downing of the Lenin memorials and other political cases”⁶⁰. In May 2015, the Carpathian Sich “decided to get legalised” by accepting an offer to become part of the 93rd Separate Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian army, but demanding to keep the Carpathian Sich as a separate unit inside the brigade. Initially, the military command agreed. However, in April 2016, the unit was disbanded. Its members either continued service in the brigade within the regular army structure or resigned⁶¹.

On February 9, 2015, during a Svoboda congress, a party sub-organisation called *Lehion Svobody*, with the double meaning “legion of freedom” and “legion of the Freedom party”, was created⁶². It had about 1000 members by 2017⁶³. The Legion’s task is to unite party members who were or are fighting in different armed units, and to support them as well as their families during and after the war. Oleh Kutsyn, then still commander of the Carpathian Sich, was

⁵⁵ “Komandyr batal’ionu ‘Sich’ Oleksandr Pysarenko: ‘My zaraz budemo maty kolosal’nu problem z biitsiamy, iaki povertaiut’sia z frontu’”, *Tsenzor*, 25 September 2015, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/353520/komandir_batalyionu_sch_oleksandr_pisarenko_mi_zaraz_budemo_mati_kolosalnu_problemu_z_byitsyami_yak (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁵⁶ “Ruslan Koshulyns’kyi, Oleksii Kaida, Markiiian Lopachak vyrushaiut’ artylerystamy na front...”, *Vseukrains’ke Ob’iednannia Svoboda*, 12-18 February 2015, http://svoboda-files.info/files/00001337_hazeta_svoboda_nomer_292.pdf (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁵⁷ Interview with Iurii Syrotyuk, 7 February 2017.

⁵⁸ “4 rota ‘Sich’ polku ‘Kyiv’”, *Vkontakte*, https://vk.com/bsp_sich (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁵⁹ “Do richnytsi stvorennia ‘Karpats’koi Sichi’: Shliakh vid volonterstva do shturmovoï roty”, *Svoboda*, 26 August 2015, <http://svoboda.org.ua/news/events/00014998/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ L. Stek, “Stvoruiet’sia naimana armiiia, iaka ne zdatna peremahaty – komandyr ‘Karpats’koi Sichi’”, *Radio Svoboda*, 13 April 2016, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27673230.html> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶² “XXX z’izd VO ‘Svoboda’”, *Svoboda*, 9 February 2015, <http://svoboda.org.ua/media/videos/00012753/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶³ Interview with Iurii Syrotyuk, 7 February 2017.

appointed the Legion's commander⁶⁴. Although the Carpathian Sich was dissolved and the Sich battalion integrated into the police special forces, the Legion continues to uphold a link between the Svoboda party and certain ultra-nationalist soldiers, as documented in numerous entries on its Facebook page⁶⁵. The party thus retains close and institutionalised ties to members actively serving in Ukraine's armed forces.

Svoboda's unsuccessful 2014 list included, among others, Oleksii Myrhorods'kyi, a platoon commander within the Ukrainian army's 22nd Mechanized Infantry Battalion⁶⁶. Six party members won mandates in single-member districts – one in the Kyiv, Poltava, Rivne and Ternopil' oblasts, and two in the city of Kyiv. Out of these deputies, only one, Oleksandr Marchenko, had participated in the Donbas conflict before the elections⁶⁷, and also served after the elections⁶⁸. In the 2015 local elections, the party was supported by a notable 6.88% of the voters participating country-wide, thereby obtaining the fifth largest share of votes across Ukraine⁶⁹. Svoboda won 125 mandates on regional and city councils, mainly in the Galician Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivs'k and L'viv oblasts.

Aside from Marchenko, notable Svoboda representatives and 2012–2014 members of parliament who participated, to one degree or another, in the ATO included the:

- former vice-speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Ruslan Koshulyns'kyi;
- younger brother of the party leader, Andrii Tiahnybok;
- former deputy head of the Svoboda parliamentary group, Oleksii Kaida; and
- head of Svoboda's Lviv branch, Markiiian Lopachak⁷⁰.

Of these, it is known that Andrii Tiahnybok fought in Sich⁷¹. The commander of Sich reported that, during their service, the MPs adhered properly to military orders⁷². Koshulyns'kyi claimed

⁶⁴ "Natsionalistiv, iaki voiuut' na Donbasi, ob'iednaly v 'Lehion Svobody'", *TSN*, 25 April 2015, <https://tsn.ua/politika/natsionalistiv-yaki-voyuyut-na-donbasi-ob-yednali-v-legion-svobodi-423603.html> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁵ "Lehion Svobody", *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/legion.svobody/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁶ Hromadske.ua, "Spysok Tiahnyboka...", *Twitter*, 14 September 2014, <https://twitter.com/HromadskeUA/status/511149712939155457> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁷ "Myr mozhlyvyi lyshe pislia peremohy nad rosiis'kym ahresorom – Tiahnybok", *032.ua*, 25 August 2015, <https://www.032.ua/article/936505> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁸ "Narodnyi deputat Oleksandr Marchenko buduie oboronni sporudy na peredovii", *Svoboda*, <http://svoboda.org.ua/news/events/00014013/> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁶⁹ "Na mistsevykh vyborakh pokrashchyly rezul'tat til'ky krytyky vlady", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 9 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/> (accessed: 9 February 2018); "Mistsevi vybory v Ukraini 2015", *Wikipedia*, https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Місцеві_вибори_в_Україні_2015 (accessed: 9 July 2018).

⁷⁰ "Myr mozhlyvyi lyshe pislia peremohy nad rosiis'kym ahresorom – Tiahnybok", *032.ua*, 25 August 2015, <https://www.032.ua/article/936505> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁷¹ "Svobodivtsi na viini: eks-vitse-spiker, deputaty ta Tiahnybok", *Holos Svobody*, 26 June 2015, <http://holos.fm/page/svobodivci-na-vijni-vice-spiker-deputati-ta-tjagnibok> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁷² "Komandyr batal'ionu 'Sich' Oleksandr Pysarenko: 'My zaraz budemo maty kolosal'nu problem z biitsiamy, iaki povertaiut'sia z frontu'", *Censor.net.ua*, 25 September 2015, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/353520/komandir_batalyionu_sch_oleksandr_pisarenko_mi_zaraz_budemo_mati_kolosalnu_prob_lemu_z_byitsyami_yak (accessed: 8 February 2018).

that he had convinced Kaida and Lopachak to serve in spite of Ukraine's counterintelligence opposition to their service due to the risk that an MP might end up as a captive of Russia⁷³.

Another 2012–2014 Svoboda MP who fought in the Donbas within the Sich battalion was Iurii Syrotiuk⁷⁴. Syrotiuk was briefly arrested on September 11, 2015 for participation in the mass protests near the Ukrainian parliament that happened on August, 31 of that year⁷⁵. Together with other former Svoboda MPs – Eduard Leonov, Ihor Sabii, and Ihor Shvaika – Syrotiuk was suspected of organising this unrest⁷⁶. During this event, a young Sich soldier (but, allegedly, not a Svoboda member), Ihor Humeniuk, threw a hand grenade at a group of police officers resulting in 141 wounded and 3 killed⁷⁷. Serhii Krainiak, a Svoboda activist, was suspected of assisting Humeniuk by setting up a smokescreen⁷⁸. Arsen Avakov, Minister of the Interior, accused Svoboda of having consciously planned this attack⁷⁹.

Natsional'nyi korpus (National Corps)

The Azov Battalion was founded as a police special forces battalion on May 5, 2014, reorganised as a regiment on September 17, 2014⁸⁰, and, on November 11, 2014, made, by an order of the Minister of the Interior, part of the National Guard of Ukraine⁸¹. When asked about the Azov Regiment and the far-right activists serving in the National Guard unit, Arsen Avakov replied: “Is it better when the right radicals are out on the streets, crushing shop windows? Or when they feel responsibility and fight for it for some time?”⁸². He and Serhii Taruta, an oligarch who served as the Donetsk oblast' governor in 2014 and later founded his own party called *Osnova*

⁷³ Ruslan Koshulyns'kyi, “Rosiiis'koiiu movoiu vidrizaiut' vukha, nosy, henitalii, katuiut' tvoikh druživ. Khocha b zarady tsioho: vidiidy vid nei!”, *Censor.net.ua*, 19 December 2016, https://ua.censor.net.ua/resonance/419675/ruslan_koshulynskyyi_rosiyiskoyu_movoyu_vidrizayut_vuha_nosy_genitaliyi_katuyut_tvoyih_druziv_hocha (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁷⁴ “Svobodivtsi na viini: eks-vitse-spiker, deputaty ta Tiahnybok”, *Holos Svobody*, 26 June 2015, <http://holos.fm/page/svobodivci-na-vijni-vice-spiker-deputati-ta-tjagnibok> (accessed: 8 February 2018).

⁷⁵ “Sud zareshtuvav svobodivtsia Syrotiuka”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 11 September 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/09/11/7081012/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁷⁶ S. Khomenko, “Richnytsia vybukhiv 31 serpnia: shcho my znaemo?” *BBC Ukraina*, 31 August 2016, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/08/160831_31aug_anniversary_sx (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁷⁷ “Hranatu kynuv ‘svobodivets’ iz batal’ionu ‘Sich’ – Avakov”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 31 August 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/08/31/7079662/> (accessed: 9 February 2018); “Pid Radoiu pom’ianuly zahyblykh vid boiovoi hranaty rik tomu hvardiitsiv”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 31 August 2018, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/08/31/7119174/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁷⁸ “Shche odnoho kam’ianchanyna Serhii Krainiaka pidozriuiut’ v orhanizatsii biini pid Radoiu. Khlopets pid areshptom”, *20 khvylyn*, 3 September 2015, <https://kp.20minut.ua/Podii/sche-odnogo-kamyanchanina-sergiya-kraynyaka-pidozryuyut-v-organizatsiy-10459963.html> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁷⁹ “Pid Radoiu pom’ianuly zahyblykh vid boiovoi hranaty rik tomu hvardiitsiv”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 31 August 2018, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/08/31/7119174/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸⁰ “Komandyr polku ‘Azov’ Andrii Bilets'kyi: Ti, khto prolyvaie krov za Ukrainu, povynni maty svii holos u vladi”, *UNIAN*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/994779-komandir-polku-azov-andriy-biletskiy-ti-hto-prolyvae-krov-za-ukrajinu-povinni-mati-svii-golos-u-vladi.html> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸¹ “Avakov: Poroshenko ne rozpuzkav batal’iony”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 11 November 2014, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/11/11/7043879/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸² Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 431.

(Foundation)⁸³, had provided the initial funding for Azov. They claim to have provided the material support for its first and legendary military operation, the liberation of Mariupol' in the summer of 2014⁸⁴.

While many commentators emphasise the right-wing extremist party-political background of the Azov Battalion⁸⁵, MP and Azov affiliate Oleh Petrenko, once a football fan club activist from Cherkassy and short-term Right Sector member, has claimed that 50% of the early Azov fighters came out of the ultras movement from all over Ukraine⁸⁶. The related *Tsyvil'nyi korpus "Azov"* (Azov Civil Corps) comprised Azov veterans and other nationalist activists, raised financial and material support for the frontlines, recruited fighters for the Azov regiment, provided, in its own words, "truthful and timely" information about developments in the Donbas, and "created a patriotic environment" via "unification of supporters around the national idea"⁸⁷. Azov commander Andrii Bilets'kyi has described this structure, "one of the most extended networks of activists in Ukraine", as the backbone of the National Corps party⁸⁸.

On October 14, 2016, the Azov Civic Corps, during a meeting, adopted the decision to start a new explicitly political project, the National Corps. Rather than legally creating a new party, two already-existing organisations, the *Hromadians'kyi rukh "Chesni Spravy"* (Civic Movement "Fair Action") and "*Patriot Ukrainy*" ("Patriot of Ukraine"), founded in 2005, were merged and renamed⁸⁹. After the Statesman Initiative of Iarosh, created as a result of a split within the Right Sector, the National Corps became the second relevant rightist party launched after the start of, and as a more or less direct result of, the Donbas conflict. While representatives of all right-wing parties attempt to gain political capital by referring to their affiliated military units, the National Corps is a party that dwells even more than its competitors on that particular political capital. Its date of creation alluded both to the Orthodox holiday of Pokrova (Protection of the Mother of God), and to the date of the creation of the nationalistic Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1942.

The above-mentioned Andrii Bilets'kyi, head of the Azov regiment, was also appointed leader of the National Corps⁹⁰. Before 2014, he had made racist statement and been known by the nickname "White Leader"⁹¹. The Azov battalion and later regiment has been using stylised,

⁸³ "V chem osnova partii Taruti", *Kommentarii.ua*, 24 October 2017, <https://comments.ua/politics/599224-v-osnova-partii-taruti.html> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸⁴ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 356.

⁸⁵ E.g. Gorbach & Petik, "Azovskii shliakh".

⁸⁶ Interview with Oleh Petrenko, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

⁸⁷ *Tsyvil'nyi korpus "Azov"*, <http://www.volunteer.org.ua/about/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸⁸ "Esli by kto-to nazval menia Belym vozhdem, byl by on bit, - Andrei Biletskii", *Focus*, 4 October 2016, <https://focus.ua/country/358170/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁸⁹ "Azov' stvoriv partiiu: khoche vidnovlennia iadernoho potentsialu ta lehalizatsii vohnepal'noi zbroi", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 14 October 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/10/14/7123637/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Andreas Umland, "Dobrovolcheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniia v postmaidannoii Ukrainie", *Politychna Krytyka*, 15 March 2016, <http://ukraine.politicalcritique.org/2016/03/dobrovolcheskie-vooruzhyonnye-formirovaniya-i-radikalnyj-natsionalizm-v-poslemajdanov-ukraine/> (accessed: 9 February 2018); Oleksiy Kuzmenko, "Ukrainian Far-Right Fighters, White Supremacists Trained by Major European Security Firm", *Bellingcat*, 30 August 2018, www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-

coded neo-Nazi symbols reminiscent of the Black Sun and Wolf's Hook, yet publicly denied that they refer to German fascism⁹². During the last years, Bilets'kyi has repeatedly denied making various earlier biologically racist statements ascribed to him, and even claimed that "if somebody had called me 'White Leader' face-to-face, [that person] would have been beaten". Bilets'kyi still publicly opposes multiculturalism, but admits that "to be a Ukrainian nationalist today is to believe in values, not racial prejudice", and his new party does not use an ethnic criterion to define who can and cannot be part of the Ukrainian nation⁹³. Nationalist Corps activist Stepan Baida claimed that the "Patriot of Ukraine", the Khar'kiv groupuscule out of which Azov emerged, had initially been Russian-speaking⁹⁴.

In October 2014, Bilets'kyi became an MP from a SMD in the high-brow Obolon' district of the city of Kyiv. Initially, he had been scheduled to run as an official Popular Front (see below) candidate. However, an initiative group of experts on the far-right sent a letter to Arsenii Iatseniuk, leader of the Popular Front, asking the then Prime Minister not to nominate Bilets'kyi from that party⁹⁵. As a result, Bilets'kyi ran as a formally independent candidate, with only informal support of Iatseniuk's party. His electoral success was a function of his fame as a capable military commander, and agreed-upon representative of the pro-Euromaidan forces, in this SMD. His right-wing extremist past was not yet widely known in Ukraine in 2014⁹⁶. Stepan Holovko, spokesman for both the Azov regiment and the Social-National Assembly, in contrast to Bilets'kyi, ran as an official Popular Front candidate in a SMD, but he was not successful⁹⁷.

For a while, the formal head of the Azov Civil Corps was the well-known politician Roman Zvarych – an immigrant to Ukraine from the US, member of the North American Ukrainian diaspora, activist for the Bandera-wing of the OUN, one-time pupil of Yaroslav Stets'ko, deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, and two-time former Minister of Justice of Ukraine. Zvarych joined Azov in June 2014, and played, until his departure in autumn 2015, some role in the formation and education of the Azov battalion, regiment and movement, with regard to both military and political affairs. In the proportional part of the 2014 parliamentary elections, Zvarych had been candidate no. 82, for the Petro Poroshenko Bloc (BPP, see below), but did not enter parliament,

europe/2018/08/30/ukrainian-far-right-fighters-white-supremacists-trained-major-european-security-firm/ (accessed: 31 August 2018).

⁹² "Pro Azov", *Azov.Press*, 8 December 2015, <http://azov.press/ukr/pro-azov> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁹³ Andrei Biletskii, "Esli by kto-to nazval menia Belym vozhdem, byl by on bit", *Fokus*, 4 October 2016, <https://focus.ua/country/358170/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

⁹⁴ Interview of Andreas Heinemann-Grüder with Stepan Baida, Kyiv, 12 January 2017.

⁹⁵ "Eksperty prizvali Iatseniuka ne vydvigat' kombata 'Azova' kandidatom v nardepy", *Obozrevatel'*, 15 September 2014, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/01652-ekspertyi-prizyvayut-yatsenyuka-ne-vyidvigat-kombata-azova-kandidatom-v-nardepyi.htm> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

⁹⁶ N. Verner, "Komandir 'Azova' idet v narodnye deputaty", *LB.ua*, 23 September 2014, http://lb.ua/society/2014/09/23/280282_kombat_azova_podal_dokumenti.html (accessed: 10 February 2018).

⁹⁷ "Vidomosti pro kandydata v narodni deputaty Ukrainy. Holovko Stepan Serhiiiovych", *Tsentral'na vyborcha komisiia*, <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/WP407?PT001F01=910&pf7201=9093> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

as he was too low on the BPP's list. Only in April 2018, long after he had left Azov, he became an MP replacing a BPP deputy who had been nominated to become a government member⁹⁸.

While he never made it to the frontline, Zvarych has claimed that he was critically involved in organising combat training for Azov fighters, by Georgian, American, Lithuanian, as well as British instructors, and to have advised Azov to refrain from using symbols and ideas that could be linked to Nazism⁹⁹. As Zvarych had left Azov before the National Corps party was created, Bilets'kyi denied that Zvarych played any role in the emergence of the new party¹⁰⁰. After his engagement with Azov, Zvarych started to criticise in public the political program of the National Corps¹⁰¹.

Non-Parliamentary and Emergent Parties

Politychna partiia "Hromadians'ka pozytsiia" (Political Party "Civic Position")

Civic Position describes itself as a centre-right. Its party leader is former Minister of Defense (2005–2007) Anatolii Hrytsenko who took part in the 2014 parliamentary elections in an alliance with *Demokratychnyi al'ians* (Democratic Alliance). Together, they won 3.1% of the vote, thus missing the 5% barrier¹⁰². While Hrytsenko is a colonel and received military education in Ukraine and the United States, he did not participate in the ATO. Instead, from the start of the Donbas conflict, Hrytsenko criticised the Ukrainian government for poor decision-making and accused it of "treason"¹⁰³.

The only IAG member on the party's electoral list was Oleksandr Kraliuk, head of Civic Position's Volyns'ka oblast section and an Aidar battalion fighter¹⁰⁴. Reportedly, Civic Position, on several occasions, provided material support to IAGs, namely to the "*Sviata Mariia*" ("Saint Mary") and "Donbas" battalions¹⁰⁵. The leader of the allied Democratic Alliance, Vasyl Hats'ko, declared

⁹⁸ "Roman Zvarych sklav prysiahu narodnoho deputata", *Ukrinform*, 17 April 2018, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2443118-roman-zvaric-sklav-prisagu-narodnogo-deputata.html> (accessed: 31 October 2018).

⁹⁹ Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018.

¹⁰⁰ I. Iavir, "Partiia dlia 'Azovu'", *Politychna Krytyka*, 11 October 2016, <http://ukraine.politicalcritique.org/2016/10/11/partiya-dlya-azovu/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

¹⁰¹ "Tak sim'ia Zvarychiv peretvorila "volonterstvo" na simeinyi biznes", *Antikor*, 1 March 2017, https://antikor.com.ua/articles/154573-jak_simja_zvarichiv_peretvorila_volonterstvo_na_simejnyj_biznes (accessed: 9 February 2018).

¹⁰² In late 2017, according to the above-mentioned DI poll, 0.3% of the voters supported the Democratic Alliance, while the Civic Position, according to the KIIS and DI polls, was then supported by 7.4–8.8% of the population. "Hromads'ka dumka"; "Reitynh pidtrymky partii".

¹⁰³ "Hrytsenko: tse niiaka ne ATO – tse derzhavna zrada!" *Presa Ukrainy*, 29 April 2014, <http://uapress.info/uk/news/show/23146> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹⁰⁴ "Hromadians'ka pozytsiia Hrytsenka: persha 20-ka spysku", *Slovo i Dilo*, 7 October 2014, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/articles/5137/2014-10-07/grazhdanskaya-poziciya-gricenکو-pervaya-20-ka-spiska.html> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Hromadians'ka pozytsiia – L'vivs'ka oblast', "Viis'kovi podiakovaly l'vivs'kym aktyvistam 'Hromadians'koi pozytsii' za dopomohu", *Facebook*, 14 July 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/GP.Lviv.Obl/posts/1498523790439635> (accessed: 10 February 2018); "Viis'kovym peredano novi topografichni karty vid 'Hromadians'koi pozytsii'", *Anatolii Hrytsenko*, 21 August 2014,

that he planned to participate in the Donbas conflict. Although he passed military drills with the “Kyiv-1” battalion, Hats’ko ultimately did not become a soldier¹⁰⁶.

Ukrains’ke ob’iednannia patriotiv (Ukrainian Union of Patriots, UkrOP)

The history of the UkrOP party is closely linked to Ukraine’s IAGs of 2014, as several UkrOP-related politicians, activists and businesspeople were in one way or another involved with the armed volunteer movement¹⁰⁷. The party was registered with Ukraine’s Ministry of Justice in June 2015. Like Civic Position, it describes itself as “centre-right”¹⁰⁸. The party’s pre-history started with the creation, on 2 December 2014, of the Verkhovna Rada’s inter-factional UkrOP group that included the independent MPs Borys Filatov, Dmytro Iarosh, Boryslav Bereza, Andrii Bilets’kyi and Volodymyr Parasiuk¹⁰⁹ – the latter four formerly or currently linked to radically nationalist political organisations (Right Sector, SNA-PU, UNA-UNSO, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists) and earlier irregular armed groups (DUK, Azov, Dnipro-1)¹¹⁰.

The subsequent creation of the party with the name UkrOP is alleged to have been, above all, a brain-child of the above-mentioned oligarch Ihor Kolomois’kyi. Initially, Borys Filatov and Hennadii Korban, former business partners of Kolomois’kyi, posed as the party’s leaders. However, after a conflict with Kolomois’kii, the latter took over the informal leadership of the party¹¹¹.

The party name’s abbreviation, *ukrop*, means dill – a picture of which is also on the party’s coat of arms. The term had initially been used, by Russian Ukrainophobes, as a derogatory term for Ukrainian soldiers in the Donbas. Yet, the term was soon adopted by Ukrainians as an expression of pride. Military chevrons with a dill symbol, authored by Andrii Ermolenko, became popular among ATO fighters. When later the UkrOP party appropriated this already-established symbol without the author’s consent, this caused a scandal¹¹².

<http://grytsenko.com.ua/news/view-viys-kovym-peredano-novi-topografichni-karty-vid-hromadjans-koji-pozytsiji.html> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹⁰⁶ A.Rinhis, “Hats’ko ta ioho komanda: DemAl’ians 2.0”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 26 July 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/07/26/7115976/> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹⁰⁷ In late 2017, the electoral support of UkrOP, according to the December polls, was difficult to determine as two major polls reported diverging percentages: 0.8% (DI) and 3.7% (KIIS). “Hromads’ka dumka”; “Reitynh pidtrymky partii”.

¹⁰⁸ “U Zhytomyri nardep Kuprii rozpoviv pro ideolohiiu partii ‘UKROP’ ta predstavyv holovy ii oblasnoho osередku”, *Zhytomyr.info*, 30 July 2015, http://www.zhitomir.info/news_149270.html (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Volodymyr Parasiuk, Kyiv, 18 January 2018.

¹¹⁰ “Min’iust zarestruvav partiiu Kolomois’koho”, *Korrespondent*, 18 June 2015, <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/3529272-minuist-zareiestruvav-partiui-kolomoiskoho> (accessed: 10 February 2018). It might be worth adding that former Right Sector spokesman Boryslav Iukhimovych Bliakher-Bereza is a practicing Jew. Vladislav Davidzon, “Right-wing Ukrainian leader is (surprise) Jewish, and (real surprise) proud of it”, *Tablet*, 1 December 2014, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/187217/borislav-bereza> (accessed: 14 November 2018).

¹¹¹ D.Kachura, “Pochemu Filatov ob’iavil voinu Kolomoiskomu”, *Depo.ua*, 20 October 2016,

<http://www.depo.ua/rus/politics/chomu-filatov-ogolosiv-vynnu-kolomoyskomu-20102016190000> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹¹² S.Dorosh, “Sheho khovaiet’sia za UKROPom”, *BBC Ukraina*, 24 June 2015,

http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/06/150624_ukrop_new_party_sd (accessed: 10 February 2018).

In the October–November 2015 local and regional elections, UkrOP was the fourth most successful party, and, country-wide, gathered 7.43% of the total vote¹¹³. The party’s nominees for these elections included a number of former IAG members or supporters. Mykola Kolesnyk, UkrOP’s candidate for the mayor of Kryvyi Rih, was also a “curator” of the “Kryvbas” volunteer battalion¹¹⁴. Ievhen Terekhov, UkrOP’s candidate for the mayor of Pavlohrad, fought in the 20th Motorized Infantry Battalion of the 93rd Brigade, the former “Dnipropetrovs’k” territorial defence battalion¹¹⁵. Ihor Il’kiv, commander of the *Medychna rota imeni Pyrohova* (Pyrohov Paramedics Company), became a L’viv Oblast Council MP¹¹⁶.

UkrOP maintained relations with the Right Sector – one connection being Dmytro Iarosh’s personal acquaintance with Korban and Filatov¹¹⁷. Jewish oligarch and UkrOP’s creator Kolomois’kyi is alleged to have not only supported the creation of the Right Sector’s DUK¹¹⁸, he has reportedly also participated in, i.e. co-financed, the creation of other originally irregular armed groups, including the Dnipro-1 and Dnipro-2 volunteer battalions, two territorial defence units, the Donbas battalion¹¹⁹, as well as, in their early phases, the infamous Shakhtars’k and Azov battalions¹²⁰.

Says Volodymyr Parasiuk, a prominent Maidan activist who later served in Dnipro-1:

“I remember who protected Ukraine in 2014. It is unpopular to praise them, but still, this was a team – Kolomois’kyi, Korban, Filatov [i.e. the later UKROP founders], and those around them (...). All of the volunteer battalions formed in the Dnipropetrovs’k oblast, there was a decent [military training] base, shooting ranges, they were the first to give out weapons”¹²¹.

¹¹³ “Na mistsevykh vyborakh pokrashchyly rezul’tat til’ky krytyky vlady”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 9 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

¹¹⁴ “UKROP vysuvaie u mery Kryvoho Rohu kuratora batal’ionu “Kryvbas”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 26 February 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/02/26/7100411/> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹¹⁵ “Kandydat v mery Pavlohrada ot ‘Ukropa’ popal v DTP”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 8 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/11/8/7087937/> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹¹⁶ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 485.

¹¹⁷ “Zhyvi, boris’ i liubi’: Korban i Filatov trogatel’no pozdravili Iarosha s dnem rozhdeniia”, *Obozrevatel’*, 30 September 2016, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/92534-zhivi-boris-i-lyubi-korban-i-filatov-trogatelno-pozdravili-yarosha-s-dnem-rozhdeniya.htm> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹¹⁸ D.Bukovskii, “Pochemu Kolomoiskii zakryl ‘Pravyi Sektor’”, *Delovaia Stolitsa*, 11 November 2015, <http://www.dsnews.ua/politics/pochemu-kolomoyskiy-zakryl-pravyi-sektor-1112015170000> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹¹⁹ I.Zhegulev, “Privattank: milliarder Kolomoiskii vedet chastnuiu voinu za iedinstvo Ukrainy”, *Forbes*, 27 May 2014, <http://www.forbes.ru/sobytiya/obshchestvo/258279-privattank-milliarder-kolomoiskii-vedet-chastnuyu-voinu-za-edinstvo-ukra> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹²⁰ “Kolomois’kyi cherez Liashka prypynyv finansuvannia batal’ioniv ‘Shakhtars’k’ ta ‘Azov’”, *Rivnens’ki Novyny*, 2 August 2014, <http://rivnenews.com.ua/index.php/2011-10-13-10-01-08/4579-kolomoiskyi-cherez-liashka-prypynyv-finansuvannia-batalioniv-shakhtarsk-ta-azov> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹²¹ Nataliia Skorychuk, “Molodi ta zukhvali. Parasiuk ta ioho pryntsypp”, *Glavcom*, 8 April 2017, <http://glavcom.ua/interviews/molodi-ta-zuhvali-parasyuk-ta-yogo-principi-407859.html> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

Evhen Hendin, a Ukrainian comedian who became a reputed volunteer, reports that “people were protected when [Kolomois’kyi], [Korban], Filatov were around”. However, “Kolomois’kyi spent little time here. Korban was actually managing”¹²².

Filatov reports that, as:

“[fighters of the first volunteer units] were registered as simple policemen [...], their salaries were laughable, so the financing was backed by then-governor Kolomois’kyi, me and others from our team. From food rations to uniforms, we bought everything with our own money [...]. If the Russian world came here, we would’ve lost everything. Not only businesses and comfortable life, we would’ve lost our homeland”¹²³.

Sviatoslav Oliinyk, Kolomois’kyi’s deputy in the oblast’ administration, claimed that Kolomois’kyi and Filatov both “understood that it is a temporary engagement [in local governance] (...) but the situation required universal mobilisation. Some were mobilised to the battalions, some, like us, to the administration”¹²⁴. Iurii Bereza, Dnipro-1 commander, claimed that from October 2014, Filatov and his team stopped helping the volunteer battalions, and that Korban expected to use Dnipro-1 as a unit for private needs. He also claims that while Kolomois’kyi is related to the creation of Dnipro-1, “[it] never had owners”¹²⁵.

Other Non-Parliamentary Party Projects

The remaining relatively significant parties which, like the far-right parties, failed to enter the parliament in 2014 – the Communist Party of Ukraine and *Syl’na Ukraina* (Strong Ukraine) – seem to not have had any connections to the volunteer battalions that are worth mentioning. Neither did the minor regional parties *Vidrodzhennia* (Rebirth), *Nash Krai* (Our Land) or *Za Zhyttia* (For Life). Together with the 2014–2019 parliamentary Opposition Bloc, which also did not appear to have had any such connections, they are considered to be relatively pro-Russian in today’s Ukraine. Aside from the Communist Party of Ukraine, they all originated from the Party of Regions. The agrarian party *Zastup* (Spade) which also failed to pass the threshold in 2014 seems to also not have any significant ties to IAGs.

For some time, the new *Rukh Novykh Syl Mikhaïla Saakashvili* (Mikheil Saakashvili’s Movement of New Forces) looked like an emerging party with some prospect¹²⁶. It was headed by former Odessa governor and ex-president of Georgia, Saakashvili, as well as by former deputy general

¹²² Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 219.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 101, 228.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹²⁵ “Deputat-kombat Iurii Bereza: Na mistsi Heleteia ia b zastrelivsia pislia Ilovais’ka”, *Glavkom*, 24 April 2015, <http://glavkom.ua/interviews/129391-deputat-kombat-jurij-bereza-na-mistsii-geleteja-ja-b-zastrelivsjia-pislja-ilovajska.html> (accessed: 10 February 2018); Iurii Bereza, “Ia khotiv by, shchob viina zakinchylasia, todi ia povernusia v sils’ke hospodarstvo”, *112.ua*, 7 July 2016, <https://ua.112.ua/interview/ya-khotiv-by-shchob-viina-zakinchylasia-todi-ia-povernusia-v-silske-hospodarstvo-323309.html> (accessed: 10 February 2018).

¹²⁶ “Min’iust zareiestruvav novu nazvu partii Saakashvili”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 21 July 2017, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/07/21/7150168/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

prosecutors Davit Sakvarelidze and Vitalii Kas'ko¹²⁷. Among the Saakashvili regional teams, one ATO combatant – Serhiy Sichevs'kyi in the Chernivtsi oblast – as well as some volunteers are mentioned¹²⁸.

Parties with Factions in the 2014–2019 Supreme Council

Vseukrains'ke ob'ednannia "Bat'kivshchyna" (All-Ukrainian Union "Fatherland")

The most prominent temporary link between the Fatherland party headed by Luliia Tymoshenko and the volunteer battalions was the one-time prisoner of war Nadiia Savchenko. Savchenko led *Bat'kivshchyna's* electoral list for the October 2014 parliamentary elections, in which the party received 5.7%. The party more than doubled this support to 12% in the 2015 local elections¹²⁹. Savchenko, a former volunteer for the infamous Aidar battalion¹³⁰ had been captured in Eastern Ukraine and tried in Russia. Until her release in 2016, she was therefore treated like a hero.

Savchenko's number one spot was meant to demonstrate *Bat'kivshchyna's* patriotism and exploited the female POW's then high popularity. In May 2016, Russia released Savchenko, who took up her mandate in the Verkhovna Rada. In December 2016 – or, as her sister claims, as early as in October of that year – Savchenko, however, left the *Bat'kivshchyna* faction. She participated in controversial unofficial negotiations with leaders of the unrecognised "people's republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk, and did so without her party's approval¹³¹. She subsequently started her own party, *Hromadians'ko-politychna platforma Nadii Savchenko* (Nadiia Savchenko's Civic-Political Platform)¹³², became involved in a bizarre terrorist plot to blow up Ukraine's parliament, and was arrested.

¹²⁷ 2016 polls showed that its electoral support then stood between 4.1% and 4.7%. See: "Elektoral'ni nastroi naseleennia shchodo vyboriv Verkhovnoi Rady ta prezidenta Ukrainy, hruden' 2016", *Kyivs'kyi mizhnarodnyi instytut sotsiologii*, 19 December 2016, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=667&page=1> (accessed: 10 February 2018); "2016-i: politychni pidsumky", *Demokratychni initsiatyvy*, <http://dif.org.ua/uploads/pdf/13816462815863c78c6b27d3.47743328.pdf>, p. 7 (accessed: 10 February 2018). By late 2017, the party support had dropped to 1.2% (KIIS) – 1.7% (DI). "Hromads'ka dumka"; "Reitynh pidtrymky partii".

¹²⁸ "RNS", *Rukh Novykh Syl*, <https://old.rns.org.ua/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹²⁹ "Na mistsevykh vyborakh pokrashchyly rezul'tat til'ky krytyky vlady", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 9 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/> (accessed: 9 February 2018). In late 2017, *Bat'kivshchyna* was enjoying the highest rating of support for any party in Ukraine, with 12.1% according to DI and 17.2% according to KIIS. "Hromads'ka dumka"; "Reitynh pidtrymky partii".

¹³⁰ "U Rosii Savchenko zareshchuvai do kintsia lita", *BBC Ukraina*, 9 July 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/politics/2014/07/140709_savchenko_update_arrest_dt.shtml (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³¹ "Sestra Savchenko kazhe, shcho Nadiia vyishla z "Bat'kivshchyny" shche v zhovtni", *Espresso.tv*, 13 December 2016, http://espresso.tv/news/2016/12/13/sestra_savchenko_kazhe_scho_nadiya_vyishla_z_quotbatkivshchynyquot_sche_v_zhovtni (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³² "Min'iust zareiestruvav partiiu Savchenko", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 19 July 2017, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/07/19/7150044/> (accessed: 13 February 2018). According to the mentioned DI poll, it was supported by 0.7% of the voters in late 2017. See "Hromads'ka dumka".

The number three on *Bat'kivshchyna's* electoral list for the 2014 parliamentary elections, Ihor Lutsenko, a political activist, was also temporarily an ATO fighter as a member of the Azov battalion¹³³. In 2015, Volodymyr Katruk, commander of the Ternopil' volunteer battalion, participated in the elections to the Ternopil' city council on the list of *Bat'kivshchyna*¹³⁴. Semen Salatenko, a former Dnipro-1 fighter, served for a while as head of the Sumy Oblast Council, representing *Bat'kivshchyna*, but resigned after a scandal and returned to the ATO zone¹³⁵.

On April 30, 2014, Tymoshenko called for citizens of Ukraine to participate in the “protection of the Ukrainian borders against the Russian aggressor” by way of creating and joining territorial defence battalions. In May, answering this call, two such battalions – *Bat'kivshchyna* and *Rukh Oporu* (Resistance Movement) – were created, with the support from the party, in the Kirovohrads'ka oblast. While being volunteer battalions, they were, from the start of their actions, part of the Ministry of Defense structure, and thus not classical IAGs. In November of 2014, these two battalions, together with another territorial defence battalion formed in the Kirovohrads'ka oblast, were merged into one unit¹³⁶. They have on several occasions received material support from Tymoshenko's party¹³⁷.

Radykal'na Partiiia Oleha Liashka (Oleh Liashko's Radical Party)

The flamboyant nationalist and populist Oleh Liashko played, throughout 2014, a special role within the armed volunteer movement. He was the Ukrainian veteran politician who linked himself most demonstratively to the emerging IAGs. Presenting himself as a “people's candidate”, Liashko sought, in the summer of 2014, to create the public impression that he was himself a frontline fighter for Ukrainian independence. However, it was soon found out that video scenes showing his participation in combat and his interrogating of prisoners of war were staged¹³⁸. He then stopped claiming personal participation in the war. His party nevertheless

¹³³ Ihor Lutsenko, “Pidstvol'nyky dlia Azova”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda Blohy*, 18 August 2014, <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/lutsenko/53f11d4d496c3/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³⁴ “Bat'kivshchyna” vede u mis'kradu kombata batal'ionu ‘Ternopil’”, *Galas*, 1 October 2015, <http://galas.te.ua/2015/10/%D0%B1%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D0%BA%D1%96%D0%B2%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5-%D1%83-%D0%BC%D1%96%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B1/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³⁵ S.Salatenko, “Esli kto-to dumaet, chto eto voina za Donbass i za Krym, to eto ne tak”, - eks-glava Sums'kogo oblsoveta, ushedshyi dobrovol'tsem v ATO, Semen Salatenko”, *Censor.net.ua*, 18 March 2017, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/431956/esli_ktoto_dumaet_chto_eta_voyina_za_donbass_i_za_krym_to_eto_ne_tak_eksglava_sums'kogo_oblsoveta_ushedshiyi (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³⁶ M.Zhyrokhov, “Kirovohrads'kyi batal'ion “Rukh oporu”, *CHELine*, 20 December 2016, <http://chelina.com.ua/news/mens-club/kirovogradskij-bataljon-ruh-oporu-47885> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³⁷ “Batal'ion “Bat'kivshchyna” otrymav cherhovu partiuu dopomohy”, *Iuliia Tymoshenko*, <https://www.tymoshenko.ua/ruh-oporu/bataljon-batkivshchyna-otrymav-cherhovu-partiyu-dopomogy/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹³⁸ “Podvyhy Liashka v zoni ATO vyiavlysia dobre zrezhysovanuiu videopostanovkoiu”, *TSN*, 24 October 2014, <https://tsn.ua/vybory-v-rady2014/podvigi-lyashka-v-zoni-ato-viyavilysya-dobre-zrezhysovanoyu-videopostanovkoyu-384754.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

won 7.4% in the October 2014 parliamentary elections, and 6.7% of the total vote across Ukraine in the 2015 local elections, sharing the fifth-best result with Svoboda¹³⁹.

In the summer of 2014, Liashko cooperated closely with the just-created and still relatively small Azov battalion. The Azov Civic Corps site even maintains that Liashko was one of the battalion's creators¹⁴⁰. In an article for the website of the Azov battalion, the famous right-wing journalist Olena Bilozers'ka acknowledged Liashko's role and stated:

“the Patriot of Ukraine and the Social-National Assembly are the backbone of Azov, but not all battalion fighters are nationalist. Moderates [in the battalion] do not have problems with people who have tattoos of runes or inscriptions such as ‘[I am a] 100% racist’. And, if someone does have such problems, he would not admit that, since in Azov, not least thanks to Oleh Liashko, it is possible to fight. Not all units are so lucky”¹⁴¹.

Liashko is also alleged to have helped in the creation of the *Ukraina* battalion that was later renamed *Shakhtars'k*¹⁴². However, as early as before the October 2014 general elections, Liashko appeared to have lost either interest in, or the support of, *Azov*, and *Shakhtars'k* was disbanded in September 2014¹⁴³. Still, the Radical Party made heavy use of representatives of various IAGs in its public positioning for the October 2014 parliamentary elections, and also included some further activists in one way or another linked to the armed volunteers movement.

The Radical Party's list for the proportional part of the 2014 parliamentary elections included, among others:¹⁴⁴

- Serhii Mel'nychuk, former commander of the Aidar battalion, in position 3,
- Artem Vitko, commander of the Luhansk-1 battalion, in list position 7,
- Ihor Mosiichuk, a former SNA-PU activist and the first press secretary of Azov, in position 9¹⁴⁵,

¹³⁹ “Na mistsevykh vyborakh pokrashchyly rezul'tat til'ky krytyky vlady”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 9 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/> (accessed: 9 February 2018). The KIIS and DI polls of December 2017 differ in their assessment of the Radical Party's support: 6.0%, according to DI, and 10.2%, according to KIIS; as compared to 7.44% won in the 2014 general elections. “Hromads'ka dumka”; “Reitynh pidtrymky partii”.

¹⁴⁰ “Polk ‘Azov’ – polk patrol'noi sluzhby militsii osoblyvoho pryznachennia...”, *Tsyvil'nyi korpus ‘Azov’*, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:F6aZOPtn--gJ:www.volunteer.org.ua/about/azov/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ua> (accessed: 30 October 2018)

¹⁴¹ *Tsyvil'nyi korpus ‘Azov’*, <http://www.volunteer.org.ua/about/> (accessed: 9 February 2018).

¹⁴² A. Filonenko, R. Onishchenko, “Komandiry batal'iona ‘Shakhtersk’: 95% militsii nuzhno uvolit’. Eto vragi”, *Obozrevatel'*, 18 July 2014, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/interview/85209-komandiryi-batalona-shahtersk-95-militsii-nuzhno-uvolit--eto-vragi.htm> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴³ Iu. Vasylenko, “Liashko zalyshyvsia bez batal'ioniv”, *Delovaia Stolitsa*, 12 September 2014, <http://www.dsnews.ua/politics/lyashko-zalishivsya-bez-batalyoniv-12092014143500> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁴ R. Chernyshev, “Liudi i vily. Analiz predvybornogo spiska partii Olega Liashko”, *Liga.Novosti*, 26 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/3416556-lyudi_i_vily_analiz_predvybornogo_spiska_partii_olega_lyashko.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁵ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 360–361. Mosiichuk either left voluntarily or was kicked out of Azov in the summer of 2014. Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018. Mosiichuk was later accused of corruption and had his parliamentary immunity removed, although the court later ruled that this decision was illegal. “Deputat Rady Mosiichuk hotovyi do povtorno

- Andrii Artemenko, affiliated with the Right Sector, in position number 13,
- Oksana Korchyns'ka, wife of Dmytro Korchyns'skyy, head of the ultra-nationalist *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood) Party and St. Mary Battalion¹⁴⁶, in position 19,
- Dmytro Lin'ko, linked to *Bratstvo* and the St. Mary Battalion, as well as, formerly, to the Azov and Shakhtars'k battalions, in position 20,
- Ihor Kryvoruchko, a veteran of the SNA-PU and an "Azov" company commander, in position 23¹⁴⁷.

The most prominent IAG representative on the Radical Party's list, Mel'nychuk, later left the party after a public conflict with Liashko. On December 8, 2016, Luliia Tolopa, a former female Aidar fighter who had fled to Ukraine from Russia, attacked Liashko in the building of the Ukrainian parliament, and spilt tomato juice over him. Tolopa had previously asked Liashko and Mosiichuk several times to help her obtain Ukrainian citizenship but did not manage to receive it. Liashko accused Mel'nychuk, in response to Tolopa's attack, of organising this provocation¹⁴⁸.

Liashko alleged that he had to include Mel'nychuk into the party's 2014 ballot under financial pressure from oligarch and former head of Yanukovych's presidential administration Serhii L'ovochkin. Liashko also claimed that the armed volunteers loyal to Mel'nychuk were functioning as guards to L'ovochkin's private property. He reported that Mel'nychuk had to be expelled from the party because of an earlier protest action when Mel'nychuk, together with other Aidar fighters, tried to set the Ministry of Defense on fire. Mel'nychuk responded that Aidar had to do so to remind the government who had brought them to power, and accused Liashko of political corruption¹⁴⁹.

Ob'ednannia "Samopomich" ("Self-Help" Association)

This party grew out of the Euromaidan movement, promised during the election campaign of 2014 to create a technocratic government¹⁵⁰, won 11% in the October 2014 elections, and

protsedury zniattia nedotorkannosti", *Radio Svoboda*, 9 June 2016, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/27788708.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁶ Marcin Mamon, "The Cross and the Sword: The Making of a Christian Taliban in Ukraine", *The Intercept*, 18 March 2015, <https://theintercept.com/2015/03/18/ukraine-part-3/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁷ Kryvoruchko did not, however, become an MP, but a parliamentary assistant to Lin'ko. Boris Gonta, "Zhyznennyi put' Igoria Krivoruchko: cherez ternii k Liashko", *Bukvy*, 1 October 2015, <https://bykvu.com/mysli/9746-zhiznennyj-put-igorya-krivoruchko-cherez-ternii-k-lyashko> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁸ "Liashko v Rade oblila sokom rossiyanka – eks-boets batal'iona 'Aidar'", *112.ua*, 8 December 2016, <http://112.ua/politika/lyashko-v-rade-oblila-sokom-rossiyanka-boec-batalona-aydar-357995.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018). Further on Tolopa: Halya Coynash, "Russian who defended Ukraine in Donbas driven out to face imprisonment in Russia", *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 5 December 2017, khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1512422913 (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁴⁹ "Oleh Liashko: Vpershe vyznau – pered vyboramy my domovylys' iz Liovochkinym. Inshoho vykhodu prosto ne bulo", *Glavcom*, 9 September 2016, <http://glavcom.ua/interviews/oleg-lyashko-vpershe-viznayu-pered-viborami-mi-domovilis-z-lovochkinim-inshogo-vihodu-prosto-ne-bulo-371621.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018); "Melnychuk z 'Aidaru': u mene e ambitsii het'mana Ukrainy", *BBC Ukraina*, 7 February 2015, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/02/150205_melnychuk_ie_sx (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵⁰ "Uriad tekhnokrativ – meta partii", *24 Kanal*, 29 October 2014, http://24tv.ua/uryad_tekhnokrativ__meta_partiyi__samopomich_n503152 (accessed: 13 February 2018).

attracted, in particular, the middle class vote¹⁵¹. In the local elections of October 2015, the party won 6.3% of the vote and finished seventh, with its support mostly concentrated in Western Ukraine¹⁵². While being closely linked to many activists who went to the ATO, *Samopomich* did not, unlike the ideologically close Radical Party or *Bat'kivshchyna*, found or co-found any IAGs officially tied to the party. The party's Kharkiv branch only provided some material support to the Kharkiv-1 volunteer police battalion which participated in the ATO¹⁵³.

In mid-2014, *Samopomich* also started to develop a special partnership with the "Donbas" battalion. This expressed itself, above all, by the fact that some of "Donbas's" representatives became *Samopomich's* list and direct candidates for the 2014 parliamentary elections. They included "Donbas" commander Semen Semenchenko (real name: Kostiantyn Hryshyn) as number two, and Pavlo Kishkar, head of the battalion's "information war group" as number eleven on the party list¹⁵⁴. Semenchenko reported that "both [the contact with] *Samopomich* and the decision to run emerged two months before the elections"¹⁵⁵.

While not having – unlike Azov or the DUK – an ultra-nationalist background, "Donbas" was one of the more radical and politically engaged IAGs as early as 2014. On November 3, 2014, a "Donbas" battalion fighter, for instance, declared on air that, should Ukraine cede "even a kilometre" of its land to the DNR/LNR, Poroshenko will be overthrown¹⁵⁶. Semenchenko himself is, perhaps, the most shimmering of Ukraine's new politicians coming out of the IAGs. He once served with the Soviet Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol¹⁵⁷. According to Vitaliy Atanasov:

"Semenchenko is accused of making risky decisions at the front, illegal adoption of a military rank and attempting to hide his past [...]. Moreover, [in 2015,] video recordings emerged showing Semenchenko inside the Donetsk regional authority building during its occupation in March 2014"¹⁵⁸.

Nevertheless, Semenchenko was, in late April of 2014, successful in summoning his Donbas volunteer battalion via a simple Facebook announcement that allegedly assembled around 600

¹⁵¹ Bohdan Butkevych, "Chomu Samopomich vtrachaie pozytsii", *Tyzhden*, 30 June 2016, <http://tyzhden.ua/Politics/168506> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵² "Na mistsevykh vyborakh pokrashchyly rezul'tat til'ky krytyky vlady", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 9 November 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/> (accessed: 9 February 2018). According to KIIS and DI, the party's rating, as of December 2017, was at 7.0–7.4%.

¹⁵³ "Batal'ionu 'Kharkiv-1' vid 'Samopomochi'", *Samopomich Kharkiv*, 19 December 2014, <http://kharkiv.samopomich.ua/news/bataljonu-harkiv-1-vid-samopomochi/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵⁴ "Partiia Sadovogo utverdila spisok kandidatov na vybory v Radu", *Liga.Novosti*, 12 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3267517-partiya_sadovogo_utverdila_spisok_kandidatov_na_vybory_v_radu.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Semen Semenchenko, "Ia dlia 90% rodstvennikov – predatel', eto stalo prichinoi smeny familii", *112.ua*, 12 May 2016, <https://112.ua/interview/ya-dlya-90-rodstvennikov--predatel'-eto-stalo-odnoy-iz-prichin-smeny-familii-310896.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵⁶ "Batal'on 'Donbass' vydvinul ul'timatum Poroshenko", *Press Post*, 3 November 2014, <http://press-post.net/batalon-donbass-vidvinul-ultimatum-poroshenko> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Semen Semenchenko, Kyiv, 19 January 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Vitalii Atanasov, "Kryvyi Rih needs an alternative", *Open Democracy*, 23 February 2016, www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/vitalii-atanasov/kryvyi-rih-needs-alternative (accessed: 13 July 2018).

potential fighters on 25 April 2014¹⁵⁹. He settled in Dnipropetrovs'k, where the Donbas battalion established its base.

Having already become a prolific politician, Semenchenko was later involved in an embarrassing episode in the young party's history in Kryvyi Rih. A popular local *Samopomich* activist, Iurii Myloboh, narrowly lost to Iurii Vilkul, the father of a prominent Opposition Bloc politician and companion of Ukraine's richest "oligarch" Rinat Akhmetov, in the second round of mayoral elections of Kryvyi Rih, in November 2015. The party managed to push through a parliamentary decision on a rerun of this election in 2016. However, instead of Myloboh, the party now nominated Semenchenko, who predictably lost. That led to – perhaps unfounded – accusations of a *dogovorniak* (shady deal, fixed game), between *Samopomich* and the Opposition Bloc¹⁶⁰.

On January 18, 2016, Donbas members rallied near the presidential administration, demanding to investigate the lost Ilovais'k battle's circumstances, and prosecute those guilty of the defeat¹⁶¹. On May 3, 2016, Semenchenko coordinated a popular protest against the disbanding of the infamous Tornado battalion, accused of marauding, in Kyiv. On that day, there was a court hearing concerning eight representatives of Tornado who had been detained on suspicion of committing violent crimes, including torture¹⁶². Events such as these were early signs of larger developments. During 2017, Semenchenko, together with Ehor Soboliev, coordinated an unsanctioned economic blockade of the occupied Donbas territories and an anti-Poroshenko protest camp under the parliament¹⁶³.

Semenchenko's actions were a marker of growing division between the post-Euromaidan regime, on the one side, and the volunteer movement, including some remaining IAGs and volunteer units that were integrated into the regular armed forces, but had kept their identities, on the other. In the early days, the post-revolutionary political regime and IAGs had been a largely united force. For instance, on July 4, 2014, when Poroshenko was giving a speech to parliament, the building was guarded by the "Donbas" battalion. The then just emerging IAGs' commander, Semenchenko, explained that "information regarding possible terror attacks was received, [and thus] the sending of some of [the battalion's] companies to the East was temporarily halted [in order to provide protection in Kyiv – K.F./A.U.]"¹⁶⁴. By September 2017,

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Semen Semenchenko, Kyiv, 19 January 2018.

¹⁶⁰ "Partiia Sadovogo utverdila spisok kandidatov na vybory v Radu", *Liga.Novosti*, 12 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3267517-partiya_sadovogo_utverdila_spisok_kandidatov_na_vybory_v_radu.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018). The problem though may also have been Myloboh himself who, for unknown reasons, decided not to run in the repeat elections where he had to then be replaced and the choice fell on Semenchenko. There may simply have been no fully adequate *Samopomich* alternative to Myloboh available.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² "Sprava Tornado: Shcho slid znaty pro novyi skandal", *Korrespondent.net*, 3 August 2016, <http://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/3726408-sprava-tornado-scho-slid-znaty-pro-novyi-skandal> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁶³ Dmytro Vovniako, "'Siomki' vid 'Samopomochi'", *Tverezo.info*, 10 September 2017, <http://tverezo.info/post/22815> (accessed: 13 February 2018); "Saakashvili i Semenchenko ne zbyraiut'sia prypyniaty aktsiiu protestu", *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 19 October 2017, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/10/19/7159017/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁶⁴ "Poroshenko pryshov u VR pid okhoronoiu batal'ionu 'Donbas'", *Ekspres*, 4 July 2014, <http://expres.ua/digest/2014/07/04/108900-poroshenko-pryshov-vr-pid-okhoronoyu-batalyonu-donbas> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

Semenchenko's "Donbas" battalion veterans were, in contrast, protecting Poroshenko's rival, Mikheil Saakashvili, when he, despite not being legally entitled to do so, entered Ukraine¹⁶⁵.

Blok Petra Poroshenka "Solidarnist" (Petro Poroshenko Bloc "Solidarity", BPP)

President Poroshenko's BPP party list for the proportional part of the October 2014 elections did not include any representatives of IAGs and not even any other recent combatants. Poroshenko's Bloc was thus one of those only two major parliamentary parties – the other being the Opposition Bloc – that did not feature prominently serving or demobilised candidates on its list¹⁶⁶. This may have had to do with Poroshenko's intention to position his Bloc as a catch-all party. The purpose of not featuring ATO participants prominently was, perhaps, to avoid controversy over the war record of the fighters and not to alienate Russophile voters in Ukraine's east and south. Also, as indicated above, some of the most prominent volunteer battalions have ties to the unpopular oligarch Kolomois'kyi. Poroshenko may have, as early as in 2014, seen his then ally Kolomois'skyi as a potential rival for political influence in Ukraine.

At the same time, there were several members of the armed and ATO-related civil volunteer movement who were elected, with the help of the Poroshenko Bloc, in SMDs. Thus, Oleh Petrenko – a former football club fan and temporary Right Sector activist in the spring of 2014 – was elected in an SMD, in his native Cherkasy oblast¹⁶⁷. During the Euromaidan, he had been involved in street fighting. In June 2014, Petrenko joined the Azov Civil Corps, and subsequently became close to Bilets'koi. Nevertheless, he was supported by the BPP "Solidarity" party, and became a member of the Poroshenko Bloc's parliamentary faction, while preserving his link to the Azov Regiment and entering the National Corps¹⁶⁸.

Poroshenko's son, Oleksii, claimed to have fought in the ATO as a volunteer, albeit under a pseudonym, for purposes of security, and was elected in a single-member district¹⁶⁹. Andrii Denysenko, who created the "Dnipro-1" battalion¹⁷⁰, was also officially elected as an MP from the BPP in the Dnipropetrovs'k oblast. He later joined the UkrOP group in parliament, but left

¹⁶⁵ "Semenchenko pro povernennia Saakashvili: U L'vovi my ochikuvaly sprob zahostrennia sytuatsii", *ZIK*, 22 September 2017, http://zik.ua/news/2017/09/22/semchenko_pro_povernennya_saakashvili_u_lvovi_my_ochikuvaly_sprob_1172895 (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁶⁶ Petr Shuklinov, "Assorti ot Poroshenko: kto est' kto v spiske prezidentskogo bloka", *Liga.Novosti*, 23 October 2014, http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/3740506-komanda_poroshenko_kto_est_kto_v_spiske_prezidentskogo_bloka.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Oleh Petrenko, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Oleh Petrenko, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

¹⁶⁹ "Syn Poroshenko rasskazal, kak voeval na Donbasse pod chuzhoi familiei", *S'ohodni*, 29 November 2014, <http://www.segodnya.ua/politics/society/syn-poroshenko-rasskazal-kak-voeval-na-donbasse-pod-chuzhoy-familiey-573186.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁰ "Biitsi "Sichi" vykorystovuiut' tabel'nu zbroiu batal'ionu "Dnipro-1" – Denysenko", *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, 23 March 2015, http://dt.ua/UKRAINE/biyci-sichi-vikorystovuyut-tabelnu-zbroyu-batalonu-dnipro-1-denisenko-167672_.html (accessed: 13 February 2018).

this association too in 2016¹⁷¹. Oleksandr Tret'iakov, one of the most influential MPs in the BPP faction, claims to have provided support to Azov, the Right Sector and three territorial units in 2014¹⁷².

Despite accusations that he is “destroying” the volunteer movement in Ukraine¹⁷³, Poroshenko has, on numerous occasions, demonstratively supported and shielded the volunteer battalions. At the 2016 second anniversary of the formation of the National Guard in the Ministry of Interior, Poroshenko, for instance, explicitly praised the first volunteer unit formed in 2014 in Ukraine, the Kulchyts'kyi battalion¹⁷⁴. During certain scandals in connection with IAGs, Poroshenko interfered on behalf of the volunteer units, and, for instance, stopped the imminent disbanding of the Aidar battalion in June 2014¹⁷⁵. In other cases, such as when the Tornado battalion was accused of violent crimes, he kept silent.

Nevertheless, about two years after the victory of the Euromaidan, if not before, relations between the President and volunteers were becoming increasingly sour. On May 20, 2016, Poroshenko, for instance, accused fighters of the Azov battalion who had burned tires and exploded petards during a march in Kyiv, that they had created “a picture [beneficial] for Russian TV”. The Azov veterans’ protest was targeted against possible elections in the Donbas, after Poroshenko had declared his adherence to the Minsk Agreements which prescribe such elections¹⁷⁶. Since then, many volunteer units and their veteran organisations have turned against Poroshenko.

Narodnyi Front (Popular Front)

On April 7, 2014, Oleksandr Turchynov, as then Acting President of Ukraine, started the ATO, by declaring a quasi-war against pro-Russian separatists who were then capturing administrative buildings in Eastern Ukraine¹⁷⁷. During the following months, on numerous occasions,

¹⁷¹ “Denysenko zaiavyv, shcho ide z “Ukropu” cherez pozytsiiu shchodo Novyns'koho”, *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 8 December 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/12/8/7129246/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷² Oleksandr Tret'iakov, “Pry Iushchenkovi buv bezlad, za Ianukovycha – svavillia. S'ohodni treba rozbudovuvaty krainu, pryvodyty ii v poriadok”, *Gazeta.ua*, 26 November 2014, http://gazeta.ua/articles/opinions-journal/_pri-uschenkovi-buv-bezlad-za-anukovycha-svavillya-sogodni-treba-rozbudovuvati-krayinu-privoditi-yiyi-v-poryadok/585362 (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷³ “Dobrovol'chyi rukh Poroshenko abo dyskredytuie, abo znyshchyt, - Parasiuk”, *Informator*, 7 July 2016, <https://informator.news/arhiv2016/?p=227959> (accessed: 13 February 2018); Serhii Ruzhyns'kyi, “Navishcho Petro Poroshenko znyshchuie dobrovol'chi batal'iony?” *iPress.ua*, 21 August 2014, http://ipress.ua/articles/navishcho_petro_poroshenko_znyshchuie_dobrovolchi_bataliony_81076.html (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁴ “Poroshenko pro batal'ion Kul'chyts'koho: My shanuiemo kozhnoho z zhyvykh heroiv i pam'iataiemo tykh, khto ne povernuvsia”, *112.ua*, 16 March 2016, <http://ua.112.ua/suspilstvo/poroshenko-pro-batalion-kulchytskoho-my-shanuiemo-kozhnoho-z-zhyvykh-heroiv-i-pamiataiemo-tykh-khto-ne-povernuvsia-298497.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁵ “Batal'ion “Aidar” isnuvatyme i prodovzhyt' vykonannia svoikh zavdan’”, *S'iohodni*, 24 June 2014, <http://ukr.segodnya.ua/regions/donetsk/batalon-aydar-budet-sushchestvovat-i-prodolzhit-vypolnenie-svoih-zadach-531197.html> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁶ “Poroshenko otvetil na aktsii “Azova””, *Korrespondent.net*, 20 May 2016, <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3685533-poroshenko-otvetyl-na-aktsiy-azova> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁷ “Iaku rol' zihraly dobrovol'tsi v ATO I chy ie maibutnie u batal'ioniv”, *Ukr.Media*, 3 April 2015, <https://ukr.media/ukrain/231997/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

Turchynov spoke highly of the volunteer battalions¹⁷⁸. This previewed the soon to be established particularly close connection between Turchynov's new party, the Popular Front, and Ukraine's armed forces – in particular, the emerging IAGs.

Although the Popular Front only became a functioning organisation in September 2014, i.e. less than two months before the parliamentary elections of 25 October 2014¹⁷⁹, it won the proportional part of these elections with 22.2%. The Popular Front did not, however, even run in the 2015 local elections, as its support had plummeted by then. Since Iatseniuk, the party leader, was Ukraine's Prime-Minister during the deep crisis years of 2014–2016, the voters evidently deemed the party responsible for the socioeconomic collapse of that time.

The Popular Front's October 2014 electoral victory was surprising in view of the fact that the Front's emergence had been somewhat accidental. The party ran only because its leaders, Turchynov and then Prime-Minister Arsenii Yatseniuk, had not been able, in the summer of 2014, to agree with their then allies, Yulia Tymoshenko and Petro Poroshenko, on their and their affiliates' positions on the electoral lists of Tymoshenko's "Fatherland" and BPP for the upcoming parliamentary elections. Thus, Turchynov and Yatseniuk founded a new party sporting a demonstratively militaristic, but not ultra-nationalist self-image, and focussed on issues of national defence as well as state security. The new party quickly carved out a particular political niche of its own. One of the corollaries of this campaign was establishing close links to the armed forces and, in particular, to the recently emerged IAGs¹⁸⁰.

A number of prominent participants of the ATO and figures linked to the armed volunteer movement were placed in high positions of the Popular Front's party list for the proportional part of the elections. Other IAG members were elected with the help of the Popular Front, in single-member districts. The most prominent list candidates among the party's top 25 positions included:

- Andrii Parubii, former Head of the National Security and Defense Council, in position 4,
- Andrii Teteruk, commander of the "Myrotvorets'" (Peacekeeper) battalion, in position 5,
- Arsen Avakov, Minister of Internal Affairs, in position 6,
- Iurii Bereza, commander of the "Dnipro-1" battalion, in position 10,
- Anton Herashchenko, the Interior Ministry's "coordinator of the volunteer battalions"¹⁸¹, in position 21¹⁸².

¹⁷⁸ "Dobrovol'chi batal'iony zaklaly ideolohiiu rozvytku syl'noi patriotychnoi nezaleznoi krainy", - Turchynov na prezentatsii knyhy "Dobrobaty". FOToreportazh", *Censor.net.ua*, 28 January 2017, http://ua.censor.net.ua/photo_news/425325/dobrovolchi_batalyiony_zaklaly_ideologiyu_rozvytku_sylnoyi_patriotychnoyi_nezal_ejnoyi_krayiny_turchynov (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁷⁹ In late 2017, the popular support for the Front stood at 1.6–1.8%. See "Hromads'ka dumka, hruden'-2017"; "Reitynh pidtrymky partii i politychnykh lideriv".

¹⁸⁰ Roman Chernyshev, "Pod prikrytiem kombatov: Narodnyi front opredelilsia so spiskom", *Liga.Novosti*, 14 September 2014, news.liga.net/politics/articles/pod_prikrytiem_kombatov_narodnyy_front_opredelilsya_so_spiskom (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁸¹ "Pozdnii start: Analiz predvybornogo spiska Narodnogo fronta", *Liga.Novosti*, 29 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/3429844-kokteyl_sezona_analiz_predvybornogo_spiska_narodnogo_fronta.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018).

Andrii Parubii, the head of the National Security and Defense council for a brief period in 2014 and then speaker of the Ukrainian parliament from April 2016, is among the most prominent politicians linked to the IAGs. Parubii had been the commander of the Euromaidan's *Samooborona* (self-defence), i.e. the numerous so-called *sotni* (Hundreds) that protected the protesters. He thus stood at the origins of those IAGs that were created out of the *Samoborona* Hundreds, and was personally acquainted with many of the IAG commanders.

In the early 1990s, Parubii had been one of the creators of the above-mentioned Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU), the predecessor organisation of Svoboda¹⁸³. Parubii, however, strayed away from Svoboda in early 2005, and instead joined Viktor Iushchenko's moderately nationalist "*Nasha Ukraina*" (Our Ukraine) party¹⁸⁴. During the 2004 Orange Revolution, he was the commandant of the Ukrainian House – one of the key locations in the Kyiv City Centre controlled by the protesters.

Against the background of his Orange Revolution experience, Parubii became, in late 2013, the commandant of the protesting camp and came to play "one of the key functions in the organisational structure of Euromaidan"¹⁸⁵. After the protesters' victory, he was among those politicians who initiated the incorporation of the Euromaidan's self-defence units into the emerging National Guard structure as volunteers units¹⁸⁶. In the spring of 2014, Parubii ordered the Euromaidan's self-defence units to capture buildings of local authorities in the north of the Luhans'k oblast, in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of separatists¹⁸⁷.

As Minister of Internal Affairs from late February 2014, Avakov also played a crucial role in the formation of the volunteer battalions, and later managed to induce several of them to merge into the National Guard. Herashchenko, an advisor to Avakov, was intimately involved in the communication between the Interior Ministry and emerging IAGs. He, for instance, supported the creation and activities of the infamous "Shakhtars'k" battalion, according to Andrii Filonenko, its commander¹⁸⁸. Herashchenko explained that, before the separatist combatants started to operate heavy weapons, the task of the new volunteer battalions had been merely to "bring order" to the settlements "liberated from the terrorists". They often acted "instead of

¹⁸² The MP Kostiantyn Mateichenko, elected on the Popular Front list's number 26 to the Verkhovna Rada in 2014, was commander of the "Artemovs'k" battalion. Interview of Andreas Heinemann-Grüder with Viktor Chavalan, Kyiv, 13 January 2017.

¹⁸³ "Komendant Rady: khto takyi Andrii Parubii?" *BBC Ukraine*, 14 April 2016, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/04/160414_parubiy_profile_upd_ms_sx (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁸⁴ "Komendant Rady: khto takyi Andrii Parubii?" *BBC Ukraine*, 14 April 2016, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/04/160414_parubiy_profile_upd_ms_sx (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ "Avakov prezentuvav knyhu ta rozpoviv, iak z Parubiiem I Turchynovym orhanizovuvaly debaty", *Depo.ua*, 27 January 2017, <https://dn.depo.ua/ukr/dn/2016/04/avakov-prezentuvav-knygu-ta-rozpoviv-yak-z-parubiyem-i-turchinovim-organizovuvali-dobrobati-20170127508785> (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁸⁷ "Komendant Rady: khto takyi Andrii Parubii?" *BBC Ukraine*, 14 April 2016, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/04/160414_parubiy_profile_upd_ms_sx (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁸⁸ Oleh Karpiak, "Chy stanut' dobrovol'chi batal'iony iadrom novoi armii", *BBC Ukraine*, 6 August 2014, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/08/140805_volunteer_batallions_ko (accessed: 29 August 2018).

the [police] which was corrupted or had defected to the enemy side”¹⁸⁹. He also believes that, after the ATO is concluded, volunteers should be invited to work in the police¹⁹⁰. That was in spite of the fact that he *de facto* expressed himself in support of the sometimes extralegal actions by Kolomoiskyi “and his team” in Dnipropetrovs’ka oblast:

“Many of the methods they used were not legal. This is true. (...) They say that in Dnipropetrovs’k, there were no storming of the oblast’s state administration, unlike in Donetsk, Luhans’k, [and] Kharkiv, because a number of Russian agents, designated by [Russia’s Main Intelligence Directorate] as Hubarevs, Bolotovs and Bezlers in Dnipropetrovs’k, immediately after Kolomoiskyi’s appointment [as the oblast’s governor] were taken away for a walk in the forest, where an explanatory talk was conducted with them regarding the correct way to love Ukraine. And the threat of separatism in *Naddniproshchyna* [the Dnipro river surroundings] was gone”¹⁹¹.

The reserve colonel as well as former UN peacekeeper, Teteruk, was, in the spring of 2014, asked by the Ministry of Interior to form a unit out of former Ukrainian participants of peacekeeping operations. Teteruk reported that interim President Turchinov and Avakov took a special interest in the creation of the “Myrotvorets” battalion (later, regiment) out of military professionals¹⁹². Their close contact since the spring of 2014 apparently facilitated Teteruk’s inclusion into the Popular Front’s electoral list a few months later. Teteruk emphasised that his battalion was an explicitly non-political project¹⁹³.

According to Viktor Chalavan, who coordinated the creation of many volunteer battalions, Kyiv-1, Dnipro-1 and *Zoloti Vorota* (Golden Gate) were among the first such units. During their formation, personalities played a large role, among them the above-mentioned Iurii Bereza and Evhen Deidei, another Popular Front MP¹⁹⁴. They, together with Teteruk, were considered to be in Avakov’s informal influence group within the Popular Front¹⁹⁵. Bereza has, however, denied that his Dnipro-1 battalion is allegiant to Avakov or anyone else except “the people”¹⁹⁶. Teteruk has claimed that, after his election to the Rada, he only participates in honorary events of the Myrotvorets’ and keeps only purely personal contact with fighters he served with¹⁹⁷.

¹⁸⁹ Anton Herashchenko, “Iakby ne dobrovol’chi batal’iony, to liniia rozmezhuvannia s’ohodni bula b des’ po Dnipro”, *Ukrains’ki Natsional’ni Novyny*, 9 November 2014, <https://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1404737-a-gerashchenko-yakbi-nedobrovolchi-batalyoni-to-liniya-rozmezhuvannya-sogodni-bula-b-des-po-dnipro>.

¹⁹⁰ Dmytro Shurkhalo, “Dobrovol’chi batal’iony – mizh viinoiu ta politykoiu”, *Radio Svoboda*, 15 August 2014, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26531775.html> (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁹¹ Anton Herashchenko, *Facebook account*, 25 March 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/anton.gerashchenko.7/posts/832567173496798> (accessed: 29 August 2018).

¹⁹² Interview with Andrii Teteruk, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

¹⁹³ Interview with Andrii Teteruk, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

¹⁹⁴ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 88.

¹⁹⁵ “Orhanizovani Partiini Hrupy-2. P’iat’ stovpiv “Narodnoho frontu”, *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 1 November 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/11/1/7125375/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁹⁶ Hladka *et al.*, *Dobrobaty*, 194.

¹⁹⁷ “Andrii Teteruk: Onyshchenko vytratyv 30 mil’ioniv dolariv, shchob znyshchyty Iatseniuka”, *Narodna Pravda*, 13 September 2017, <https://narodna-pravda.ua/2017/09/13/andrij-teteruk-onyshchenko-vytratyv-30-miljoniv-dolariv-shhob-znyshchyty-yatsenyuka/> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

More 2014–2019 Popular Front MPs came out of the armed volunteer movement. Mykhailo Havryliuk, a Maidan hero with later links to the “Zoloti Vorota” battalion¹⁹⁸ won an SMD seat in the Rada in October 2014, with the support of the Popular Front. As mentioned above, Andrii Bilets’kyi, Azov commander, ran in Kyiv with unofficial support of the Popular Front. Mykhailo Bodnar, elected in the Lviv region in October 2014, had fought in the Kulchyts’kyi battalion¹⁹⁹. Millionaire V’iacheslav Konstantinovs’kyi had volunteered as a fighter in the ATO, within the “Kyiv-centre” rapid response unit of the “Kyiv-1” battalion. Konstantinovs’kyi became famous after he sold his Rolls Royce car and donated the UAH2.5 million he received for it for medical treatment of soldiers injured in the ATO and for purchasing equipment for the units fighting in Donbas²⁰⁰.

Popular Front MP Ihor Lapin, formerly a Maidan activist, had served, before his election, as the commander of the 2nd Company of the Aidar battalion and received several awards for his service. After being elected to the Verkhovna Rada, as per Lapin’s official biography, “visits [the] the ATO [zone] to help our fighters, share skills and experience of conducting [military] operations”²⁰¹. Lapin was subsequently accused of corruption and of forging his military biography, by an investigative journalist²⁰² – the latter an allegation that, in view of various video documentation of Lapin’s service, could be misleading²⁰³.

Conclusions and Elaborations

Our survey indicates various forms of interaction, section and penetration between parties and IAGs in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Several parties, party leaders and MPs took an active part in the creation and development of IAGs in 2014. Some – until then, mostly minor – politicians became soldiers or commanders of IAGs. Later on, there were numerous transitions of formerly non-political IAG members into the party-political realm – either via the joining of older parties or through the creation of new political organisations. We have listed here only a part of the intense back and forth between Ukrainian parties and IAGs as well as their today’s successor units within Ukraine’s regular armed forces.

¹⁹⁸ “Mykhailo Havryliuk: Odnym slovom, v Verkhovnij Radi – bardak. Liudy pryshly ne na robotu, a butsimto v rozvazhal’nyi tsentr”, *Antikor*, 31 March 2015, http://antikor.com.ua/articles/34664-mihajlo_gavriljuk_odnim_slovom_v_verhovnij_radi_-_bardak_ljudi_prijshli_ne_na_robotu_a_butsimto_v_r (accessed: 13 February 2018).

¹⁹⁹ “Mykhailo Bondar”, *Narodnyi Front*, <https://nfront.org.ua/team/member-details/mykhailo-bondar> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

²⁰⁰ V.Konstantinovskii, “Millioner Konstantinovskii: Mesti iz Moskvyy ne boiuis”, *Obozrevatel’*, 28 September 2014, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/interview/96408-millioner-konstantinovskij-mesti-iz-moskvyi-ne-boyus.htm> (accessed: 13 February 2018).

²⁰¹ “Ihor Lapin. Biohrafia. Aidar”, <http://igorlapin.com.ua/aidar.php> (accessed: 29 August 2018).

²⁰² “Heroi-deputat chy vse zh taky samozvanets’ Ihor Lapin? Chastyna III”, *Volyns’ki novyny*, 30 March 2017, <https://www.volynnews.com/news/authority/heroy-deputat-chy-vse-zh-taky-samozvanets-ihor-lapin-chastyna-iii/> (accessed: 29 August 2018).

²⁰³ Interview with Ihor Lapin, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

Most importantly, by late 2014, a number of IAG commanders had become members of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan national parliament. Some of them had already been active in politics before their engagement in the armed volunteer movement. Yet, most made the jump into the Verkhovna Rada, in light of, and often with explicit reference to, their service within an IAG. Certain IAG members – as, for example, the above-mentioned Azov affiliates Kryvoruchko and Holovko – tried, but did not manage to enter the national parliament as deputies. Still other IAG representatives were elected to regional and local representative and executive organs, as a result of their participation in the 2015 *oblasts'* (region) municipal and *hromada* (community) elections – a phenomenon we did not cover here comprehensively.

There was a wave of Ukrainian IAG commanders and related activists entering Ukrainian parliamentary politics in 2014–2015, on the one side, and a notable engagement of political parties with IAGs, on the other. The new people's deputies from the IAGs sometimes became involved in, and sometimes the hatchers of, political infighting within or between those parties with the help of which they had entered the Verkhovna Rada. These and further developments illustrate considerable political ambition on the side of numerous IAG commanders of various levels, and of some activists linked to the armed volunteer movement. In the summer–autumn of 2014, i.e. during the parliamentary election campaign, at least one significant older party and parliamentary faction, namely Liashko's Radical Party, partly reinvented itself, and at least one major new party and parliamentary faction of 2014–2019, the Popular Front, originally invented itself, as political forces whose post-Euromaidan public profiles heavily built on their claims to represent the armed volunteer movement.

Moreover, several minor parties, such as the Right Sector, UkrOP, Statesman Initiative of Iarosh, and National Corps, are – as illustrated above – especially closely connected to the IAGs. The National Corps, in particular, represents the political arm of a more broadly organised movement that also includes the Azov volunteer regiment of the National Guard, the so-called *Natsional'nyi druzhyny* (National Militias, unarmed street guards), the *Ekolohichnyy korpus* (Ecological Corps), and some other subunits. The Right Sector and National Corps may be regarded as belonging, from a comparative perspective, to the class of those “few [irregular armed] organisations whose militant origins remain essential to their identities and platforms as political parties”²⁰⁴.

The multiple transitions of both ultra-nationalist and moderately nationalist IAG commanders to Ukraine's party politics seems to follow patterns earlier observed with regard to IAGs who emerged in very different situations, but had – like in Ukraine in 2014–2015 – achieved *part* of their initial aims. Benjamin Costa observed that “whether [an IAG] was initially founded by a political party” or not was not that important for predicting its further development²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁴ Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 671.

²⁰⁵ Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 672.

“[P]articular outcome goals and ideologies tend not to alter the likelihood of militant transition”²⁰⁶. Rather,

“[c]omplete outcome-goal achievement appears less likely to promote militant transition to party politics than partial success – possibly even reducing the odds of transition. Longstanding political actors establish parties as a new means to achieve an existing political end [...]. When organizations accomplish their goals outright – like organizations that achieve military victories that topple adversarial regimes – much of the organizational incentive to transition evaporates. In contrast, achieving some success, though remaining outmatched or at parity with their adversaries or rivals, might direct organizations to transition in efforts to accomplish the remainder of their outcome goals. As militant organizations that seek transition can use their limited success to convince their constituencies to support a new direction, partial goal achievement may foster transition”²⁰⁷.

In post-Euromaidan Ukraine, a number of IAG members went rather quickly and determinedly through this transition process, after the post-revolutionary Ukrainian state had stabilised, in summer 2014. They did so, as they had succeeded in saving Ukraine from being overrun by Russia-led separatists. Yet, the IAGs had not fully achieved their goal, as the war with Russia continued and continues until today. This partial success promoted, as has happened elsewhere in the world before, militant transition to party politics in Ukraine.

In spite of the – here only partly outlined – resulting continuing and multifarious connections between the armed volunteer movement and post-Euromaidan national as well as local politics, the IAGs *as such* played only a limited or indirect role in shaping political power, actions and decisions in Kyiv. This is in distinction to, for instance, post-war Indonesia where “factional alliances between militias and members of the political elite raised the threat of coups and domestic fragmentation”²⁰⁸. In more general terms, “[t]he loss of the presumed state-held monopoly on violence is commonly identified as a harbinger of anarchy”²⁰⁹. Has that, to any degree, also been the case in post-Euromaidan Ukraine?

As Ilmari Kähkö observed, “[i]n the end the volunteer phenomenon only lasted for about a year, before they were turned from independent militias into state-controlled paramilitary forces. Yet years later, they continue to influence the Ukrainian nation and politics because of their proximity to the nation”²¹⁰. Such background influence has remained present until 2019, and may have materialised, for instance, through various public protest actions of IAG-related political activists. Only occasionally and only with regard to certain policy issues, however, did some IAGs or their veterans, as organised entities of volunteers, exert noticeable impact on

²⁰⁶ Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 675.

²⁰⁷ Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 669.

²⁰⁸ Ahram, *Proxy Warriors*, p. 36.

²⁰⁹ Ahram, *Proxy Warriors*, p. 140.

²¹⁰ Kähkö, “A Nation-in-the-Making, in Arms”, p. 148.

central and local decision-making – above all with regard to Ukraine’s policies vis-à-vis Crimea and the Donbas.

The immediate biographical background of the IAG representatives entering the Verkhovna Rada in October 2014 played an important role for their political image, profile, popularity and rise. Their afterwards doubtlessly continuing links to various some still existing irregular or/and various regular Ukrainian armed formations and their weapons were, however, *not* a readily usable political resource for the new people’s deputies recruited from the armed volunteer movement, or for the parties that had developed close links to this or that volunteer unit. By late 2018, the many post-Euromaidan warnings about the dangerous future role of the IAGs and their successor organisations had not materialised.

In 2016, Malyarenko and Galbreath had concluded their paper on the IAGs – one of the first longer scholarly publications on the topic – with the juxtaposition that “[f]or the pro-Ukrainian paramilitaries, they may prove to be both Ukraine’s saving grace in the war and its greatest threat to national security in the subsequent peace”²¹¹. This was a warning that made sense back then, and was in line with earlier findings from comparative research into the IAGs. One researcher with no connection to Ukraine had, for instance, concluded his broad cross-cultural study, several years before the Donbas War, with the warning that “factional alliances between militias and members of the political elite raised the threat of coups and domestic fragmentation”²¹².

Yet, the Ukrainian paramilitary formations – whatever their particular ideological orientation and degree of political ambition – had, by 2018, not (yet) become such threats. One of the most revolutionary inclined party-IAG alliances, the Right Sector and its DUK, split, as mentioned, in November 2015. Its, by far, most widely known leader, Iarosh, left, with a large group of his followers, both the party and Corps. Iarosh created his own party and volunteer unit whose rhetoric and political stance have been much less anti-systemic than of that of the Right Sector and the DUK.

The Azov Regiment, in turn, had already become a regular part of the National Guard subordinated to the Ministry of Interior in late 2014. It is true that the initial Azov battalion has, between 2014–2018, given birth to a politically prolific and publicly visible movement that includes, among others, a party, a veterans’ organisation and an unarmed militia. The popularity of these organisations builds on, among other things, the real or perceived military victories of Azov. Yet, there has, so far, never been an indication that the (un)civil organisations that sprang out of Azov did or will resort to using the weapons of the eponymous National Guard regiment.

Our above survey indicates, to be sure, that many of the armed volunteer movement’s graduates did not hide their political ambitions, made political careers, and have come to

²¹¹ Malyarenko and Galbreath, “Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine”.

²¹² Ahrām, *Proxy Warriors*, p. 36.

influence Ukrainian political affairs, in one or another way. Yet, the IAGs or their successor volunteer units within the regular forces did not seem to have shaped, to a notable degree, Kyiv's domestic policies, the Ukrainian polity and national-level politics of post-Euromaidan Ukraine, with the exception of decisions taken in relation to the conflict with Russia. Neither in the period of 2014–2015, when the IAGs had been more or less independent, nor afterwards, when most of them were integrated into the troops of the Ministries of Interior or Defense, did the volunteer units as such exert a clearly identifiable and relevant impact on the President's, government's or parliament's decision-making, with regard to – narrowly defined – domestic political matters.

One of the reasons that this did not happen may be that the politicians that came out and were linked to the IAGs acquired, as MPs on various levels or executive officials with different functions, new opportunities to exert political impact, as our survey indicates numerous times. To be sure, the mere existence of the IAGs may have, as a background condition, had some repercussions for these new politicians' social standing, and for the public conduct of the President, government, parliament and parties. Yet, there has so far never been a situation in which a direct threat of a military or para-military group to use its arms, determined a, in the narrow sense, major domestic decision, i.e. principally shaped a course of action, appointment of personnel, or choice between alternative options not directly related to the war with Russia – the latter being a matter where, of course, the IAGs and their regular successor units exerted considerable influence.

Our above survey indicates considerable interpenetration between political parties and IAGs in Kyiv since 2014. Nevertheless, Huseyn Aliyev's recent assertion that the post-Euromaidan volunteer troops are "informal power-holders" in Ukraine is fundamentally misleading, and has no empirical grounding. The power of certain figures once or still linked to the IAGs and their successor units in Ukraine's regular armed forces is due to the political posts that they occupy. It has little or nothing to do with their potential access to firearms and heavy weapons, or to their links to serving soldiers who could use such weaponry within the context of domestic politics²¹³.

One of the structural reasons for the, at least until 2019, relatively low internal political salience of the Ukrainian IAGs regarding issues other than the Donbas conflict itself, as well as for the largely smooth transition of its former commanders to civilian politics, is the *putatively* civil character of the war in Eastern Ukraine²¹⁴. Unlike numerous other paramilitaries around the world over the last few decades, the Ukrainian IAGs emerged within the context of a proxy and hybrid war between two already more or less established states: Russia and Ukraine. Contrary

²¹³ Aliyev, "Bewaffnete Freiwilligenbataillone".

²¹⁴ Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruktion, Invasion: Russlands Krieg in der Ukraine", *Osteuropa*, vol. 64, no. 8 (2014), pp. 3–16; Lawrence Freedman, "Ukraine and the Art of Limited War", *Survival*, vol. 56, no. 6 (2014–2015), pp. 7–38; Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruktion, Invasion: Russia's War in the Donbass", *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2015), pp. 219–250; Oleksandr Zadorozhnyi, "Hybrid War or Civil War? The Interplay of Some Methods of Russian Foreign Policy Propaganda with International Law", *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, no. 2 (2016), pp. 117–128.

to the assertion of some observers²¹⁵, the war in the Donbas was not primarily the result of an internal political rift within one and the same state²¹⁶. The outbreak of the war was, to be sure, shaped by a number of Ukrainian domestic conditions that eased the Kremlin's active meddling in the Donbas more so than in other regions where such attempts – as the so-called Glazyev Tapes documented²¹⁷ – were also made²¹⁸. Yet, the war in the Donets Basin would not have broken out in 2014 without the Russian factor²¹⁹.

As a result of this circumstance, most of the leaders of pro-Ukrainian IAGs found it easy to cooperate with, integrate into, and become parts of, the state – whether by way of transforming their groups into regular armed units or by, as we partly illustrated above, individually transiting to electoral politics. With the partial exception of such units as the DUK and Azov, most of the groups in the Ukrainian armed volunteer movement thus fall into the category of “within-system” organisations.

“Whereas ‘anti-system’ organizations aim to collapse, overthrow, or replace political systems, ‘within-system’ organizations pursue outcome goals that do not fundamentally conflict with the target’s political system. This divide implies that organizations with ‘anti-system’ goals are less likely to transition, as they have little to gain by working with a given political system”²²⁰.

Accordingly, most of the Ukrainian IAGs have been successfully integrated into the troops of the Ministries of Defense and Interior. Only some minor and the most revolutionary inclined of the prominent pro-Ukrainian IAGs, such the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps DUK, have, by 2019, not become a parts of the regular armed forces. The political arm of the DUK, the Right Sector, has – after MP Iarosh’s departure in 2016 – no representation in Ukraine’s governmental system

²¹⁵ Sergiy Kudelia, “Reply to Andreas Umland: The Donbas Insurgency Began At Home”, *PONARS Eurasia*, 8 October 2014, www.ponarseurasia.org/article/reply-andreas-umland-donbas-insurgency-began-home (accessed: 9 September 2018).

²¹⁶ Andreas Umland, “In Defense of Conspirology: A Rejoinder to Serhiy Kudelia’s Anti-Political Analysis of the Hybrid War in Eastern Ukraine”, *PONARS Eurasia*, 30 September 2014, www.ponarseurasia.org/article/defense-conspirology-rejoinder-serhiy-kudelias-anti-political-analysis-hybrid-war-eastern (accessed: 9 September 2018).

²¹⁷ Brian Whitmore, “How To Manufacture A War”, *The Power Vertical*, 26 August 2016, www.rferl.org/a/how-to-manufacture-a-war/27947359.html (accessed: 9 September 2018); Halya Coynash, “Odesa Smoking Gun Leads Directly to Moscow”, *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 20 September 2016, khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1473972066 (accessed: 9 September 2018).

²¹⁸ Sergiy Kudelia, “Domestic Sources of the Donbas Insurgency”, *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memos*, no. 351 (2014), www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/domestic-sources-donbas-insurgency (accessed: 9 September 2018); Ivan Katchanovski, “The Separatist War in Donbas: A Violent Break-up of Ukraine?” *European Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2016), pp. 473–489; Serhiy Kudelia, “The Donbas Rift”, *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2016), pp. 5–27; Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, “War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 34, nos. 2–3 (2018), pp. 139–157; Elise Giuliano, “Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 34, nos. 2–3 (2018), pp. 158–178.

²¹⁹ Nikolai Mitrokhin, “Grubye liudi: kak russkie natsionalisty sprovotsirovali grazhdanskuiu voynu v Ukraine”, *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeskoj istorii i kul'tury*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2014), pp. 53–74; Anton Shekhovtsov, “How Alexander Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianists Geared up for the Russian-Ukrainian War in 2005–2013”, *Euromaidan Press*, 26 January 2016, euromaidanpress.com/2016/01/26/how-alexander-dugins-neo-eurasianists-geared-up-for-the-russian-ukrainian-war-in-2005-2013/ (accessed: 15 September 2018); Andrew Wilson, “The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 4 (2016), pp. 631–652; Andreas Umland, “The Glazyev Tapes, Origins of the Donbas Conflict, and Minsk Agreements”, *Foreign Policy Association*, 13 September 2018, foreignpolicyblogs.com/2018/09/13/the-glazyev-tapes-origins-of-the-donbas-conflict-and-minsk-agreements/ (accessed: 15 September 2018).

²²⁰ Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 675.

any more. The Right Sector and the DUK as well as some even smaller such entities, however, constitute altogether exceptions rather than the rule among post-Euromaidan IAGs and parties.

The Ukrainian case since 2014 seems to lend support to a larger previous re-assessment of IAGs in a broad cross-cultural study, with no relation but partly applicable to Ukraine. Ariel Ahram asserted in 2011, in the concluding remarks of a seminal monograph, that his

“book shows how the dynamics of competition between various domestic and international forces provides an incentive for states to rely on nonstate actors instead of maximizing control over violence. State weakness and the emergence of militias do not constitute an aberration, dysfunction, or result of failure of will. Contrary to David Clare’s contention that militias ‘usually seek to eliminate all the vestiges of central government within their area of operations,’ the case studies [i.e. Indonesia, Iraq and Iran] show how militias and state officials routinely cooperate with and mutually reinforce one another”²²¹.

Comparative explorations of the Ukrainian case that would juxtapose the East European experiences, with Latin American, Central African, Middle Eastern or East Asian developments are so far missing. In fact, it may, by 2019, still be too early to do them. Considerable empirical research, descriptive analysis, and ideographic interpretation remains to be done, before cross-cultural comparison with other cases will make sense²²². Yet, conclusions from earlier cross-cultural studies, such as the above-quoted, already indicate that the emergence of IAGs in Ukraine in 2014, their subsequent inclusion into state-structures, and their commanders’ transition to electoral politics, may constitute less exceptional phenomena than sometimes assumed. They may be more easily explicable and interpretable with reference to earlier similar phenomena in other regions of the world than our above descriptive survey by itself suggests.

²²¹ Ahram, *Proxy Warriors*, p. 135.

²²² The general and rather simple rule of having to first produce satisfactory descriptions of events (i.e. their when, where and what) that can then, in a second step, be compared – a procedure mentioned, for instance, by Theda Skocpol – is all too often ignored by political scientists. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Summary

The shortlived Ukrainian armed volunteer movement and its interactions with electoral politics, in some regards, did and, in other regards, did not fit patterns observed in previous case studies and cross-cultural research of IAGs. The distinctly short life of the Ukrainian IAGs as more or less independent actors, and the swift integration of most of them into Ukraine's regular forces, was unusual. This was one of the reasons for the relatively low political impact of the IAGs as such – a repercussion somewhat in contrast to the impressive political careers of some IAG commanders since 2014.

There were various forms of interaction, section and penetration between parties and IAGs in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Several parties, party leaders and MPs took an active part in the creation and development of IAGs in 2014. Some – until then, mostly minor – politicians became soldiers or commanders of IAGs. Later on, there were numerous transitions of formerly non-political IAG members into the party-political realm – either via joining of older parties or through the creation of new political organisations.

Most importantly, by late 2014, a number of IAG commanders had become members of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan national parliament. Some of them had been active in politics before their engagement in the armed volunteer movement. Yet, most made the jump into the Verkhovna Rada via, in light of, and often with explicit reference to, their service within an IAG. Certain IAG members tried, but did not manage to enter the national parliament as deputies. Still other IAG representatives were elected to regional and local representative and executive organs as a result of their participation in the 2015 oblast (region), municipal and hromada (community) elections.

Many of the armed volunteer movement's graduates did not hide their political ambitions, made political careers, and came to influence Ukrainian political affairs in one or another way. Yet, the IAGs or their successor volunteer units within the regular forces did not seem to have shaped, to a notable degree, Kyiv's domestic policies, the Ukrainian polity and national-level politics of post-Euromaidan Ukraine, with the exception of decisions taken in relation to the conflict with Russia. Neither in the period 2014–2015, when the IAGs had been more or less

independent, nor afterwards, when most of them were integrated into the troops of the Ministries of Interior or Defense, did the volunteer units as such exert a clearly identifiable and relevant impact on the President's, government's or parliament's decision-making with regard to – narrowly defined – domestic political matters.

Our paper indicates that one of the reasons that this did not happen may have been that the politicians who came out and were linked to the IAGs acquired, as MPs on various levels or executive officials with different functions, new opportunities to exert political impact. To be sure, the mere existence of IAGs may have, as a background condition, had some repercussions for these new politicians' social standing, and for the public conduct of the President, government, parliament and parties. Yet, there has, so far, never been a situation in which a direct threat of a military or para-military group to use its arms, determined an, in the narrow sense, major domestic decision, i.e. principally shaped a course of action, appointment of personnel, or choice between alternative options not directly related to the war with Russia – the latter being a matter where, of course, the IAGs and their regular successor units exerted considerable influence.