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UKRAINE: DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONS, SEPARATISM AND RUSSIAN
HYBRID WAR**

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A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING NATIONALISMS IN UKRAINE: DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONS, SEPARATISM AND RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR

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ABSTRACT. This article expands the analytical framework for understanding “nationalism” in Ukraine to competing ethnic Ukrainian, Soviet and Russian nationalisms that co-existed uneasily but largely peacefully until the 2013–2014 Euromaidan sparked by Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement, but then driven by widespread public anger at rapacious levels of corruption, Ukrainophobia and political repression. His presidency, violence during the Euromaidan and Yanukovich fleeing from power precipitated Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine in support of separatist proxies. Violence during the Euromaidan and the Donbas conflict was a reflection of the authoritarian, criminal and thuggish culture common to the Donbas and Crimea that had always underpinned the Party of Regions and its political allies were the greatest threat to Ukraine’s democracy and territorial integrity. With only marginal political support, ethnic Ukrainian nationalist parties, although the subject of many academic studies, were never electorally popular even during a time of war in 2014.

Keywords: nationalism; Euromaidan; Donbas; Crimea; Viktor Yanukovich;
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1. Introduction

Ukraine is a country with competing nationalisms and cultural orientations that are a product of the country’s colonization by imperial powers and the legacies of Soviet totalitarianism that has produced a regionally diverse

country. Although traditionally depicted as a country divided into two linguistic groups (Russian and Ukrainian) the reality is more complex as this ignores a large number of bilingual Ukrainians. The Donbas conflict has shown that language *per se* is a poor indicator of allegiance to Ukraine or separatism with a large proportion of Ukraine's security forces being Russian speakers.¹ This article outlines a broader framework for identities in Ukraine that take into account history, region, language and cultural orientation. Russia successfully stoked conflict in the Donbas because the region has a closer identity to the Crimea in both having majorities who profess an attachment to Soviet identity, but was unsuccessful in other Russian speaking regions of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Region is therefore important not because the Donbas is geographically located in Eastern Ukraine but because the Donbas has little relationship to historic Cossack Eastern and Southern Ukraine, was heavily pro-Bolshevik in the Russian Revolution, was a melting pot for successful Soviet nationality policies that produced a *Homo Sovieticus* and experienced a violent transition in the 1990s.

Until the 2013–2014 Euromaidan studies of nationalism in Ukraine failed to provide a complete picture of nationalisms in Ukraine because they focused on only one region (Western Ukraine) and one element (ethnic Ukrainian nationalism) while exaggerating the influence of the *Svoboda* (*Freedom*) political party. Thus, they argued that *Svoboda* represented the main “threat” to Ukrainian democracy² while ignoring and failing to anticipate the far more powerful threat from the thuggish, kleptocratic and violent Party of Regions and its Communist and Russian nationalist allies. *Svoboda* was only present in parliament in 2012–2014 after it won 10 percent of the vote it received support. The Party of Regions and its Communist Party allies won a combined 40–45 percent of the vote; that is, 4–5 times as many votes. During the Euromaidan and Donbas conflict supporters of the Party of Regions, Communists and Russian nationalists backed by Russia became the main threat to Ukraine's democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity;³ meanwhile, *Svoboda* lost popularity and failed to enter parliament in the October 2014 elections.

2. Academic Studies of Ethnic Ukrainian and Russian/Soviet Nationalisms

There has long been a need for studies of nationalisms in Ukraine to be broader and deeper⁴ but until the Euromaidan, Western studies of nationalism in Ukraine focused entirely on only one part of the political spectrum associated with the Ukrainian ethnic nationalist right, specifically the rise of the *Svoboda* party.⁵ There were no academic studies of Russian and nationalism in Ukraine,⁶ the links between these nationalisms and the Russian Orthodox Church who have supported the Donbas separatists⁷ or the paramilitary train-

ing undertaken by pro-Russian groups in the Donbas and Crimea in the run up to the separatist conflict.⁸ Although Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov analyzed nationalist parties in Russia they surprisingly, did not study Russian and Sovietophile nationalist parties in Ukraine. Kuzio analyzed the Crimean triangle with Russia and Ukraine and Moscow's long-standing support for Russian and Sovietophile political forces in the Crimea and how the Party of Regions allied with them from 2006–2014.⁹

Studies of Russian and Sovietophile nationalist and communist forces in Ukraine are over a decade old and need bringing up to date. Andrew Wilson¹⁰ published studies of the left wing of Ukrainian politics and the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) but these need to be updated. The KPU and the Party of Regions both had strongholds in the Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk *oblasts*) and Crimea. Studies of the Party of Regions were until recently limited to analyses of Donetsk political culture¹¹ and election fraud.¹² The authoritarian and violent political culture, ideology and domestic and international allies of the Party of Regions were until recently ignored which is surprising because it was Ukraine's only political machine that monopolized power in eastern and southern Russophone Ukraine. The successful approach of the Party of Regions to building a political machine was first analyzed by Serhiy Kudelia and Kuzio¹³ just as the party was disintegrating following the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich by the Euromaidan. The Party of Regions extensive ties to organized crime and ideology, two factors that have played an important role in the violent conflict in the Donbas, have only been analyzed by Kuzio¹⁴ but there is still a need for more extensive fieldwork and research. Ethnic Ukrainian nationalist parties have had no electoral popularity except for three years of Ukraine's quarter of a century of independence (2012–2014). Meanwhile, the KPU and Party of Regions won first place plurality in four parliamentary (1998, 2006, 2007, 2012) and one presidential election (2010) and Russian nationalists who were ensconced in the Crimea in the 1990s and from 2006–2014. The Party of Regions and KPU received a combined four to five times more votes than *Svoboda*.

Skewed research into nationalism in Ukraine therefore produced two outcomes. The first was an inability to appreciate the extent of the violent authoritarian nature of Russian and Soviet nationalisms in Ukraine, as witnessed in the violent conflict in the Donbas in spring–summer 2014, or the Crimea as Ukraine's most xenophobic region that is reflected in repression of the Tatar minority by the Russian occupation authorities. The second factor is scholars attributing xenophobic, sexist and racist ideologies and programs solely to *Svoboda*. Shekhovtsov and Umland¹⁵ criticize *Svoboda's* homophobia while ignoring the leading role that was played by Party of Regions deputies such as Vadim Kolesnichenko in drafting anti-homosexual legislation. Billboards in Ukraine by the pro-Russian Ukrainian Way NGO (led

by Viktor Medvedchuk, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin) use same sex marriages to attack Ukraine's European integration. Homophobia, as we see in Russia, is evident across the entire political spectrum. Shekhovtsov and Umland¹⁶ also paint *Svoboda* as leading attacks on abortion rights for women when again this is far more commonplace across the political spectrum in Ukraine, remains an acute election issue in some Western democracies becoming a leading campaign issue in the September 2014 election in New Brunswick, Canada.

Finally, there has been insufficient comparative analysis of how Ukrainian and Russian nationalists differ in their approach to European integration and NATO membership, with the former in favor and the latter vehemently against. As Shekhovtsov and Umland write, "The Ukrainian far right's ambivalent, soft, or even positive stance toward the EU and NATO makes it an outlier among similar European parties. In both the EU and Russia, far-right parties tend to be vocally anti-liberal, plainly anti-American, and more or less anti-EU."¹⁷ European fascist and nationalist-populist parties have aligned themselves in an anti-EU and anti-American axis with Russian President Putin supporting his annexation of the Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine.¹⁸

3. Unpopularity of Ethnic Ukrainian Nationalism

Since World War II moderate and radical wings of ethnic Ukrainian nationalism have dominated the Ukrainian diaspora, a phenomenon common to many diaspora's from Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, ethnic Ukrainian nationalism has been unpopular in Ukraine and since 1991 a nationalist party has only once briefly entered parliament (*Svoboda* in 2012–2014). Nevertheless, a legacy of the USSR that was deliberately inflamed by the Party of Regions and Russian television, which is widely watched in Eastern Ukraine, was to return to the use of "ant-fascism" rhetoric. Soviet propaganda had targeted four nationalisms – Ukrainian, Lithuanian Latvian and Estonian – as "bourgeois nationalism" financed by Western intelligence services because of the threat they represented to the territorial integrity of the Soviet state. Ukrainian nationalist political prisoners from the 1940s insurgency in Western Ukraine were being executed until mid-way through Mikhail Gorbachev's USSR in 1987–1988. Separatist nationalism did not exist in nine Soviet republics (Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) and Georgian and Armenian nationalism was small enough to be contained by the KGB. In this sense, Alexander Motyl was right to point out the misnomer of "Russian nationalism" as the Russian people never sought to secede from the Tsarist Russian Empire or USSR, in many ways similar to the English having never

sought to separate from the United Kingdom (which is why there is a Scottish National Party but no English National Party).¹⁹

Soviet-style denunciations and rhetoric of “anti-fascism” returned during the 2004 elections when they were imported into Ukraine by Russian political technologists working for the Yanukovych election campaign.²⁰ “Bourgeois nationalists” (USSR) or “fascists” (today) have nothing to do with political science definitions²¹ and all to do with historic Russian antipathy to Ukrainian separatism stretching back to the 1709 Ukrainian Cossack uprising by Hetman Ivan Mazepa in alliance with Sweden and Russian nationalisms of all stripes (imperial, democratic) in the nineteenth century and since. Russian President Putin has repeatedly stated that Euromaidan “Nazis” took power after Yanukovych fled and his state controlled television channels and trolls writing comments on web sites have repeated this incessantly. “Bourgeois nationalists” and “fascists” represent any Ukrainians, ranging from national communists, liberals through to nationalists who support an ethnic Ukrainian as opposed to a Russophile, East Slavic identity in domestic and foreign policies. Any Ukrainians who therefore support European integration removing Ukraine from Russia’s sphere of influence are ipso facto “fascists,” as are pro-Western supporters of the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. From Moscow’s perspective, Ukraine is inhabited by only two categories of people, good pro-Russians who recognize the superiority of the Russian language and view Russians as their paternalistic “elder brother” *and* bad pro-Western “fascists” who are “traitors” because they are in the pay of the West. In this bizarre mind-set, President Petro Poroshenko is viewed merely as a contemporary reincarnation of Mazepa who Aleksandr Pushkin attacked in his famous poem “Poltava” and the Russian Orthodox Church poured anathema upon each year.

In the late 1980s and following the disintegration of the USSR, Ukrainian nationalist groups emerged into the open. In 1991, the émigré OUNb (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Stepan Bandera) at first aligned with the small DSU (State Independence of Ukraine) political party whose leaders had links to the underground National Front (NF)²² that had been active in Western Ukraine in the 1960s and 1970s. OUNb distanced itself from the largest, at that time, home grown nationalist group, the Inter-Party Assembly (MPA) (from 1992 renamed Ukrainian National Assembly [UNA]).²³ OUNb therefore did not support MPA leader Yuriy Shukhevych’s candidacy in the December 1991 presidential elections. UNA established a paramilitary wing Ukrainian People’s Self Defence Forces (UNSO).

Instead of building up DSU, the OUNb founded the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN) in 1992 that was led by OUNb leader Yaroslava Stetsko until she passed away in 2003. OUNb dropped its support for DSU because its operating culture desired an organization that it completely con-

trolled: Yaroslava Stetsko was leader of OUNb and KUN as well as the ABN (Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations). Although KUN received support from the biggest and wealthiest Ukrainian émigré party (OUNb) the political project nevertheless proved to be a complete failure. OUNb had decades to prepare for their activities in a future independent Ukraine but they failed to understand the local situation on the ground and, most importantly, the need for nationalist organizations to be led by charismatic and young leaders. Yaroslava Stetsko could never fit this bill whereas *Svoboda* party leader Oleh Tyahnybok and Dmytro Yarosh do. The problem of leadership was plainly evident in the 1998 parliamentary elections when KUN, Conservative Republican Party and Republican Party “*Sobor*” campaigned for the Ukrainian parliament in the National Front bloc which came in twelfth (out of 30th) place with only 2.71 per cent support.²⁴ The National Front advertisement on Ukrainian television was one of the weakest of any in the election campaign with three older generation Ukrainians (Yaroslava Stetsko, Stepan Khmara and Levko Lukyanenko) unable to capture the imagination of young Ukrainians.

By the 1998 elections the DSU joined with the Social National Party of Ukraine ([SNPU], the future *Svoboda* party) in the *Menshe Sliv (Fewer Words)* bloc coming next to the bottom of political forces participating in the election and winning only 0.16 per cent. After the elections DSU *de facto* closed down while the SNPU modernized into *Svoboda* and changed its leader becoming Ukraine’s largest nationalist political force, although outside parliament. The SNPU chose to emulate Joerg Haider’s Austrian Freedom party by changing its name in 2004 from the Nazi-sounding Social-National Party of Ukraine to the *Freedom (Svoboda)* party.

Yaroslava Stetsko took KUN into Our Ukraine in the 2002 elections but passed away a year later when gas trader Oleksiy Ivchenko became KUN leader. After Ivchenko took over KUN the party’s earlier ties to the émigré OUNb declined. Since 2003, OUNb and KUN have been different organizations with OUNb led by second generation Ukrainians from Germany (Andriy Haydamakha) and Australia (Stefan Romaniw) while KUN was taken over by Galicians (such as Ivchenko) who were involved in the highly corrupt gas trade.²⁵ OUNb and *Svoboda* have different supporters among Ukrainian émigrés with the former based on the post-1945 Western Ukrainian diaspora and the latter attracting the support of fourth wave émigrés who grew up in Soviet Ukraine and emigrated to the West since the 1990s. There is little contact between the two nationalist diaspora communities.

Creating paramilitaries also proved to be failure for Ukrainian nationalist groups. The *Tryzub (Trident)* paramilitary organization was established by the Stepan Bandera Sports-Patriotic Association following the example set by UNA-UNSO, DSU and SNPU who had earlier established paramilitary formations.²⁶ Paramilitaries suffered from the same problem as KUN; namely,

that of infiltration by the Security Service (SBU) who undoubtedly drew upon KGB strategies that had been successfully developed since the 1940s against the émigré groups.²⁷ In the post-Soviet world, long-standing KGB infiltration strategies continued to be pursued by its successor organization, the SBU, whose agent (Serhiy Zhizhko) inside KUN facilitated Zvarych's expulsion.²⁸ There was additionally the problem of corruption that could be used to buy off political groups. Ivchenko "purchased" KUN as the *krysha* (*political roof*) for his corrupt gas business interests that enabled him to be appointed by President Viktor Yushchenko as the chairman of the state *Naftohaz Ukrainy* gas company,²⁹ an appointment that ended in scandal.

By the late 1990s the UNA had split into three wings, two cooperating with the authorities and one in opposition. Those cooperating with the President Leonid Kuchma regime and oligarchs included well-known UNA leader and television presenter Dmytro Korchynskyy who established the Eurasianist *Bratstvo* (*Brotherhood*) party.³⁰ A typical provocation of his took place on December 1, 2013 when his supporters drove a bulldozer to *Berkut* riot police in front of the presidential administration where they started a fracas giving the security forces the excuse to savagely beat legitimate protesters. A second offshoot was Eduard Kovalenko's UNA that was briefly active during the 2004 elections when it dressed in Nazi-looking uniforms and marched in support of Yushchenko, in one of many attempts to discredit him as an extremist "fascist." In August 2004, terrorists who planted bombs in Kyiv had links to Kovalenko's UNA. These co-opted and loyal pseudo nationalist groups were found in many post-communist countries and in Ukraine were financed by Medvedchuk, Chief of Staff (2002–2004) to President Kuchma and leader of the Social Democratic United Party of Ukraine (SDPUo).³¹

The opposition wing of UNA was led by Andriy Shkil who formed the radical wing of the Ukraine without Kuchma movement that was decapitated by arrests following the March 2001 riots in Kyiv when eighteen leading UNA members were convicted and sentenced, including Shkil who was elected to parliament in 2002, 2006 and 2007 in the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT). This wing of UNA-UNSO together with *Patrioty Ukrayiny*, the former youth wing of *Svoboda*, and *Tryzub*, led by Dmytro Yarosh, united during the Euromaidan to form the *Pravyi Sektor* (*Right Sector*) political force. Russian television poured huge volumes of invective against *Pravyi Sektor* exaggerating their influence out of all proportion³² because of their radical participation in the front lines of the Euromaidan.

Another group that rose to prominence during the Euromaidan was the Social National Assembly (SNA), the wing of *Svoboda* that had not supported Tyahnybok's modernization. It became the source for the Azov volunteer battalion formed within Ukraine's new National Guard based in the Donetsk regional port of Mariupol. *Pravyi Sektor* or the SNA had no success in elections

held in 2014. In the 1990s SNPU's symbol was suspiciously similar to the *Hakenkreuz* (*hook-cross or swastika*) used by the Nazis and the symbol continues to be used by the SNA, giving rise to Western press reports of the "neo-Nazi" Azov, although they now claim that the symbol stands for "SN" (Slava Natsii [Glory to the Nation]). Far more Russian neo-Nazi groups, such as the Russian Party of National Unity, and individuals with fascist inclinations have volunteered to fight alongside Donbas separatists.³³

The SNPU has always been well funded which has raised two suspicions about the source of its financial base. Firstly, these funds did not come from the émigré OUNb, the wealthiest Ukrainian émigré organization, with whom relations have always been poor. Secondly, as mentioned earlier with corruption rife, it was not surprising that rumors abounded about the source of *Svoboda's* and *Pravyi Sektor's* financial resources; after all, Tyahnybok and Yarosh each lost 2.5 million *hryvnya* (\$200,000) deposits after failing to enter the second round of the May 2014 pre-term elections. Similar rumors had existed in the 1990s about UNA-UNSO.

Oligarchs reportedly financed *Svoboda* in a dual strategy to take votes from national democrats in Western Ukraine and mobilize Eastern Ukrainian voters against the threat from Ukrainian nationalism ("fascism") and "orange" political forces and leaders. *Svoboda's* nationalism is unpopular in Eastern and Southern Ukraine and therefore it would never have become a threat to the Party of Regions in their home base. Andrew Wilson describes *Svoboda* as "scarecrow party" to indirectly mobilize support for the authorities in the same manner as the loyal nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia mobilizing nationalist voters for the Russian authorities.³⁴ These parties, together with the Communists, "have for years been in the business of losing elections."³⁵ Jewish-Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoyskyy (with oil and gas interests in Western Ukraine) had ties to *Svoboda* and since the Euromaidan to *Pravyi Sektor* and Yarosh, which became obvious during his term as Dnipropetrovsk governor in 2014–2015. Senior Party of Regions leaders Volodymyr Sivkovich, Borys Kolesnikov, and Andrei Kluyev reportedly provided financial assistance to *Svoboda*.³⁶ As party financing in Ukraine is opaque from the huge shadow economy and capitol in offshore tax havens it is not surprising there is limited evidence.

Although a smoking gun is near impossible to find in Ukraine's opaque political world at the same time, there is evidence of the authorities indirectly supporting *Svoboda* after Yanukovych was elected President. In the October 2010 local elections, the blocking of *Batkivshchina's* ability to run candidates in Lviv worked favourably for *Svoboda*. In 2010–2011, on the eve of parliamentary elections and when media censorship was growing and the opposition were not given airtime, *Svoboda* was disproportionately invited to participate in political television discussion shows. In 2011, *Svoboda* repre-

sentatives, at a time when they were not present in parliament, participated in every second Shuster Live (State Channel 1) and Yevhen Kyslyiv's *Velyka Polityka (Big Politics)* discussion shows on *Inter* channel³⁷ which is owned by the gas lobby (led by gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash) allied to President Yanukovych.

The marginalization of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party after he left office in 2010 and imprisonment of Tymoshenko a year later opened up a vacuum in opposition politics in "orange" (Western-Central) Ukraine. Our Ukraine's place was taken by boxing champion Vitaliy Klitschko's Ukrainian Alliance for Democratic Reforms (UDAR) who aligned during and after the Euromaidan with Poroshenko.³⁸ *Svoboda* emerged as a third political force in Western-Central Ukraine receiving 10 percent in the 2012 elections, the first time a nationalist parliament had entered parliament, although not re-elected in 2014. *Pravyi Sektor's* popularity grew during the radicalization of the Euromaidan in January–February 2014 and conflict with Russia over the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine but the new party's popular support proved to be weak in the 2014 parliamentary election.

4. Popularity of Russian and Soviet Nationalism in Ukraine

In Ukraine, Soviet and Russian nationalisms have always represented a graver threat to Ukraine's democratic system, inter-ethnic stability and territorial integrity. Over one hundred protesters were murdered and thousands were tortured, abducted and wounded. Massive human rights abuses by violent separatists in Donetsk *oblast* have been well documented.³⁹ Intolerance and xenophobia to outsiders is far higher in Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea than in Western Ukraine. Until the Euromaidan the only politically motivated deaths were of two pro-Ukrainian activists murdered by Russian nationalists, the composer Ihor Bilozir in Lviv on May 8, 2000 and Odesa State University student and member of the patriotic youth movement *Sich* Maksym Chayka in Odesa on April 17, 2009. Meanwhile, no Russian nationalist or activist had died at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists in independent Ukraine. Ukrainian nationalists have always been less electorally popular and far less violent than Soviet and Russian nationalist political forces who dominated Eastern and Southern Ukraine and the Crimea. Ukrainian Catholic University Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak warned that the Yanukovych administration was "placing Ukraine on the verge of civil war"⁴⁰ which proved to be prophetic.

Intolerance of alternative opinions is far higher in Eastern, where authoritarian political culture is dominant, than in Western Ukraine. Dominique Arel pointed out that, "political culture in Eastern Ukraine is based on intimidation. Kuchma in the late 1990s tried, and ultimately failed, to institute the "black-mail" state. Yanukovych learned nothing from the Orange Revolution and

everything from Putin that to stay in power, you have to bully your opponents.”⁴¹ Arel believes, “Western commentators have often been suspicious of its (Ukrainian nationalism) intent and possible consequences. Nationalism is the desire to have one’s state or to make an existing state ‘national’ but how to define ‘national’ has been contested). It can have its ugly side, and the rise of *Svoboda* in Galicia is not pretty.” Arel continues:

But let the record show that Ukrainian nationalism, in the empirically verifiable field of Ukrainian politics of the last twenty years, has been the driving force behind democracy, while Ukrainian anti-nationalism, for lack of a better word, a.k.a. the political forces grounded in Eastern Ukraine, have aimed at the dismantlement of democracy. *Rukh* in the 1990s, Our Ukraine and the Tymoshenko Bloc in the 2000s had serious flaws (rule of law, historical memory), but they were, in their *actions*, not just in words, for free elections and a free media. Political culture in Central-Western Ukraine is rowdy, exasperating in its incomprehension of the law, but open.

The Party of Regions, when it was in opposition and in power, was the most aggressive and violent political force in Ukraine, a factor explained by the more authoritarian culture to be found in its home bases of Donetsk and Crimea and because of its ties to organized crime. Violence has been especially prevalent during Ukrainian election campaigns at the local level, where the Party of Regions used vigilantes and established a Russian-style managed democracy in its home base of Donetsk (2000–2004) before moving to the national level (2004–2014). In the 2004 elections the Yanukovich campaign’s strategy of “directed chaos” nearly brought the country to the brink of conflict⁴² when it laid out a strategy of pitting “nationalists” (Yushchenko’s election campaign) against Russophone Eastern Ukrainians.⁴³ A terrorist attack in Kyiv in August 2004 that led to fatalities and casualties was blamed on pro-Yushchenko nationalists but was part of the covert strategy by the authorities of “directed chaos.”⁴⁴ “Directed chaos” was a precursor to Putin’s hybrid war of “controlled conflict” a decade later.

The Party of Regions alliance with Soviet and Crimean Russian nationalists stoked interethnic conflict and exacerbated anti-Tatar xenophobia, both laying the groundwork for the future Donbas conflict. An example of a xenophobic Party of Regions leader was former head of the Crimean and Ukrainian Interior Ministries and Crimean Prime Minister Anatoliy Mogilyov. Crimean Tatars protested at Mogilyov heading the Crimean government because of his reputation for ruthlessness in suppressing Tatar protests and because as Interior Minister he had written a xenophobic opinion commentary for *Krymskaya Pravda* newspaper supporting Soviet leader Stalin’s ethnic cleansing of the Crimean Tatars.⁴⁵ The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHRPG), Ukraine’s leading human rights NGO, reported:⁴⁶

The latest remarks from Anatoly Mohylyov, prime minister of the Crimea, are in no way out of character. This is, in fact, the problem. President Yanukovich was well aware of Mohylyov's rabid hate speech directed against Crimean Tatars and role in the gratuitously violent confrontation on Ai-Petri plateau in Crimea on Nov. 7, 2007 when he appointed Mohylyov as interior minister in March 2010. The president then promoted him to the top post in the Crimean leadership in November 2011.

KHRPG researcher Halya Coynash continues:

Mustafa Dzhemiliev is convinced that Mohylyov is simply carrying out Yanukovich's instructions. He believes that the latter has it in for the Mejlis because it acts as an autonomous body and has in recent years supported parties and candidates in opposition to Yanukovich.⁴⁷

Xenophobic and racist views of the Crimean Tatars as "Nazi collaborators" drew on similar Soviet legacies that depicted Western Ukrainians and diaspora Ukrainians as "bourgeois nationalists" and "Nazi hirelings," views which were vociferously spread by the Russian media during and since the Euromaidan. Anti-Tatar xenophobia is prevalent in the Party of Regions, Communists and Crimean Russian nationalists (i.e. Eurasian, Soviet and Russian nationalism respectively) – but absent among ethnic Ukrainian nationalists. Communist Party leader Piotr Symonenko defended the ethnic cleansing of Tatars in a speech given in parliament in May 2012 in protest at the annual commemoration by Tatars of the deportation. Symonenko said "In order to save the Crimean Tatar people they were deported from the Crimea. Why? The presence of these criminals (in the Crimea) would inevitably have led to civil war."⁴⁸ He claimed that Tatars were given education and employment in exile ignoring the fact that nearly half of them died en route to Central Asia. Former Crimean Parliamentary Chairperson Anatoliy Hrytsenko told US Ambassador William Taylor that Crimean Tatars "betrayed" the USSR in World War II and, "a majority of Crimea's inhabitants viewed Tatars as traitors."⁴⁹

Intolerance of national minorities in the Crimea has led to violence between Russophone Slavs and Tatars and the homes of Crimean Tatar activists were bombed, Tatar journalists murdered and Tatar activists sentenced to lengthy prison sentences for acts of civil disobedience. The most serious violence erupted over the misuse of historic Tatar sites, such as the former imperial seat of the Tatar Khans in Bakhcharay. Clashes took place during protests against attempts to build apartments and business offices on ancient Tatar sites and cemeteries.⁵⁰ Tatars undertook acts of civil disobedience to bring attention to their plight, particularly over social issues such as the lack

of land allocated to them by the local authorities and changes to the criminal code that have led to severe punishments for illegal seizures of land.

The presence of Russian Cossacks from the Transdnestr frozen conflict and Northern Caucasus, two regions plagued by inter-ethnic violence since the 1990s, stoked conflict in the Crimea. Russian Cossacks in the Crimea were traditionally Ukrainophobic, intolerant of all religious denominations other than Russian Orthodoxy, they are able to wear paramilitary uniforms without legal sanction and fly Russian imperial banners and flags.⁵¹ The paramilitary Crimean Cossack Union, which is allied to the Russian Community of Crimea (ROK), is “the single most dangerous and active pro-Russian actor in the Crimea” according to a US cable,⁵² and many of its members are former or serving Interior Ministry and SBU personnel, many of who became “self defense” detachments that assisted Russian troops in the annexation of the Crimea. The Crimean Cossack Union is allied with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Russian Patriarchate) and Russian nationalist extremist groups. One of the most active Russian nationalists in the Crimea was Serhiy Tsekov, leader of the ROK and the Russian Bloc with whom the Party of Regions had been allied with since 2006, as seen in Table 1.

5. Organized Crime and Russian and Soviet Nationalisms in Ukraine

Links between business, politics and crime in the former USSR began to surface in the second half of the 1980s, at the same time as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev liberalized the economy. Crime exploded in three regions of Ukraine – Crimea, Donetsk and Odesa – where there were huge profits to be made from trade, tourism, property, and the export of raw materials. During this legal vacuum, and at a time of the disintegration of one state (USSR) and a yet-to-be-built Ukraine, individuals such as Yanukovych, Crimean leader (and former criminal “Goblin”) Sergei Aksyonov and their Donetsk and Crimean allies literally fought their way to the top. Those who survived the bloodshed, by the late 1990s were already attempting to transform themselves into *biznesmeni*.

In the 1990s, Crimea was a major source of organized crime, and had the largest number of murders of any Ukrainian region, according to former Police Chief Yuriy Lutsenko, with Donetsk coming second. Not coincidentally, Crimea and Donetsk were the strongholds of ousted President Yanukovych’s Party of Regions. Serhiy Taruta was appointed Donetsk governor by Kyiv’s then revolutionary leaders because although co-director of the Industrial Union of Donbas, he had never joined the Party of Regions, and supported the pro-Western opposition.

A cable from the US Embassy in Kyiv reported that Taruta had dismissed the whole Donetsk-Regions group, saying “they are all looters,” which was

clearly seen in the massive asset and budget stripping that occurred under Yanukovych. Former National Security and Defence Council Secretary Volodymyr Horbulin told US Ambassador to Ukraine John Herbst that the Party of Regions was “notable for its inclusion of criminal and anti-democracy figures.” Another cable described the Party of Regions as, “long a haven for DONETSK-based mobsters and oligarchs,” led by “DONETSK CLAN godfather Rinat Akhmetov.” Akhmetov, who has close business ties to Yanukovych going back to the 1990s, backed him to the ignominious end, issuing timid statements during the Euromaidan protests.⁵³

From 1997, when Yanukovych became Donetsk governor until 1999, 24 members of the Yevhen Kushnir criminal gang were murdered and eight imprisoned. Oleksandr Melnyk and the *Seilem* organized crime groups, which included Aksyonov, provided local protection for the business interests of Yanukovych and Donetsk oligarch Akhmetov. Subsequently, the *Seilem* and Givi Nemsadze gangs defeated their Kushnir and rival *Bashmaki* criminal gangs. In Donetsk, organized crime integrated itself under the Party of Regions, launched in 2000–2001, whereas in the Crimea they established Russian nationalist parties such as Russian Unity led by Aksyonov.

The Donetsk and Ukrainian prosecutor-general’s office was led by Renat Kuzmin, Viktor Pshonka, Hennady Vasyliev, Svyatoslav Piskun and Oleksandr Medvedko, all of whom had strong ties to the Party of Regions. With a background in covering up gangland murders on behalf of political and business bosses, it is little wonder there was no rule of law in Ukraine. Perversely, Kuzmin led the criminal cases against Yulia Tymoshenko upon whom he tried to pin the 1996 murder of Ukraine’s then wealthiest oligarch Yevhen Shcherban.⁵⁴

By 1999, after they had cleared Donetsk of competitors, regional Governor Yanukovych and business ally Akhmetov united the Donetsk groups into the Party of Regional Revival – “Labour Solidarity Ukraine” changing its name to the Party of Regions the following year. Five political parties led by Poroshenko (Party of Ukrainian Solidarity), Volodymyr Rybak (Party of Regional Revival), Valentyn Landyk (Labor Party), Leonid Chernovetsky (Party for a Beautiful Ukraine) and Party of Pensioners merged to form the new political *krysha* of the Donetsk clan. Mykola Azarov (2001 and 2010–2014), Volodymyr Semynozhenko, (2001–2003) and Yanukovych (2003–2010) led the Party of Regions.

The Party of Regions successfully merged former and current organized crime leaders (such as Yuriy Ivanyushchenko), new businessmen, “Red Directors” (heads of big former Soviet plants such as Valentyn Landyk) and defectors from pan-Slavic and pro-Russian forces (such as Kolesnichenko). Former crime bosses provided a supply of vigilante’s from low time enforcers of criminal rackets. The Party of Regions elected organized crime

leaders to the Ukrainian and Crimean parliaments and local government. In the March 2006 elections to the Crimean parliament and local councils, hundreds of candidates who had “problems with the law,” according to then Interior Minister Lutsenko, ran in the election blocs “For Union!” and “For Yanukovych!” Many of these candidates were, like Aksyonov, members of the *Seilem* organized crime gang, such as its leader Melnyk who was elected in the “For Yanukovych!” bloc. Yanukovych reportedly told a Party of Regions deputy who criticized this alliance with organized crime that, “I take responsibility for him (Melnyk).” Prime Minister Yanukovych asked Police Chief Lutsenko to not touch “my Sasha” (Melnyk).

The corrupt Prosecutor-General’s office assisted in protecting these ties between politics, business and crime. Former Deputy Prosecutor-General Kuzmin ensured Melnyk evaded justice, after the Party of Regions lobbied the prosecutor’s office not to press charges. Lutsenko said, “Having all the evidence connecting the (*Seilem*) gang to murders” Kuzmin “releases the man who Yanukovych shelters, the head of an organized crime gang.” Lutsenko told the US Embassy in Kyiv that the *Seilem* organized crime gang had been responsible in the 1990’s for 52 contract murders, including one journalist, two police officers, 30 businessmen and 15 organized crime competitors. Kuzmin “rehabilitated” another of Ukraine’s most notorious crime bosses, Nemsadze, who led an organized crime gang that committed over a hundred murders. In 2010, after Yanukovych came to power, criminal charges against Nemsadze were closed. In the second half of the 1990s, when Yanukovych was Governor of Donetsk, Nemsadze’s organized crime group had worked for him destroying a rival gang led by Kushnir who was blamed for the murders of Donetsk crime boss Akhat Bragin (“Alek the Greek”), and Ukraine’s then wealthiest oligarch Shcherban in 1995–1996. Ethnic ties from Russian Tatarstan connected Bragin, Shcherban and Akhmetov; and a large Islamic school and mosque was opened in Donetsk in the late 1990s, in honor of Bragin that was financially paid for by Akhmetov.

In his capacities as Prime Minister and President, Yanukovych strengthened the already close ties between crime and energy. The 2006–2007 Yanukovych government signed an oil deal whereby the four owners in Vanco Prykerchenska included Akhmetov’s DTEK (Donbas Fuel-Energy holding), Party of Regions deputy Vasyl Khmelnytsky’s Austrian-registered Integrum Technologies, and Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Novitsky’s Shadowlight Investments. A US cable from Moscow and other sources described Novitsky as leader of the *Solntsevo* criminal gang that provided protection to gas intermediaries such as *Itera* that had been operated in the 1990s by Gazprom. Criminal ties to business and politics did not stop there. Gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash, who was detained in Vienna, Austria in March 2014, and Akhmetov gained enormously from Yanukovych’s four-year presidency. Firtash

admitted in December 2008 to US Ambassador Taylor that he had been assisted in entering the energy business by mafia don Semyon Mogilevich who is wanted by the FBI. Mogilevich protected the energy market, and worked with Russian leaders.

The alliance between Yanukovych, Donetsk oligarchs such as Akhmetov, Party of Regions bosses and Crimean Russian nationalists such as Akhmetov, was always close. The Party of Regions, which had 82 out of 100 deputies in the Crimean parliament, facilitated the peninsula's annexation by Russia. In spring 2014, Yanukovych and his government allies in exile in Russia and local members of the Party of Regions in Eastern and Southern Ukraine largely supported separatism and the entry of covert Russian *spetsnaz* from the Crimea and Russia.

In the 2006 Crimean elections, Konstantin Zatulin, Director of the CIS Institute, brokered a coalition of the Party of Regions with the *Za Soyuz (For Union)* party that brought together the *Soyuz* Party, Slavic Party and two smaller Russian nationalist political parties. The coalition revived the fortunes of Crimean Russian nationalists after a decade of marginalization and little political influence.⁵⁵ A US cable revealed high-level Russian influence within the Party of Regions through Zatulin who, the US Embassy reported, "had personally brokered the electoral alliance between Russian Bloc and Regions' Crimean branch, even negotiating party list placement for favoured Russian Bloc members."⁵⁶ The US believed, "Regions had given the Russian Bloc undue political prominence in 2006 by forming a single Crimean electoral list, providing them with slots in the Crimean Rada they would not have won on their own."⁵⁷

Table 1 Russian and Neo-Soviet Nationalists in the Crimea, 1991–2015

Name	Political Affiliation	Active in Ukraine	Russian Support
Party of Russian Unity	Extreme Russian nationalism	Minimal electoral support but its leader (Aksyonov) was installed by Russian occupation forces	Neo-Nazi Russian Party of National Unity
Russian Community of Crimea (ROK)	Controls the Russia Bloc and Crimean Cossack Union	Russia Bloc	Moscow-Crimea and Moscow-Sevastopol Foundations
Russia Bloc	Political face of ROK	Allied with Party of Regions in For Yanukovich! Bloc (2006)	For Yanukovich! Bloc brokered by Konstantin Zatulin
Crimean Cossack Union	Paramilitary and most extreme of pro-Russian groups. Some members are local Interior Ministry and SBU personnel.	Active in Crimea, Odesa and Donbas	ROK, Don and Kuban Cossacks in Russia.
<i>Proryv (Breakthrough).</i>	Tiraspol, Transdnister separatist region, Moldova	Banned	Russian military intelligence in the Transdnister and the Black Sea Fleet
Eurasian Youth Union	Pan Russian Eurasia Movement	Banned	Aleksandr Dugin
Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia Front	Active in Sevastopol	Banned	Moscow-Sevastopol Foundation
Progressive Socialist Party	Extreme leftist break-away from the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU).	Marginal political force in Ukraine. Active only in Crimea.	Under Kuchma reportedly received assistance from the presidential administration.

6. Conclusions

Russian and Soviet nationalisms were more electorally popular receiving 40–45 percent of the vote in proportional elections and as high as two-thirds of seats in the 2012 elections because of additional deputies elected in single mandate districts. The Communist Party (1998), Party of Regions (2006, 2007, 2012) and Yanukovich (2010) won five elections while ethnic Ukrainian nationalist have never won an election and were only elected to parliament on one occasion (2012).⁵⁸ Ukrainian émigré nationalists failed to establish a political force in Ukraine while nationalist and neo-Nazi groups from Russia always had a presence in the Crimea and joined Donbas separatists.

This article reaches 4 conclusions.

Firstly, *support for xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism*. International organizations such as the Council of Europe and US government have routinely documented greater xenophobia in the Crimea than anywhere else in Ukraine and low levels of anti-Semitism throughout the country. Ukrainian Jews denied the validity of Putin's claims of anti-Semitism in the Euro-aidan and in Ukraine in general.⁵⁹ The Soviet legacy of anti-Zionism (a form of disguised anti-Semitism) has left a greater impact upon Eastern Ukraine. Soviet and Russian nationalisms exhibits higher levels of intolerance than contemporary ethnic Ukrainian nationalism in Western Ukraine and US diplomatic cables from Ukraine showed that many skinhead groups have extensive ties to skinhead movements in Russia.

Secondly, *aggressive and violent political culture* is more a feature of Russian and Soviet nationalisms; Party of Regions deputies were always involved in and behind violence in the Ukrainian parliament and the Yanukovich presidency murdered and wounded Euromaidan protesters.⁶⁰ Denial of and disrespect for the *holodomor* (the 1933 artificial famine in Ukraine that murdered 4 million people) and 1944 Tatar ethnic cleansing is widely prevalent in the Party of Regions, KPU and their Crimean Russian nationalist allies. The Party of Regions and KPU did not vote for the 2006 law on the *holodomor* and during Yanukovich's presidency the KPU erected monuments to Soviet dictator and criminal Joseph Stalin.

Thirdly, *authoritarianism, anti-democratic political culture and election fraud* were more common among Eastern Ukrainian political forces under Yanukovich in the position of governor (1999, 2002), prime minister (2004) and president (2010, 2012). Violence, including bombings and murder, and political repression, has been primarily undertaken by Soviet and Russian nationalists, especially during Yanukovich's presidency and by the Party of Regions.

Fourthly, *organized crime* influence was extensive only in the Party of Regions and Crimean Russian nationalist political parties, although corruption and opaque funding exists among all Ukrainian political parties.

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