

A stylized map of Ukraine composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific regions or points of interest.

## The Extreme Right in Ukraine

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October 2012

- The major political forces in Ukraine do not have a well-articulated ideology. An analysis of the gradual emergence of the Svoboda (Freedom) party into the political mainstream since 2001 and as a contender in the October 2012 parliamentary elections reveals that this party is the flagship of core extreme right ideology.
- The economic crises, unemployment and corruption have enabled Svoboda to add a socioeconomic dimension to its ultra-nationalist agenda as well as to expand its outreach by communicating with the grassroots rather than via elite lobby politics. This has helped Svoboda to gain power in regional legislative bodies in Western Ukraine.
- Instead of distancing themselves from the rhetoric of Svoboda, the mainstream political parties have entered into situation-dependent and other tacit alliances with it, either in order to win the nationalist vote or to showcase Svoboda as an »enemy« of democracy while presenting them as the only democratic alternative. The lack of consensus among the major political actors on how to combat right-wing extremist ideas has legitimised Svoboda in the public perception.
- Civil society has provided some counter-strategies to the Svoboda party. However, in the absence of political consensus, these efforts have proved feeble and futile. To raise awareness of the inadmissibility of right-wing extremism in mainstream politics, it is necessary to turn to the substantive socioeconomic elements of participatory governance.



## Contents

<b>1. Introduction: Overview of the Extreme Right and Its Electoral Performance</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>2. The Extreme Right</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
2.1 Svoboda’s Ideological Evolution as the Rising Right-Wing Extremist Party . . . . .	5
2.2 Information and Communication Strategy and Social Base . . . . .	8
<b>3. Impact of Right-Wing Extremism on Politics</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Counter Strategy of the State, Political Parties and Civil Society</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Conclusions and Recommendations</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>



## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DSU	State Autonomy of Ukraine ( <i>Derzhavna Samostiynist Ukrainy</i> )
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EURO-2012	European Football Championships co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland in 2012
FARE	Football against Racism in Europe
FES	Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (Friedrich Ebert Foundation)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OUN	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists ( <i>Organizatsiya Ukrains'kykh Nationalistiv</i> )
OUN (M)	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (Moderate)
OUN (R)	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (Radical)
SPAS	Social Patriotic Assembly of the Slavs ( <i>Sotsialno-Patriotychna Assambleya Slovyan</i> )
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UNA	Ukrainian National Assembly ( <i>Ukrains'ka National'na Asambleya</i> )
UNSO	Ukrainian National Self-Defence ( <i>Ukrains'ka National'n'a Samo Oborona</i> )
UNTP	Ukrainian National Labour Party ( <i>Ukrainska National'na Trudova Partiya</i> )
UPA	Ukrainian Rebel Army ( <i>Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armiya</i> )

## 1. Introduction: Overview of the Extreme Right and Its Electoral Performance

The present paper analyses the growth of right-wing extremism and of the main right-wing extremist political force, the Svoboda (Freedom) party, in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Ukraine in October 2012. As background, it draws on two earlier pieces of research<sup>1</sup> on diversity and tolerance in the context of Euro-2012 and the parliamentary elections, which focused on prevention strategies (including creating new institutions and counter-forces). Two major aspects are analysed: first, the entry of right-wing extremism into mainstream politics via Svoboda and its relationship with other rightist groups; and second, the strategies adopted by the state and political and civil society to counter this phenomenon. On the basis of this analysis, the paper draws some conclusions and makes recommendations.

During the years of independence and before – between the late 1980s and early 1990s – right-wing extremism and ultra-nationalism, expressed in slogans such as »Ukraine for the Ukrainians«, was never characteristic of mainstream politics in Ukraine. Laws on language (1989), citizenship (1991), ethnic minorities (1992) and later the Constitution (1996) laid down the foundations of Ukraine as a political nation. However, two decades of faltering economic and social reforms have led to the fragmentation of the democratic bloc and a simultaneous strengthening of the conservative far right. A short history of this evolution follows.

Ultra-right ideology in Ukraine draws on nationalist traditions in West Ukraine that evolved in the interwar period when the Ukrainians fought first Polish and then Bolshevik domination, led by the Ukrainian Armed Organisation and then, from 1929, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).<sup>2</sup> Both espoused terror, ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, fascism, bolshevism and what they called integral nationalism, professed by Dmytro Dontsov. In 1940 OUN split into a moderate (OUN-M, followers of Andriy Melnik) and a radical group (OUN-R,

followers of Stepan Bandera). Their tactical collaboration with the Nazis led to the total rejection of their ideology in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, even though at the time their armed wing, the Ukrainian Rebel Army (UPA), was fighting the Nazi occupiers and then the Soviets. During the Soviet era, emigré leaders of the OUN-R based in Munich softened their radicalism but continued lobbying for an independent Ukraine, and with the coming of independence supplied young people with erstwhile banned nationalist literature.

The organisation Union of Ukrainian Youth, formed in Lviv in the 1990s, was initially enthusiastic about integral nationalism, but later, its activists such as Oleg Vitovich, Anatoliy Shcherbatyuk and Volodymyr Yavorskiy, were condemned and expelled for being right-wing extremists. Radical nationalism was marginalised and found its place in Dmitry Dontsov's Fan Club and the Ukrainian Nationalist Union, whose leader in Kyiv was Dmytro Korchinskiy.<sup>3</sup> Smaller newly formed nationalist parties (such as the Ukrainian National Party, State Autonomy of Ukraine – DSU) sprang up and refused to cooperate with the moderate national democratic leaders of Rukh (such as Vyacheslav Chornovil, Myhailo and Bohdan Horyn, and Levko Lukyanenko of the Republican Party) as well as to participate in elections. An inter-party assembly of these parties was set up to coordinate them, led by Yuriy Shukhevych, the son of Roman Shukhevych, head of the UPA. But this failed to stop their marginalisation and fragmentation. As a result, they were unable to propagate radical ideas in mainstream Ukrainian politics.

After the failed coup of 1991 and the collapse of the USSR, this inter-party assembly was renamed Ukrainian National assembly (UNA) and its armed wing Ukrainian National Self Defence (UNSO). The UNA became active in politics, taking part in violent conflicts and organising violent activities in Crimea, Moldova and Georgia. Since 1993, DSU under the leadership of Roman Koval and Ivan Kandyba have become openly fascist and have adopted the slogan »Ukraine for Ukrainians« and advocated banning mixed marriages and the entry of non-Ukrainians into Ukraine and returning all Jewish people and Russians to their homelands. At the end of 1993, they set up the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in Ukraine (realising that the name OUN, an émigré organi-

1. See the FES studies by Mridula Ghosh: *Diversity and Tolerance in Ukraine in the Context of Euro-2012*, FES study, May 2011; <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/08144.pdf>; and *The Year 2012 and Beyond: Diversity and Tolerance Issues in Ukraine*, June 2012; <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/moe/09147.pdf>.

2. Bohdan Nahailo: *RFE/RL Research Report*, June 1994.

3. *Ibid.*

sation banned in the former USSR, was being used by leaders of the émigré OUN, led by the widow of Yaroslav Stetsko, Ms. Yaroslava Stetsko) and organised the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (CUN) in Ukraine. OUN Ukraine later openly declared itself as anti-Semitic and anti-Russian, contrary to CUN.

Today, among the radical and moderate parties, Svoboda (previous name – Social National Party of Ukraine) is viewed as the right-wing extremist one, since it is »xenophobic, radical, and anti-democratic: the three defining features of extremism«.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed at a glance, Ukraine's political spectrum splits into myriad liberal parties (holding 66.18 percent of the seats in parliament), parties with a socialist ideology (3.86 percent), parties with a communist ideology (1.45 percent) and parties whose ideologies are not defined (a sizeable 22.71 percent).<sup>5</sup> Only 5.8 percent, or fourteen parties, declare themselves to be nationalists and hence as belonging to the right end of the political spectrum. The list is topped by the Svoboda (Freedom) party, followed by Narodniy Rukh Ukrayini, Ukrainian National Assembly, Social National Assembly, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, and a number of smaller parties.

None of the above parties ever managed to score landslide victories in national and local elections. And the majority of them, including Svoboda, opted for alliances in order to maintain their marginal presence within blocs in the parliamentary elections of 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2007. Most of the centre-right parties, including the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian People's Party, and Rukh, position themselves as national democrats rather than as right-wing extremists. They align and build partnerships with the more ideological Christian Democratic Party and other mainstream parties.

Public statements issued by Svoboda, its own programmatic documents, its international affiliation to the EuroNat and Alliance of European National Movements (AENM) and its cooperation with a paramilitary formation called the Patriots of Ukraine are objective facts indicating that this is the main right-wing extremist group in Ukraine.

4. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/alexander-j-moty/ extremism-ukraine>.

5. <http://www.politico.ua>.

The All-Ukrainian Union »Svoboda« (previously known as the Social-National Party of Ukraine – SNPU) resulted from a merger of Varta Rukhu, Students' Brotherhood, Organisation of Ukrainian Youth Spadshyna and Ukrainian Veterans of Afghanistan in 1991. Until it registered as a candidate on 16 October 1995, it did not participate in the elections; however, some of its members ran as independent candidates in local elections in 1994 and won four seats on the Lviv City Council and a few in West Ukraine. In the 1998 elections, SNPU formed a bloc with Derzhavna Samostiyinist Ukrayiny (DSU) called Fewer Words (Menshe Sliv), which polled a paltry 0.16 percent in a proportional list, although Oleh Tyahnybok as a single mandate constituency candidate won a seat to the national parliament from the Buh district of Lviv Oblast. The party was active in forging alliances with its European counterparts. On 21 May 2000, Jean Marie Le Pen visited Lviv and attended the Sixth Congress of SNPU. After that, international cooperation and assistance were stepped up. In the 2002 elections, Tyahnybok again won a parliamentary seat as a candidate for the same constituency and joined the faction Nasha Ukraina, but was expelled in 2004 after his openly anti-Semitic remarks caused a public scandal. SNPU members won two seats on Lviv Oblast Council and a few more on city and district councils in Lviv and Volyn Oblasts.

A major breakthrough took place on 14 February 2004, when the SNPU's Ninth Congress renamed the party Svoboda, having received advice and support from France's Front National. On 4 July 2004, Svoboda attempted to become the umbrella Right party, by uniting the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukraine version of OUN, but did not succeed. In 2006, it for the first time stood for the parliamentary and local elections in its own right, but won only 0.36 percent of the vote, which was below the 3-percent threshold required to enter the national legislature. It did, however, win ten seats on Lviv Oblast Council, nine seats on Lviv City Council and four seats on Ternopil City Council. Svoboda failed to enter parliament in the 2007 national elections as well, winning 0.76 per cent; likewise the 2008 Kyiv local elections. It should be noted, however, that despite these consistent failures and low percentages its vote did steadily increase (doubling each time).

On 15 March 2009, Svoboda won a staggering 34.69 percent in the Ternopil Oblast Council by-election and formed a 50-member strong faction in a council of 120

deputies. After this success, the media and analysts began to speculate that Svoboda might have a serious chance of winning seats in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

The performance of Svoboda should be viewed in relation to changes in the electoral legislation of Ukraine. Thus, in 1998 and 2002, when the election law allowed for both proportional party or bloc-based representation as well as single mandate constituencies for individual candidates, members of Svoboda (SNPU) were able to win seats both as direct candidates and as members in a bloc with other parties. This constrained them to a certain extent since they were forced to cooperate with the mainstream. This system was replaced in 2005 with purely proportional representation based on nationwide party lists. This was intended to encourage the development of the party system, promote coalition-building in the parliament and make parties more responsible for governing as well as to prevent manipulation by vested interest groups by putting »independent« candidates in »majority« constituencies. Under these circumstances, Svoboda failed to reach the threshold of 3 percent at the national level, but their proportional representation brought them victory in western regions of Ukraine in the 2009 local elections.

The new electoral law adopted on 17 November 2011, which was to come into force for the next parliamentary elections in October 2012,<sup>6</sup> re-established the mixed system under which half of the deputies were elected through first-past-the-post elections in single-member districts, and half through proportional representation in nationwide multi-member districts. It also raised the threshold for entry into parliament to 5 percent. Several analysts contend that this will prevent Svoboda from gaining any seats in parliament.<sup>7</sup> Opinion poll results released by the Research and Branding group on 7 April 2012 indicated that five parties would cross the 5 percent threshold and enter the parliament – the Party of Regions (18 percent), Batkivshchyna (15 percent), Front Zmin (9 percent), Udar (8 percent) and the Communist party (6 percent), but not Svoboda. More recent data from the same company published on 7 September 2012 show the Party of Regions (21 percent), United Opposition (consisting of Batkivshchyna, Front Zmin and others – 15.4 per

cent), Udar (11.4 per cent), and the Communist Party (10.9 per cent) as likely to enter the parliament.<sup>8</sup> Those falling below the threshold were Svoboda (3.4 per cent) and the party of Natalia Korolevska, Ukraine Ahead (3 percent). In these circumstances, Svoboda is likely to use the single mandate (majoritarian) constituencies and/or conclude agreements with the opposition parties in order to get at least a few deputies elected to the national parliament, as it also did in the 2002 elections, when Oleg Tyahnybok, the leader of Svoboda was elected under the Nasha Ukraina bloc. Svoboda's performance will largely depend on its ideological debate and discussions and how much its right-wing extremist ideas appeal to people.

## 2. The Extreme Right

### 2.1 Svoboda's Ideological Evolution as the Rising Right-Wing Extremist Party

The background to the rise of right-wing extremist ideas is grounded in Ukraine's harsh reality – namely, slow progress in establishing a democracy, a state based on the rule of law and a socially responsible market. This has had dire consequences for human rights and living standards. A competitive market is yet to be seen and most wealth and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few businessmen – the oligarchs. The gap between rich and the poor has increased manifold over the two decades of transition. In addition, sharply falling life expectancy, low birth rates and mass migration abroad for economic motives has led to a critical decline in the size of the population, which has not been addressed by any coherent demographic or migration policy. It is estimated that by 2050, Ukraine will have lost 36 percent of its population. Added to the country's economic and demographic woes is political turmoil, the imprisonment of opposition leaders, attempts to muzzle freedom of speech and endemic corruption. All this has provided fertile ground for right-wing extremism.

In the past decade the extreme right has ceased limiting its statements merely to nationalist rhetoric revolving around issues of history, national honour, dignity etc. as parties like the UNA, UNSO, DSU, SPAS, UNTP, UPA used to do. These purely cultural diatribes made it easy to marginalise them. Now, however, the Social National

6. [http://portal.rada.gov.ua/rada/control/en/publish/article/info\\_left?art\\_id=290355&cat\\_id=105995](http://portal.rada.gov.ua/rada/control/en/publish/article/info_left?art_id=290355&cat_id=105995).

7. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/anton-shekhovtsov/security-threats-and-ukrainian-far-right>.

8. <http://rb.com.ua/rus/projects/omnibus/8576/>.

Party or Svoboda has extended its ideological repertoire to migration, boosting the economy, social equality and defending everything that is ethnically Ukrainian. At the same time it has toned down the cultural rhetoric, even pushing aside the national democratic ideology of parties like Rukh, Nasha Ukraina and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and branding them all either as collaborators with the current »anti-Ukrainian« regime or weak national romantics, unable to achieve anything.

Paradoxically, backing for Svoboda's new ideology often inadvertently comes from outside the party, from democratic and academic circles. Frequent statements from demographers to the effect that the European element of the Ukrainian population is declining and being replaced by expanding Asian and African races,<sup>9</sup> albeit carefully disguised as »scientific« arguments, are bound to provoke xenophobia and encourage Ukrainian ethnocentric groups.

External factors are also cited as arguments in favour of the right-wing extremist platform in Ukraine. One such argument is the rise in right-wing populist rhetoric in other parts of Europe, reflected in the results of the 2010 European parliamentary elections, as well as those of elections to several national parliaments, including Ukraine's neighbours. The emergence of the right-wing extremists elsewhere is also used to justify the presence of their »lookalikes« in Ukrainian politics, equating them with the Jobbiks in Hungary, the Front National in France, the Austrian Freedom Party etc. The very presence of right-wing extremists is misconstrued by many political scientists as an attribute of »European-ness« in Ukraine's body politic.

Understandably, in the context of the socioeconomic crisis, the call for a strong hand has been heard from various corners. Ukrainian political analysts, such as Viktor Tkachuk, general director of the Ukrainian Foundation for Democracy »People First«, has attempted to explain the presence of right-wing extremists in Ukraine, by drawing comparisons with pre-war Europe and in particular Germany during the Weimar Republic. This, paradoxically and in a roundabout way, has provided analytical support for the rise of right-wing extremism.

Meanwhile, the social component of the centrist and centre-left political platform, social democracy and socialists have been almost non-existent in the parliament,

although there is an immense need and certainly room for a healthy social democratic movement in Ukrainian politics. Instead, the left platform has been usurped fully by the Communist Party, which is often a situation-dependent ally of the parties supported by big capital. Hence we can be certain that any party that highlights the social dimension in its ideology will have electoral and popular appeal.

In the course of its »renaissance«, it is not by chance that Svoboda's website refers in its program not to the integral nationalism of Dmytro Dontsov and other nationalist literature, but instead to the work *Two Revolutions* by Yaroslav Stetsko (a leader and follower of Stepan Bandera of the OUN, who died in exile in Munich) as the main ideological treatise and cornerstone guiding its work. The essence of the two revolutions is highlighted in an earlier work by Stetsko dated 1938 and entitled *Without National Revolution There Is No Social One*, where he states that the revolution will not end with the establishment of the Ukrainian state, but will go on to establish equal opportunities for all people to create and share material and spiritual values and in this respect the national revolution is also a social one. Svoboda shrewdly notes that this social aspect of equality and fair distribution has not received much attention from the national democrats, who have demonstrated a clear shift away from any egalitarian approach, fearing identification with the left. Using the ideas contained in Stetsko's *Two Revolutions*, written in 1951, Svoboda professes that »a Ukrainian revolution cannot be one-sided, only nationalist. The driving force of revolution is the people, symbolising the nation, which includes a union of »alive, dead and unborn« people, so they constitute the social revolution... there is no Ukrainian liberation without national-social revolution.«<sup>10</sup>

While Svoboda has continued to maintain its original anti-communist stance (the party does not accept atheists or former communists as members), its social rhetoric against big capital and oligarchic capitalism puts it on the same platform as the left, recalling the French Front National's stance during the 2012 French presidential elections. While Svoboda speaks of state loans for large fami-

9. <http://for-ua.com/ukraine/2012/04/19/123401.html>.

10. Miroslav Kabal: *Spadshyna yaroslava Stetska kriz pryzmu ukrainskykh realii na pochatku KHKHI-st* (Through the prism of Ukrainian reality at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – in Ukrainian); <http://zakarpattya.net.ua/Blogs/91762-Spadshchyna-lAroslava-Stetska-kriz-pryzmu-ukrainskykh-realii-na-pochatku-KHKHI-st>.

lies, the Communist Party promulgates social housing and rent subsidies. Interestingly, the manifestos of these polar opposites use almost identical phrases. Both advocate the renationalisation of previously privatised enterprises that are of strategic importance to the state and favour the ban on the sale of agricultural land and strengthening the position of state-owned banks and both would welcome the introduction of a tax on luxury goods.<sup>11</sup> This new symbiosis has helped Svoboda stand out among other right-wing extremists, nationalists and national democrats. Svoboda's leader Oleh Tyahnybok has emphasised in interviews that the concept of nation is a union of blood and spirit and that Ukrainians are social-nationalists (as opposed to national socialists) on the brink of the third national revolution.<sup>12</sup> He carefully avoids the issues of anti-Semitism and neo-Fascism, although on several occasions he has publicly endorsed or even made anti-Semitic statements.

Svoboda has repeatedly asserted that it was the idea of nationalism that finally gave birth to the modern Ukrainian state and that Svoboda's mission is hence to complete unfinished tasks. Svoboda's »Program for Protecting the Ukrainians« thus includes such traditionally right-wing extremist, xenophobic and nationalist ideas as: criminal prosecution for »Ukrainophobia« (anyone who despises Ukrainians and Ukraine) and the re-introduction of the Soviet practice of specifying ethnic origin on passports and birth certificates. Considering that ethnic Ukrainians constitute more than 70 percent of the population, it proposes proportional representation of ethnic Ukrainians and national minorities in executive bodies. The program also contains such xenophobic clauses as a ban on adoptions of Ukrainian children by non-Ukrainians, preferential treatment for Ukrainians over foreign students in the allocation of places in student residences and changes in favour of Ukrainians to existing legal provisions stipulating equal treatment for citizens and non-citizens alike.

This undemocratic, xenophobic position is substantiated by its staunch anti-Soviet and anti-Communist approaches, such as the dismissal of state employees who were active in the Soviet system before 1991 (full lustration or replacement of the elite) and no visible propaganda of communist ideology in public spaces (monuments, street- and place-names).

11. [http://odfoundation.eu/files/pdf/ODF\\_15.08.2012\\_monitoring\\_Ukraine\\_EN.pdf](http://odfoundation.eu/files/pdf/ODF_15.08.2012_monitoring_Ukraine_EN.pdf).

12. <http://from-ua.com/politics/59d0de62e3b33.html>.

The economic aspects of Svoboda's program are shallow and populist. It calls for safeguarding the socio-economic rights of the people, advocates waging a war on big capital and the oligarchs, but does not explicitly outline a policy for achieving prosperity or the re-distribution of wealth and resources. Other policies include abolishing VAT, state ownership of farmlands which would then be leased to farmers, implementation of a pro-family policy by the state and even an alternative green energy program. Above all, it advocates a state-driven market, orientated towards national prestige.

This statist approach is also manifested in its foreign policy, based on zero tolerance for separatism. It espouses a united Ukraine and the abolition of Crimean autonomy. The Russian Federation is portrayed as the main enemy, which should »apologise for its communist crimes«. Svoboda believes Ukraine should leave the Commonwealth of Independent States and other post-Soviet structures. Notably, during the August 2008 military conflict between Russia and Georgia, Svoboda, albeit softly, condemned the Russian bombardment of Georgia, yet expelled Dmytro Snehrirov, its member in the Ukrainian city of Luhansk, for publically advocating gathering together volunteers to go to Georgia and help fight the Russians.

In order to overcome the Soviet past, move away from Russia and be a regional power, Svoboda urges an explicit guarantee of accession to NATO within a set period of time and the re-acquisition of tactical nuclear weapons by Ukraine. Even though Svoboda is »affiliated« with its far-right counterparts in Western Europe and with their international organisations (who are against the enlargement of the EU), Svoboda is not overtly sceptical about Ukraine's EU accession. In recent public statements, it has rather upheld the idea of the European Union and proposed that Ukraine play a key role in it as well as advocating more cooperation with the Baltic and Black Sea states. According to Svoboda, joining the EU would facilitate Ukraine's shift away from Russia and assert itself as a nation. Yet Svoboda has also openly opposed multiculturalism and diversity in Europe.

It is in this context that Svoboda's Islamophobia is implicit, traced in its attitude towards Crimean Tatars, who are considered by most national democratic parties to be »more pro-Ukrainian« than the ethnic Russians



in Crimea. Svoboda's stand has been that any »pro-Ukraine« force in Ukraine should be ethnically »Ukrainian, not Tatar, Georgian or Russian (...) Of course, the Crimean Tatars would like to use this current situation and eventually up their present autonomous status to that of a separate nation. For Ukraine, both Tatar and Russian autonomy in Crimea are equally threatening«.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, while acknowledging the separatist ambitions of the Chechen resistance (the majority of whom are Muslim), Svoboda has not attempted to aid them or host refugees from Chechnya in Ukraine. Above all, the politics of diversity in Europe are heavily criticised by Svoboda.

## 2.2 Information and Communications Strategy and Social Base

Svoboda's information strategy has always been to maintain a high political and social profile and hence to command a lot of media attention whether positive or negative. Svoboda is also active at the grassroots in the western regions of Ukraine where it has historically received most support.

The key messages delivered for the lumpenised electorate are: first, Svoboda is the only viable nationalist alternative to all other moderate nationalists and those in power are »corrupt gangs«. After many failed attempts since 2010, Svoboda has finally managed to reach a general agreement with the opposition bloc based on these positions, but while maintaining its own identity. Second, it uses every possible opportunity to articulate its position in the media, adopting a position on whatever issue is most topical: language, nation, or economic crisis. The media, in turn use Svoboda's statements and presence to make their stories »sensational« on the pretext that all sides should be represented.

In its internal communication policy Svoboda has always dictated from the top down, allowing no space for dialogue or critical thinking let alone dissent. Thus, its tack has been to use grassroots communication channels such as You Tube, Facebook, Twitter and VKontakte to address and recruit young people. Here special mention should be made of the relations Svoboda maintains with informal, far-right organisations, such as neo-Nazi

underground movements and radical football fans and hooligans. Members of these groups provide active pockets of active support for Svoboda's ideology.

Among the ultra-right organisations that openly propagate intolerance (a total ban on migration, refugees and asylum seekers) are one part of the UNA-UNSO, the Ukrainian National Labour Party and Patriots of Ukraine, Skinheads, followers of Hetman Pavel Skoropadskiy, Fans of the Third Hetmanate, Movement against Illegal Migration and Delegation of the Right from the regions. There are others that do not associate themselves with racism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism, but harbour radical ideas, such as the moderate part of UNA-UNSO, Tryzub, Ukrainian Party, Banderivets, National Alliance, both moderate and radical groups in the OUN, Youth National Congress, and Patriots – for the Defence of the Homeland.

Right-wing extremism does, however, have another pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian dimension. Among right-wing extremist groups that do not cooperate with (or even oppose) Svoboda are the pro-Russian groups, the Cossack organisations and other Islamophobic entities in Crimea, such as the Slavic Party, which attacks the Crimean Tatars. Another party, the SPAS – Social Patriotic Assembly of the Slavs, demands Ukraine for the Ukrainians, but professes Slavic unity and a socialist state of Slavic brotherhood, where only Slavs hold power and wealth. They are anti-American and oppose European integration. SPAS members protested against an anti-racist march in Kyiv in June 2007, threw bananas at an African pastor in April 2007 and supported the Russian position in the 2008 Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. As well as recruiting members from higher education institutions, SPAS works with disillusioned youth and has also set up a fighter unit, Chornaya sotnya. What unites them with Svoboda and its allies is anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-immigration and anti-Roma ideas. They do not cooperate with Svoboda, but they do not actively criticise it either.

During 2011 Svoboda's current or former members and affiliates were involved in sporadic activities in various regions of Ukraine, often without any clear political aim. These actions started with clashes with the Hasidic pilgrims in Uman in autumn 2011 and on 9 September 2012 and included attacks on those who came to lay the flowers at the Soviet-era World War 2 victory monument

13. <http://www.tyahnybok.info/dopysy/zmi/005546/>.

in Lviv on 9 May 2011 or destroying food kiosks and beating up foreign students in Luhansk in October 2011. If these events receive a lot of media attention, Svoboda's leaders follow up by »politicising« the issue at hand and reaping maximum dividends. If the provocations fail, on the other hand, Svoboda keeps a low profile so as to avoid having to go to court and face penal procedures.

As the age of those participating in extreme right-wing activities rises, the far-right youth subculture matures. The skinhead movement in Ukraine, once populated by young adolescents, is now being replaced by a more over-arching ultra-right subculture capable of unifying several marginal militant groups.<sup>14</sup> Svoboda has tapped into these groups, choosing historical dates to mount specific aggressive campaigns. Monitoring reports leading up to the European Football Championships in June 2012 showed an increase in the number and scale of hate signs and xenophobic attacks used by radical football fans, pointing to their alignment with far-right ideology.

Contrary to the assertion of one of the leaders of Svoboda, Iryna Farion, that, »people living in houses are the sympathisers of Svoboda, not people in dormitories«, educated and better off people in the western regions of Ukraine in fact are well aware of the dangers of oversimplifying history and national issues and therefore do not support Svoboda. According to Ostap Kryvdyk, a political scientist, Svoboda's social base is drawn from four systemic elements: first it chooses to appeal to the lumpenised masses, who do not question or demand dialogue, thus reinforcing Svoboda's narcissism and self-confidence and unquestioned position.<sup>15</sup> Second, aggression and force are espoused as legitimate methods by Svoboda and expressed in such slogans as »Glory to Ukraine! Death to the Enemy!« despite the fact that the death penalty has been abolished in Ukraine. Third, as well as recruiting far-right subcultures, it also hijacks sensitive causes espoused by NGOs and grassroots movements in order to enhance the party's image. Fourth, it creates the impression of a pseudo-opposition and portrays Ukrainian national consciousness in a false light.<sup>16</sup>

14. [http://smi.liga.net/articles/2012-03-29/4848234-v\\_ukra\\_n\\_b\\_ishenema\\_sk\\_nkhed\\_v.htm](http://smi.liga.net/articles/2012-03-29/4848234-v_ukra_n_b_ishenema_sk_nkhed_v.htm) See also <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/45537>.

15. Ostap Kryvdyk: »Neyakisniy Nationalism«, *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 20 April 2011; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2011/04/20/6122719/>.

16. Ibid.

### 3. Impact of Right-Wing Extremism on Politics

Most of the above has impacted on internal politics and the quality of democracy in Ukraine and has also damaged its external image. Internally, Svoboda's policies have reinforced the lack of trust in the authorities to the extent that people at large feel »disenfranchised« and »disempowered«. In the words of Mykola Riabchuk: »We live in a country in which no one believes that the mass media simply report the news, that customs takes care of smugglers, or that law-enforcement agencies protect citizens rather than themselves and their real masters.«<sup>17</sup> This gross mistrust has resulted in a crisis of values and a »democracy without democracy«.

Following its victory in the 2009 and 2010 local elections, Svoboda's intolerant ideology led to drastic moves with regard to educational institutions not loyal to its ideas in western regions of Ukraine. Having gained a majority on the Lviv City Council, Svoboda refused to exempt the Ukrainian Catholic University from land tax, one of the reasons being that historian Yaroslav Hrytsak and human rights activist and former dissident Miroslav Martnovych, both from this university, are vehement critics of radical nationalism. Another step was to dismiss the editor of the newspaper *Yi*, Taras Vozniak, who is an active proponent of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, from the post of head of the International Department of Lviv Oblast Council. These moves alienated part of the intellectual democratic elite in West Ukraine.

This vulgar, grotesque nationalist ideology conceives Ukrainians as an ethnic monolith rather than a modern political nation, leading the country backwards to archaic ethnocentrism, which was what caused the destruction of Europe during the Second World War. It offers few or no policy options for state building and has little valuable to contribute to economic and social policy in the era of globalisation. In this sense, it is not very far from the unrealistic communist ideals of the Soviet era.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the provocative aggression which Svoboda professes paves the way for legitimising violence in politics, and this could in turn be used by the authorities to use undemocratic means to clamp down on any resistance under the pretext of combating terror.

17. Mykola Riabchuk: *Towards an Anecdotal History of Ukrainian Politics*, 26 February, 2012 <http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/02/>.

18. <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2011/04/20/6122719/>.

Disproportionate policing and reaction to dissent and activism by the authorities between 2009 and 2011 is a result of the Svoboda-style far-right extremist activism, based on the threat of violence that it has practiced in recent years in collaboration with smaller far-right groups, including football hooligans. As a result NGO activism on socially acute issues has suffered a setback, as was the case with the demonstrators against the language law in July-August 2012 in Kyiv.

Although for different reasons, protesters demanding the release and fair trial of former Minister of the Interior Yuriy Lutsenko and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko were kept under heavy police surveillance. Already existing problems of law enforcement and abuse of power by the police in Ukraine were aggravated instead of being contained or overcome. Undoubtedly, Svoboda's activities contributed to this and gave a false perception that the Ukrainian public shares its ideas.

Inspired by the anti-Semitic, xenophobic hate speeches of Svoboda, far-right and xenophobic groups committing crimes against Jews, Muslims, Roma and other visible minorities and foreigners in Ukraine may thus hope for justification and protection of their actions. In the run-up to Euro-2012, from September 2009 to December 2011, hate signs (fascist, racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Islam, homophobic, anti-Roma) were displayed in stadiums on eighty-five occasions by right-wing extremist fans. Even the disciplinary committee of the Ukrainian Premier League, and the Ukrainian Professional Football League did not take action against the hate signs (Celtic cross, anti-black, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic slogans banned by UEFA) displayed by various fan groups on different occasions during 2011 as expressions of racism and anti-Semitism. Instead, they simply noted them as »unpleasant or humiliating incidents« in resolutions and imposed fines on the clubs of the fans involved.

Monitoring reports showed an escalation of right-wing extremist hate crimes against minorities and foreigners during 2007–2008; the figure came down in 2009–2010, but went up again in 2011, levelling off somewhat in 2012.<sup>19</sup> However, despite assistance from the OSCE and the international community, the authorities have yet to make crime statistics public as per European standards (to enable better monitoring and comparison) or to im-

prove procedures for applying Article 161 of the Criminal Code. The political will to implement these changes is simply lacking, so despite the existence of laws, their application remains problematic partly because of a failure to acknowledge the existence of intolerance in Ukraine.

The growth of a healthy democratic opposition in Ukraine is hampered to a large extent by the presence of Svoboda in mainstream politics. Media hype »showcases« right-wing extremists even though they do not enjoy much popular support. Over the past two years, the extreme right has often been posited as an alternative to the ruling party of the political mainstream on prime time TV and radio and in the press. Whether deliberate or not, this media exposure fails to realise the danger of such »acknowledgements«, »acceptance« or endorsements, which may pave the way for the legitimisation of a hate ideology propagated under the slogan »Ukraine for the Ukrainians«. Under these circumstances, the potential for the gradual upsurge of young armed groups may grow into a social evil amid regional, religious and inter-ethnic intolerance that is already in place.

#### 4. Counter Strategy of the State, Political Parties and Civil Society

The response of various sectors to the growth of right-wing extremism has been varied. If the state tackled the consequences of right-wing extremism by promoting multiculturalism, diversity and law enforcement, communities and political parties would have more leverage to engage in prevention. The state policy documents prepared since 2011 are: Cabinet of Ministers Action Plan for Migrants' Integration into Ukrainian society 2011–2015; Action Plans on regional levels in Chernivtsi, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk and Luhansk; Action Plan for Implementation of the State Migration Policy Concept 2011–2015; and draft Discrimination Prevention Strategy of Ukraine and Ethno-national Policy of Ukraine. Legislation that has been improved includes Article 161 (hate crimes, hate speeches and inciting hatred, violating equality) and Article 115 (murder on racial grounds) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. In 2011, the Prosecutor General in Ukraine instructed its offices to observe legislation towards minorities, to fight xenophobia and ethnic intolerance and to report on progress to the public. However, certain steps, such as the dissolution of the State Committee for Nationalities and Religion in 2010 and the distribution

19. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09147.pdf>.

of its functions among other state bodies (Ministries of Culture, Interior and State Migration Service) led to a loss of critical human resources and institutional memory.

Civil society's response to right-wing extremism has been aimed at monitoring hate crimes and aggression and promoting diversity. More than sixty community projects were implemented in 2011 by organisations of the Diversity Initiative Network, ranging from teaching the history of Holocaust, to educational projects, training, tolerance in school text books, ethnic minorities in the life history of the city's youth, intercultural cities, ethnic and national identity, international students, detecting ethnic profiling, hate speeches on the internet, legal aid to survivors of hate crimes, street football and Euro-2012 etc. The target groups of most of these projects were young people, civil activists, teachers, local government representatives, law enforcement bodies, the media and the minorities themselves. However, these efforts are mostly donor-driven and dependent, with weak ownership and sustainability. Community-based funding is a rarity among some ethnic diaspora-based cultural projects. It may only be hoped that the new integration program for migrants for 2012–2015, prepared by the State Migration Service will be implemented at the regional and local levels with local budgets and community funding.

The intellectual response to challenges from the extreme right involving controversies not addressed for decades has included public discourse by Prof. Evhen Gritsak, Miroslav Marynovych, Taras Vozniak and many others in West Ukraine, as well as several intellectuals in Kyiv, on issues of national identity and social dialogue. Special mention should be made here of an International Conference hosted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the East European Development Institute.

On the political front, building a unified left front against right-wing extremists has proved difficult. In post-totalitarian Ukraine, left-wing extremism is naturally weak and there is as yet no proper centre-left, social democratic or socialist alternative. Anti-fascist youth organisations have not yet mobilised politically to address the issue.

The ideological platforms of most liberal, democratic and national-democratic political parties in Ukraine are too vague for them to have a clear public identity and they have hence been unable to challenge the rise in right-wing extremist populism with a coherent ideology.

What is more, they do not shun Svoboda. The ruling Party of the Regions, although antagonistic in ideology, has indirectly contributed to the growth of Svoboda by giving it a prominence presence in the media – largely controlled by the authorities or by individuals loyal to them – simply by publicising Svoboda's criticism of the national democratic parties, the main opponents of the ruling party. Some moderate nationalist politicians opine that the far right in Ukraine today are populists and do not have the ideological conviction of their analogues in the 1930s and 1940s. This passive position underestimates the danger posed by Svoboda, which while once marginal is now the main marker of nationalism and the other democratic parties surrounding it. Many sympathisers with patriotic ideologies have entered into open situation-dependent alliances with Svoboda within the framework of the KOD (Komitet Opory Diktatury), a committee set up to unite democratic parties in 2010–2011 under a common opposition front to the Party of Regions. A letter sent by forty Ukrainian scholars and intellectuals in April 2012 calling for Svoboda to be excluded from this alliance was ignored. Later the KOD was dissolved and a new alliance was formed on the eve of the parliamentary elections, the United Opposition. Svoboda did not formally enter this union, but cooperates closely with it, attending all public events, and is hence perceived by the public as part of the democratic bloc.

Ukraine's young democracy has stalled on its way to consolidation. Quantitative socio-economic indicators show that the institutional framework and formal elections matter less as variables, while substantive content, programmatic relevance to life and socio-economic variables are of prime importance.<sup>20</sup> These substantive indicators beyond mere institutions should be looked into and a more representative party system should be put into place. One such attempt is the First December Initiative,<sup>21</sup> launched in December 2011 on the twentieth anniversary of the Ukrainian Referendum for Independence, as a result of an appeal by three Ukrainian churches. But it is secular in content and includes leading international bodies in the spheres of human rights, science, technology and the arts. It calls for social dialogue to lessen the gap between rich and poor, for the

20. Melanie G. Mierzejewski: *Stalled on Substance: Democratization and Public Opinion in Post-Orange Revolution Ukraine*; [http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/White-Papers/2010/~media/Files/Publications/White%20PaperReport/2010/Manatt\\_Melanie\\_Mierzejewski\\_2010Dec21.pdf](http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/White-Papers/2010/~media/Files/Publications/White%20PaperReport/2010/Manatt_Melanie_Mierzejewski_2010Dec21.pdf).

21. <http://1-12.org.ua/>.

reinforcement of the moral dimension in development, for more solidarity in the redistribution of wealth and for human rights and a fair justice system. In the run-up to the elections, this initiative, which includes a number of critics of radical nationalism, will focus on building a consensus against aggressive ethnocentrism.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above analysis of the gradual emergence of Svoboda (Freedom) party as the flagship of core extreme-right ideology into the political mainstream, the following conclusions and recommendations may be made:

In the absence of a healthy debate on national identity on behalf of the right and nationalist parties, Svoboda, with its simplified, vulgar, right-wing populist rhetoric has attracted lumpenised segments of the population, in particular young people, and is using existing neo-fascist, skinhead and informal subcultures to strengthen its base. It is the main right-wing extremist party on the Ukrainian political scene and espouses anti-immigrant, xenophobic and anti-Semitic positions.

The rise of Svoboda was caused by the economic crisis, political turmoil and polarisation in Ukraine, especially after the 2010 presidential elections. Continuing unemployment, falling living standards, lack of opportunities, and corruption have called liberal free-market values into question. Svoboda has added socio-economic dimensions to its ultra-nationalist agenda and with respect to big business and capitalism, land privatisation and housing support uses slogans resembling those of the ultra-left and the Communist Party.

Using the theory of the inevitability of two revolutions, social and national, Svoboda has declared itself as a social nationalist party and reached out to the masses via grassroots communication rather than via elite lobby politics. Posing as a force close to the people and as a »role model« for other right-wing extremist groups on issues of patriotism, national identity, language and culture, the main targets of its attacks have been the opponents of the ruling party. The latter easily showcase Svoboda as their undemocratic opponent, as an »enemy« of democracy, while presenting themselves as the only democratic alternative. To this end, media organs owned by individuals close to the ruling party have given

Svoboda media access and hence boosted its public image. This has paved the way for Svoboda to gain power in regional legislative bodies.

Instead of distancing itself from the anti-Semitic, xenophobic and racist rhetoric of Svoboda, the mainstream right and opposition political parties have entered into situation-dependent and other tacit alliances with it, to win the nationalist vote. The lack of consensus among major political actors on how to resist right-wing extremist ideas has legitimised Svoboda in the public perception as a partner in democracy. By criticising liberalism, Svoboda resembles the Liberal Democratic party of Russia (LDPR) led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, which is neither liberal nor democratic, but articulates the slogans of aggressive nationalism. The danger is that, unlike the LDPR, the intolerant messages of Svoboda may cause discontent in Russian-speaking Ukraine, and the pro-Russian Cossack extreme right in those regions may actively threaten the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Civil society and intellectuals have consistently provided legal, moral and informational counter strategies to the Svoboda ideology and healthy alternatives to prevent intolerance and hate speeches on issues of history, language and culture. However, in the absence of political consensus, as noted above, these efforts have proved rather feeble and futile.

To raise awareness of the inadmissibility of right-wing extremism in mainstream politics, it is necessary to look beyond the formal and institutional framework of political democracy and turn towards substantive socioeconomic elements of participatory governance for deeper consolidation of democracy. Post-institutional democratic development should be rights-based and involve political forces, the media and civil society with more assistance from the international and the European community.

As the European economic and social crisis continues, the rise of right-wing extremism and Europhobia may dovetail with mounting social and workers' protests. However, the emergence of a unified Europe is based not only on the common market but also on solidarity, transcending geographic and ethnic divisions. If European integration is Ukraine's priority, these aspects need to be borne in mind.<sup>22</sup>

22. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/04/20124185250195670.html>.



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### Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Dep. for Central and Eastern Europe  
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:  
Dr. Ernst Hillebrand, Head, Dep. for Central and Eastern Europe

Phone: ++49-30-269-35-7726 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9250  
<http://www.fes.de/international/moe>

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ISBN 978-3-86498-325-2