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Ukraine's wartime nationalism

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The Euromaidan revolution and the war in Donbas that followed it have brought about deep changes in the way Ukrainian citizens think and have led to a rapid transformation of how people view the concept of national community. It began to be increasingly common for proponents of nationalism to refer to solidarity with the state instead of referring to the nation understood as an ethnic community, as they had previously done. This is due to the fact that an entire young generation has matured which takes the Ukrainian state for granted, but also because in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict most Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine have opted for Ukraine.

The war with Russia, which has now been ongoing for over a year, has led to a significant radicalisation of society's attitudes and to attempts to seek models of military actions from the past that could serve as reference points in contemporary thinking. In Ukraine, the main, if not the only clear-cut model of this type of action, has been the story taught in schools involving fighting carried out by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1943–1952 (the narrative omits the crimes perpetrated by this formation – not only those against ethnic Poles). One consequence of this has been the currently observed wide-scale adoption of OUN-UPA symbols including by groups dominated by Russian-speaking residents of central and eastern Ukraine. This, however, is not accompanied by the adoption of the ideology of these historical organisations. Even when activists and columnists

refer directly to Stepan Bandera, his actual views remain largely unknown. A new phenomenon has emerged which so far has been of marginal importance, but which has large potential to develop: neo-Nazism which refers to contemporary European neo-Nazism instead of Banderite traditions.

Another new trend has been the accelerated weakening of the trend which involves associating nationality with language alone, and which used to be a typical element of Ukrainian nationalist thinking. The fact of using the Ukrainian language has ceased to be the main determinant of identity. This makes it possible to devise a new concept of the Ukrainian nation – understood not as a community based on strictly ethnic criteria, but a civic, political community which include all citizens who are loyal towards the state.

At this point in time it is difficult to describe the rapid transformations of the Ukrainian national concept in detail. It is not clear which of the currently emerging trends will prove stable and which will be merely ephemeral. Much will depend on further developments, especially on the course of the war and the manner in which the territory of the Donets Basin will (or will not) be re-integrated with the rest of Ukraine. This text is devoted to a conceptual evolution which has been evident in Ukrainian nationalism in the last year and a half. It omits changes – although they are significant – which have occurred since late 2013 and which have involved the nationalist movement understood as a conglomerate of organisations and groups.

Ukrainian nationalism (an attempt at a definition)

Various definitions of nationalism have been proposed. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, nationalism is a synonym for a sense or an idea of a nation, it is mainly free from negative associations. In Poland, for a concept to be classified as nationalism it must involve a conviction that one nation is superior to (better than) other nations. In the Polish tradition, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon one, the national community is clearly separate from civic community and is granted priority in the axiological hierarchy.

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The Ukrainian concept of nationalism is closer to the Anglo-Saxon one – it involves the conviction that Ukrainians understand the Ukrainian nation as being the ultimate value (on the list of political values), and that the fatherland is the most important value in the life of society and in the lives of individual citizens. There is, however, a strong trend towards placing national community (defined not so much in ethnic as in linguistic categories) above political community. This view had until recently been predominant in western Ukraine, where so-called “integral nationalism”¹ emerged. In Poland,

¹ In Ukrainian integral nationalism, the nation was considered an organic community (in which the fact of belonging to a nation does not depend on the person’s will) which has been permanent and unchanged for centuries; integral nationalism also challenged internal divisions (social classes). It rejected representative democracy and opted for a totalitarian state which would be ruled by ‘a national organisation’, it supported the concept of eliminating the influence of religion on social life and of building an ‘ethnically clean’ state.

this view is usually associated with OUN ideology. Integral nationalism, which refers to views popular in the 1930s, has recently become less prominent, in part due to the fact that it proved to be intellectually helpless against challenges for Ukrainians and Ukraine of the second decade of the 21st century.

The 20th-century ethnocentric Ukrainian nationalism targeted mainly Poles and Jews, as well as Hungarians and Romanians, leaving the “Russian question” to one side. By now, the conflict with Poland and Poles has been ultimately resolved. Similarly, there is no significant Jewish minority². The presence not so much of Russians but of the Russian language and culture in Ukraine is seen as the most important issue. Moreover, today the organic (radically collectivist) concept of the nation, which used to form the basis for OUN’s version of nationalism, is difficult to comprehend for younger generations which have been raised in the spirit of individualism³. Currently, in Ukraine any view which defines the Ukrainian nation in ethno-historical terms (that is, in opposition towards Russia and Poland) is considered nationalism. Recently, nationalists have ever more frequently referred to Ukrainian traditions of statehood, mainly to the Ukrainian People’s Republic which existed in 1917–1920, as well as to tradition associated with the independence/autonomy of the Cossack community in the 17th century. This trend does not eliminate opposition towards Russia, but it shifts the balance from the ethnic aspect to the institutional one. Moreover, it paves

² Before the outbreak of World War II, at least 3 million Jews lived in the territory of contemporary Ukraine. Today this number appears to be less than 200,000 (the number estimated according to the 2001 census was approximately 100,000 but was overly conservative and is also now out of date).

³ This explains e.g. the failed attempts by older generation Banderites aimed at creating one country-wide nationalist organisation. The trend to establish numerous, mutually hostile and often ephemeral organisations and groups proved to be stronger. The recruitment slogan currently used by the Ukrainian military: “A strong army – a strong you” may serve as an interesting example of individualist trends in contemporary Ukraine. It refers not to the “fatherland”, “state” or “country”, but to “you”.

the way for the inclusion of concepts such as identity and civil solidarity into the catalogue of nationalist views. This is due mainly to the fact that the Ukrainian state has existed for almost 25 years, as well as to the fact that its existence has been threatened for over a year now. Over the past year, there emerged a concept of “state nationalism”, or civic nationalism.

Ukrainian nationalism and the ‘Russian challenge’

Ukrainian debate over nationalism and over the essence of national community has been carried out in constant opposition towards the Great-Russian, imperialist approach to the Ukrainian nation as a concept and as reality. According to this approach, Ukrainians in fact are Little-Russians, their language is a dialect of Russian which has been spoilt by Polish influence, their culture is a regional variety of Russian culture, and their concept of national separateness has been inspired by Russia’s external enemies (previously – Poland, the Vatican and Germany, and at present mainly the USA).

This view used to be shared by residents of eastern and southern Ukraine, as well as by residents of big cities nationwide. The concept of Ukrainians being Little-Russians (i.e. a separate group within the Russian nation) began to lose its popularity as the status of the Ukrainian state grew stronger. For some time, the concept itself became less emphasised by Russian propaganda. However, the concept remained strong among older generations and in groups centred around Soviet-era migrants, predominantly Russian-speaking and only mildly assimilated into Ukrainian society.

In the Soviet era, the leadership of Ukraine paid little heed to official rhetoric and attempted to prevent, or at least hinder, the integration of residents of Eastern Galicia with the rest of the Ukrainian nation. For this purpose, inhabitants of this region were referred to as ‘banderas’ (which carried a clear association with bandits) and traitors who had fought the Red Army as support-

ers of the Third Reich. Similarly, as early as in the 1960s, if not earlier, the Ukrainian language began to be referred to as “Banderite speech”.

The narrative which associated the Ukrainians’ focus on their own language, culture and literature, their attempts at finding their own way within the Orthodox Church, as well as at shaping their own state independent of Russia, with radical nationalism, or even fascism, returned with new force after 2010, when the concept of the Russian world (*Russkiy mir*) began to be promoted. In 2014–2015, as a result of the Revolution of Dignity and the outbreak of the war in Donbas, this line of propaganda became more

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prominent. The new government in Kyiv began to be referred to as a “fascist junta” and ‘Banderites’, and plans to bring about a Ukrainian rapprochement with the European Union were seen as manifestations of ‘Banderite ideology’ advocated by this government. Additionally, these allegations were similar to views shared by European extreme nationalists, who consider the actions carried out by the Third Reich as the first attempt at achieving ‘Euro-integration’⁴. To cast Ukrainian voluntary and regular units in a negative light, the extremely defamatory term of ‘karateli’, also rooted in World War II reality, began to be used to describe them⁵.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Vladyslav Rachynsky, Uroki Pobedy i otnosheniye k pobediteliyam, [in:] *Kommentarii. Analitchieskiy jezheniedielnik* no. 17 of 2015.

⁵ In the USSR, ‘karateli’ (literally “punishers”) were members of auxiliary police units of the Third Reich recruited from among residents of occupied territory; they were often used to perform bloody pacifications of villages, referred to as “punitive operations”. The term has no good counterpart in Polish or in English.

This massive propaganda campaign quickly spread across Ukraine and triggered a paradoxical reaction. The fact of associating the fight for independence with “fascism” inspired people to refer to Banderite traditions (in the version taught in Ukrainian schools) and in this way to demonstrate resistance towards hostile propaganda. This, however, did not encourage any references to the actual OUN doctrine or to Dontsov’s thought⁶, nor did it involve a return to ethnic exclusivism, a major concept in OUN ideology and, more generally, an important element of various lines of nationalism which emerged in the first half of the 20th century.

Russia’s propaganda-fuelled interpretation of the current conflict is being accepted without much thought by numerous groups in EU countries for whom Nazism and anything related to it is the ultimate evil. Therefore, forces which fought Nazism (mainly the Soviet Union) are assessed as positive. As a consequence, those groups tend to ignore or even deny crimes perpetrated by the Communist regime. Russia frequently refers to this view and tries to emphasise it in its attempts to delegitimise not only the current government of Ukraine but also the very concept of Ukraine’s real independence.

Generation change and nationalism

A significant change in the Ukrainian national concept was associated with the emergence of the Ukrainian state. For those who witnessed its creation it turned out to be a durable entity, while the younger generation seems to be taking it as a given. Previously, the Ukrainian national concept had focused on a nation-ethnos. Currently, there has emerged “state-

⁶ Dmytro Dontsov (1883–1973) was a political activist and ideologist of Ukrainian nationalism. His views, which were convergent with interwar fascist ideology, served as an inspiration for OUN; the main difference was that Dontsov considered western Ukraine a marginal periphery, whereas the OUN leadership saw it as key portion of Ukrainian national space. The fact that Dontsov emphasised the importance of the Dnieper region is likely to contribute to a revival of his intellectual heritage.

-centric nationalism” or civic nationalism. Although it places great emphasis on the issue of ethnicity, it does not exclude fellow citizens who do not belong to the Ukrainian ethnic community. In the meantime, a generation change was being observed: a whole new generation raised in Ukrainian schools and Ukrainian state traditions has now reached maturity. Young generations of Ukrainians, and partly also Ukrainian Russians and other minority groups (with Zakarpattia Hungarians as the least prominent group), began to identify themselves with the Ukrainian state (and not only with Ukraine as a country).

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They also began to accept the official narrative of collective identity and the role of the Ukrainian language as the symbolic and actual language of state life. Moreover, as was to be subsequently proven, the young generation turned out to be ready to fight for this state.

There is, however, a downside to this situation. Not all Ukrainian Russians, including the young ones, accepted these changes, especially when it comes to replacing elements of the Russian-Soviet identity narrative with Ukrainian elements. The most significant doubts concerned not so much the language as the questions whether so-called Kyivan Rus was an ‘Old Russian’ or an ‘Old Ukrainian’ state, whether Hetman Mazepa was a traitor of the Russian Empire or a Ukrainian hero, or who should be considered the national poet: Pushkin or Shevchenko etc. This dispute (involving both those who support the new narrative and those who reject it) is being carried out not by reference to a thorough knowledge of these prominent figures and events, but by using clichés promoted

by schools and the media. These groups have seen the emergence of active, strong resistance which received ideological and organisational support from the structures of *Russkiy mir*. This is how new Russian nationalism, which seems to be more ethnic than imperial, emerged in Ukraine. This, however, goes beyond the scope of this text.

Previously, during the 2004 Orange Revolution, two important trends could be observed. On the one hand, the split into Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking citizens was being gradually eliminated. On the other hand, there was resistance towards the pro-Western (also meaning: pro-Ukrainian) orientation of the state. Ten years later, the division within society became considerably stronger, and rallies against the Yanukovich regime and against the Eurasian option were organised also in cities in the central and eastern part of the country, including Donetsk. The scale of these rallies was much smaller than that seen in the events in Kyiv. It should be remembered, however, that ten years back no such protests could have been possible.

The Revolution of Dignity and the war that followed it have magnified this trend. This is because the revolution lasted much longer than the previous one and the war is still ongoing. The fact that the war has actually transformed an internal conflict which emphasised ethnic divides into an external, interstate conflict which fosters the consolidation of civic attitudes, disregarding ethnic and political divides is another reason.

War and nationalism

Participants in the 2014 Euromaidan protests were much more ethnically diverse than those who took part in the 2004 events. Among the first protesters killed in 2014 there was a Ukrainian ethnic Armenian (a son of Armenian refugees) and an immigrant from Belarus. Other victims included at least two Ukrainian ethnic Poles (activists of Polish minority organisations). Numerous Ukrainian Jews took

part in the revolution, which inspired Russian propaganda to coin a defamatory term 'zhydo-banderivtsy'⁷. This defamatory effect was quickly neutralised when this word was adopted as a proper name with a positive meaning, and when a graphic symbol combining the Ukrainian tryzub (trident) with the menorah was created. There were very few members of

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minority groups among the Euromaidan protesters, however, it should be remembered that in Ukraine national minorities (excluding the Russian minority) are negligible (excluding Russians, none of the minority groups accounts for more than 0.5% of the country's population). Voluntary battalions, which decided to shoulder the burden of fighting separatists in the initial stage of the war, enabling the Ukrainian military to take its time to reconstruct its combat potential, were composed mainly of residents of eastern Ukraine, including the Donets Basin. Most of them were and still are Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian Russians⁸. The situation is similar in the case of civilian volunteers who support the battalions and the military, currently numbering hundreds of thousands. Similarly, most members of regular units (military and police units) are Russian-speaking residents of central and eastern Ukraine.

⁷ Both in Russian and in Ukrainian (excluding the Halych dialect of Ukrainian), the term 'zhyd' (Jew) has negative connotations; the neutral word for a Jew is 'yevrey' (Hebrew).

⁸ For example: Semen Semenchenko, the first commander of the "Donbas" battalion, currently a parliamentarian elected from the list submitted by the "Lviv-rooted Self-Reliance Party" is an ethnic Russian born in Sevastopol; until spring 2014 his name was Konstantin Grishin.

So far, approximately 35,000–40,000⁹ individuals have served as members of voluntary units. A large portion of them have returned to civilian life. Similarly, many servicemen have been demobilised. They have become local heroes: for their families, neighbours and local communities. In this way, the narrative associated with the new generation is gaining ground and this is happening faster than would normally be the case in a natural sequence of generations.

The war has turned out to be surprisingly deadly: so far, government forces have lost approximately 2,300 soldiers¹⁰. This number corresponds to the number of Ukrainians who died in the Soviet Army during the nine-year war in Afghanistan. The war is all the more shocking for the public because the Afghan war was fought far away from Ukraine and Ukrainian civilians were not threatened by it. According to current estimates, the number of civilian residents of eastern Ukraine killed so far is at least 7,000¹¹.

Towards a new shape of nationalism

On the one hand, the development of events in Kyiv and in Donbas fostered the spreading of nationalist concepts and slogans. On the other hand, it promoted a milder rhetoric, which was evident especially in the case of ethnocentrism. In the initial stage of the Revolution of Dignity, the slogan “Glory to Ukraine – glory to

heroes!”, which stemmed from the OUN tradition, was received with mixed emotions in the Euromaidan. Some protesters were outright hostile towards the slogan, and the mood was dominated by pro-Western, patriotic-liberal attitudes¹². When blood was shed, killed and injured friends and relatives became heroes, and a war for Ukraine’s integrity and independence broke out, and the slogan began to be perceived as a natural expression of wartime patriotism. Back in 2013, only radical nationalists shouted it out; today, only Russophiles reject it. It is possible to state that it has become banal; and this makes it certain that it has become detached from its historical roots, as with other symbols of this type.

The war came as a shock which was aptly expressed by the poet Anastasiya Dmytruk in the words “We will never be brothers”. There emerged a trend involving a strong rejection – which had previously been absent in Ukraine – of all things Russian, which generally used to be perceived as close, even brotherly.

The increase in nationalist tendencies was tantamount to abandoning traditional ethnocentric nationalism. Language and declared nationality were no longer the main determinants of one’s identity. These were being replaced with state solidarity, or civic solidarity, also referred to as nationalism – this nationalism, however, was common for everyone who fought for Ukraine and supported this fight.

At the same time, there emerged a trend involving a strong rejection – which had previously been absent in Ukraine – of all things Russian, which generally used to be perceived as close, even brotherly (mainly due to the linguistic similarity of Russian and Ukrainian). The war came

⁹ The number of a battalion’s members used to change constantly; it seems that the maximum number of members at a given time could have been 15,000–20,000. Cf estimates in: Siły zbrojne Ukrainy, stan na połowę stycznia 2015 roku, <http://www.nowastrategia.org.pl/sily-zbrojne-ukrainy-stan-polowe-stycznia-2015-r/>; accessed 10.06.2015.

¹⁰ This figure was quoted by the volunteer-run Memory Book of those killed for Ukraine (<http://memorybook.org.ua/>; access 20.07.2015); official figures are smaller, as some of the killed individuals who had been members of voluntary units were not properly registered, especially in the initial stage of fighting. In late July 2015, Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence confirmed the figures compiled in the Memory Book.

¹¹ This figure was announced by President Poroshenko in his speech marking anniversary of the end of World War II (<http://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-na-urochistomu-zasidanni-verhovnoyi-radi-u-35270> access 20.07.2015).

¹² Initially, groups present at the Euromaidan had included e.g. gay interest groups which later hid under pressure from the Right Sector.

as a shock which was aptly expressed by the poet Anastasiya Dmytruk in the words “We will never be brothers”. This shock contributed not only to an increased awareness of how separate Ukrainian identity and culture is from Russia’s – it inspired the view that also in the past “we actually never were brothers”¹³. Previously, this view was promoted only by radical nationalists, not necessarily being the followers of OUN tradition.

Creating the concept of nationalism or national identity as such not on the basis of events and controversies from a century ago, but on the basis of half-legendary (or even made up) ancient history, is likely to appeal to individuals supporting different views; moreover, it may inspire them to devise further concepts.

This new nationalism avoids making references to Banderite ideology or to the OUN tradition. It does, however, draw inspiration from OUN-UPA symbols and the memory of UPA fighting the Soviet Union’s forces and the Third Reich forces (the scale of the latter fighting is exaggerated beyond measure). In the new circumstances, these symbols and this memory have lost their party and political connotations to become nationwide symbols (although they are not yet generally accepted). This is partly due to aggressive Russian propaganda which was criticised by an unnamed Euromaidan member in Zaporizhia, who said: “If the fact that I want to live in a better world means that I am a ‘Banderite’, then yes, I am a Banderite”¹⁴.

¹³ The original title of the book by Max Kidruk, in Poland published as *Ja, Ukrainiec* [I, the Ukrainian] (Warsaw 2015) is *Nebratni* [Unbrotherly]; and the book itself is largely devoted to this issue.

¹⁴ Piotr Pogorzelski, *Ukraina. Niezwykli ludzie w niezwykłych czasach*, Gliwice 2015, p. 40. Cf also: Oksana Forostyna, *Poaching, simmering, and boiling: The declining relevance of identity discourse in Ukraine* [in:] *What Does Ukraine Think*, European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/133, p. 32.

The symbols are gaining popularity, which, however, does not entail any revival of the Banderite ideology popular in the late 1930s and in the early 1940s.

One manifestation of the increased willingness of young Ukrainian citizens (regardless of their ethno-linguistic background) to identify with the state was the establishment in 2013 of the “Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalists” movement. In its manifesto, the movement stated: “(1) Ukraine above all; (2) We are Ukrainians”, and expressed its support for a monopoly of the Ukrainian language as the state language¹⁵. The manifesto also made reference to a 1943 resolution of an Extraordinary Congress of OUN, in which the organisation dropped the demand for the primacy of ethnic Ukrainians in the state. The movement has no mass status, nor is it widely known; it is likely that it was established on the basis of an initiative proposed by one of post-OUN organisations. However, the very fact that it could be created, confirms that a significant change in people’s awareness has occurred. This new nationalism, civic nationalism, is not entirely without ethnic elements, but it is being shared by an ever larger portion of residents of all regions of Ukraine. In this way, it is gradually losing the status of a “minority faith” which it had some 25 years ago¹⁶.

Ukrainian neo-Nazism

Recently, certain neo-Nazi trends with considerable potential for development have emerged, although at this point their importance seems to be slight. They do not refer to OUN tradition or the ideological heritage of other organisations active during World War II. Instead, they draw inspiration from contemporary neo-Nazi movements, mainly those active in Western Europe as well as Russian ones. The fact that the best voluntary unit fighting in this war,

¹⁵ After http://pyh.ykp.target_run, accessed: 3.06.2015.

¹⁶ Cf Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith*, Cambridge 1997.

the “Azov” regiment, uses these symbols and rhetoric, fosters a popularisation of ideas supported by the regiment’s leadership (in October 2014, a march organised by “Azov” in Kyiv gathered five times more participants than a rally organised on the same day by the neo-Banderite Svoboda party; on the same day, Azov organised rallies in Odesa and in Kharkiv, where the largest form of protest Svoboda could organise would be a picket line).

This seems to be another manifestation of the generation change: the memory of World War II is seeing the gradual development of an increased openness to the world growing up alongside it. Symbols such as the ‘Wolfsangel’ or the Black Sun are not historical references, but manifestations of a pan-European trend followed by neo-rightist organisations. Similarly, Slavic neo-paganism is gaining popularity among Ukrainian nationalist groups. These groups support e.g. modern (anti-immigrant) racism, which often takes an extremely drastic form, as well as anti-liberal views similar to those advocated by their Western European counterparts (involving both the economic and the social aspect of liberalism). In Ukraine, these views have become anti-Western views. Interestingly, however, these groups are unanimous in their support for Ukraine’s membership of NATO, and a large portion of them are proponents of Ukraine joining the EU (for geopolitical reasons).

It comes as no surprise that “Azov”, whose members include few representatives of Ukraine’s western oblasts, uses blue-yellow flags (i.e. state flags) and not the red-black ones. What may be surprising, though, is that a new justification of nationalism is emerging in these groups: it makes reference to the Old-Russian state (Kyivan Rus, Ukraine-Rus) which has to fight the “eastern hordes” currently symbolised by the Russian state.

Equally surprising is the new, racist concept of the Ukrainian nation put forward by Andriy

Biletsky¹⁷. In his view, it is not the language but race that is the foundation of a nation – the language undergoes historical changes, whereas race, at least the Ukrainian race, has remained the same for millennia (according to this concept, the Ukrainian nation/race has existed since the times of the Trypillian culture, i.e. since ca. 4000-3000 BC)¹⁸. Should this view become popular, it will be a turning point for Ukrainian nationalism. One of its consequences might be ultimate permanent split between ‘neo-nationalists’ and traditional nationalist groups for whom language remains the apple of the eye of the nation’s existence.

It seems that the national identity projects discussed in this article have considerable development potential also in groups which avoid any connection to neo-Nazism. Neo-Nazism itself is likely to remain a niche movement (although the number of its members is expected to grow). Similarly, Slavic neopaganism is unlikely to become a mass religious and political movement. However, creating the concept of nationalism or national identity as such not on the basis of events and controversies from a century ago, but on the basis of half-legendary (or even made up) ancient history, is likely to appeal to individuals supporting different views; moreover, it may inspire them to devise further concepts. This seems possible all

¹⁷ Andriy Biletsky, born in 1979 in Kharkiv to a family with noble and Cossack roots, had been a member of the Social-National Party of Ukraine which he left in 2003 after it was transformed into the less radical Svoboda party. Next, he headed the Patriot of Ukraine organisation; in nationalist circles he was known as the White Leader. In 2014, he was the main organiser and the first commander of the voluntary “Azov” battalion (later turned regiment); he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel of police. In the 2014 elections, he ran as an independent candidate and won a parliamentary seat; he doesn’t joined any parliamentary grouping.

¹⁸ Cf Slovo Biloho Vozhdia (a collection of texts by Biletsky), <http://web.archive.org/web/20140924041340/http://rid.org.ua/knigarnya/AB/slovo.pdf>; accessed: 24.06.2015, pp. 28-31; also: Vyacheslav Likhachov, Batalion ‘Azov’ i politichieskiye ambitsii neonatsistov, <http://eajc.org/page18/news46972.html>; access 24.06.2015.

the more so since the younger generation has been influenced by fantasy books and is thus more open to such narratives than the older generation, whose minds were shaped by “classic” historical novels¹⁹. Similarly, it seems that anti-liberalism (in its broader sense) has a certain growth potential because it is at pains to offer remedies for contemporary challenges and not historical ones. This is not an exclusively Ukrainian phenomenon – in several European countries ‘the new right’ is becoming radicalised as it adopts nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-liberal views (often tantamount to anti-capitalist views, which brings them closer to slogans supported by radical left).

In Ukraine, these views and organisations (including neo-Nazi views and organisations) may be expected to develop at a faster pace due to the fact that this country has not been exposed to major educational projects carried out in the spirit of liberalism (as has been the case in Western Europe and also in Central Europe, although for a shorter period). Still, there are no major liberal or conservative parties (which could be described as liberal or conservative in terms of their actual political platform, not just in terms of their declared views), and traditional left parties have been totally compromised mainly due to their dominant post-Soviet/pro-Russian agenda. The political scene has been dominated by different versions of national-democratic (including nationalist) platforms as well as by national-radical ones. War fosters a radicalisation of attitudes and views and hinders liberal attitudes. A war that is lost (and Ukraine is still at risk of losing the current war) often entails the emergence of anti-democratic resentments. A dramatic decline in the economic situation, which translates into limited opportunities for the younger generation, is likely to promote political radicalism.

¹⁹ The larger issue of the influence of contemporary popular culture on political attitudes has not been researched in detail, especially in the case of post-Communist societies, but the influence itself is unquestioned.

Which nationalism?

At this point it is unclear what the future direction of the development of the Ukrainian nationalist movement might be. It seems certain that the movement has now found itself at a crossroads and that it is undergoing a change comparable to the one which brought about the concept of integral nationalism back in the 1920s. The pace, the scope and the main direction of this change will largely depend on how long the current “frozen war” in Donbas will last, as well as on the severity of the social cost (especially for the younger generation) of reforms which are being carried out, albeit in an inconsistent manner. It is beyond doubt, though, that “neo-nationalist” (and also “neo-leftist”) movements and organisations are now facing new development opportunities.

The events which took place over the last two years have brought about an expansion of nationalist views and attitudes within society. At the same time, society seems to have lost its previous radicalism and especially its ethnocentrism. A new attitude referred to as “civic nationalism” has emerged, focused on the state and promoting ethnic pluralism. On the other hand, a neo-Nazism has emerged which does not support the ethnic concept of a nation. Organisations which support ethnic exclusivism in the spirit of the former OUN, have remained on the margins of the current transformations. However, there are not grounds to expect the emergence of a mass nationalist political movement characterised by a paramilitary or totalitarian structure, capable of carrying out long-term consistent actions. It is more likely that several short-lived organisations, groups and movements will appear whose actions will be influenced for example by the current intellectual fashion and by the popularity of certain symbols. This is confirmed by developments observed to date (including in recent months) which emphasised the potential of the Ukrainian anarchist-democratic tradition.

This situation is also likely to be consolidated by a certain interest in nationalist organisations on the part of politicians and oligarchs. They intend to support (and sponsor) these groups in pursuit of their own goals, but at the same time

they would like to keep these groups contained. It remains an open question whether and to what extent the current and future organisations will become able to carry out successful political action.

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