

UKRAINE: THE RISE OF ULTRA-NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

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After a period of relative quietness, the uprising in Ukraine has registered a new wave of violence with at least five people killed and hundreds injured over the last couple of weeks. The new clashes were triggered by the government's decision on January 17th to put new restrictions on protests till March 8th. Since then, the confrontation between governmental forces and the oppositions has become more intense. While far-right movements have been blamed for the escalation, several abuses like mistreatment, torture and kidnappings carried out by the Special Forces "Berkut" have been reported by human rights organizations.

Indeed, one of the reasons of this hike in violence is due to the escalation brought into play by the Right Sector, who has adopted guerrilla-like tactics against security forces. As a consequence, the Berkut, the anti-uprising police under the control of the Ministry of Interior, has committed a series of abuses in order to extract information about this new formation. According to Human Rights Watch, alleged security agents have tortured protesters to extract information on the Right Sector in order to understand who controls them and who its members are.

Despite representing a very small percentage of the totality of protesters, the Right Sector has brought a new variable to the Ukrainian turmoil with unpredictable effects. The Right Sector is an informal league a different far-right, ultra-nationalist, groups that include, among others, the Trident, the Patriot of Ukraine, the White

hammer and the UNA-UNSO. Although no apparent links have been found with the ultra-nationalist Svoboda party, the Right Sector is believed to be an offshoot of the Trident, an ultra-nationalist group inspired on the principles of Ukrainian nationalism and Christianity.

It organizes its activities online, using social networks like Facebook and VKontakte; the latter is particularly used in Russian speaking country like Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Belarus, and Israel. The Right Sector's Vkontakte page has more than 50.000 followers and the movement is attiring an increasing number of affiliates. Through social media, the group organizes its activities and the supply chain through donations of fireworks, glass bottles and gasoline to fabricate Molotov cocktails, slingshots armed with steel balls, laser pointers and chains.

The Right Sector has chosen a no-negotiation stance in the regards of President Viktor Yanukovich and plans his overthrow by force. Right Sector's coordinator Andriy Tarasenko threatened to wage guerrilla warfare if President Yanukovich does not resign. The terms "guerrilla warfare" and "civil war" are quite recurrent in Tarasenko's speeches.

What is worth noting here is that the Right Sector has opened a new front in the confrontation between the government and the opposition. The group, in fact, stands for a Ukraine outside of the spheres of influence of both Russia and the European Union. During an interview with the Guardian, Tarasenko stated: *"For us, Europe is not an issue, in fact joining with Europe would be the death of Ukraine. Europe means the death of the nation state and the death of Christianity. We want a Ukraine for Ukrainians, run by Ukrainians, and not serving the interests of others."*

On the one hand, the Right Sector accuses the government of corruption, mafia-like governance run by the "Family" and the pursuing of an anti-nationalist agenda by pursuing a deeper integration with Russia. On the other hand, it blames the opposition of ineptitude in overthrowing the government and for bringing the country to the brink of a civil war by pursuing the EU integration.

The consequences brought about by the Right Sector to the current socio-political unrest are quite serious. First of all, it brought a violent escalation in the confrontation with security forces, hence generating a reaction/counter-reaction spiral. This leads to a radicalization of the confrontation, with the Berkut committing human rights abuses on protesters, no matter if linked to the far right or to the non-violent opposition.

Secondly, the Right Sector risks weakening and delegitimizing the opposition. More violent crackdowns will isolate the democratic opposition, leaving only governmental forces and far-right activists facing each others on the streets. In this case, the government will be legitimized to use violence against radical protesters, hence putting to an end also to the peaceful protests organized by the democratic opposition.

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