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Between Frontline and Parliament: Ukrainian Political Parties and Irregular Armed Groups since 2014
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“It must be like the Maidan, but with military means.”

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

Introduction

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

This paper surveys the interaction between Ukraine’s main political parties after the 2013–2014 Euromaidan uprising, and the new irregular armed groups (IAGs) that emerged in the spring-autumn of 2014. It touches on the parties’ role in the formation and absorption of
individual and collective actors within the armed volunteer movement. As the number of political and military organisations as well as of persons dealt with here is high, the paper only scratches the surface of each interaction between a party and an IAG. It often merely lists certain names and some selected facts, leaving out numerous episodes of varying importance. The paper is thus not a proper, in-depth investigation into this intriguing topic, which would demand a far larger and, perhaps, multi-author exploration. Rather, the paper is an outline of possible directions for further research on the course and interpretation of the various Ukrainian parties’ relationship with the IAGs.

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

From Social Activism to Armed Resistance – and Back

Ukraine’s semi- and irregular volunteer units that, since the spring of 2014, had begun to form, in response to Kremlin-fuelled separatism in the Donets Basin (Donbas) and Russia’s subsequently escalating crypto-war, sprang from, and enjoyed the support of, a variety of
These included civic groups, political parties, commercial companies and informal networks of former servicemen, novice protesters, experienced mercenaries, patriotic criminals, football hooligans, minority activists, and others. As the post-Euromaidan state was in a shambles, the irregular armed groups (IAGs) had – and, in select cases, still have – to sustain themselves through crowdfunding, private sponsoring and political support, from outside the government.

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

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

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7 Hunter, “Crowdsourced War”.

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


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

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

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

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

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

continued to elicit considerable social popularity, public trust and political support for the initially non-state fighters, in particular, as well as for all soldiers employed within Ukraine’s Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), in general. This was so much so that the majority of competitive parties actively induced former or still active combatants to join their electoral lists for the October 2014 parliamentary and October 2015 local elections. For instance, according to a study by the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, support from and for ATO fighters was one of the most important topics in the electoral campaigns of the parties for the 2015 local elections.16

What follows is a cursory survey of Ukrainian parliamentary and other relevant parties as well as their engagement with the post-Euromaidan IAGs. We briefly introduce the parties and outline their interpenetration or/and interactions with IAGs.17 In the conclusions, we extract from this overview some implications of the evidence for a broader assessment of their political role, and make some suggestions of how to interpret the Ukrainian experience, in light of and in view of the international comparative study of IAGs across various continents and time periods.

Right-Wing Parties and their Para-Military Arms

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


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

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out below, was and partly still is particularly close. The Right Sector claims to have lost about 60–70 members in combat\textsuperscript{20}, Svoboda over 50 members\textsuperscript{21}, and the Azov Battalion/Regiment 39 members\textsuperscript{22}. Another reason for considering the far-right here at the beginning is that these Ukrainian parties as well as their armed wings were and still are playing a disproportionately large role in the Kremlin’s propaganda campaign against, as well as, to a lesser degree, in Western media reports about, Ukraine.

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

**Pravyi Sektor (Right Sector)**

Although the youngest of Ukraine’s three main far-right parties, the Right Sector received especially wide attention throughout 2014. It was initially a loose umbrella movement for various right-wing grouplets and nationally inclined individuals participating in the Euromaidan. At its inception as an informal network of activists in late November 2013, the Right Sector consisted of several dozen people, mainly men\textsuperscript{24}. As the protests unfolded and clashes with law enforcement officers became more frequent and violent, the character of the uprising and outlooks of the protesters changed\textsuperscript{25}. Nevertheless, the number of Right Sector members increased only moderately to about 300 to 500 people towards the end of the Euromaidan uprising\textsuperscript{26}. It was only after the Revolution of Dignity when the number of Right

\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Artem Skoropadskii, Kyiv, 5 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview with Iurii Syrotiuk, Kyiv, 7 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018.
\textsuperscript{24} The later press secretary of the Right Sector stated that his group had around 400 members, by January 19, 2014. Interview with Artem Skoropadskii, 5 February 2017.
Sector members and groups using this label started, for a while, to grow rapidly, in connection with the unfolding confrontation with Russia.

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

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

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

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28 Ibid.


33 Hladka et al., Dobrobaty, 282.
would “support each other” during the 2015 local elections. Yet, the Right Sector ultimately decided against participating in those elections.

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

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

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

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

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37 Hladka et al., Dobrobuty, 209.
In his capacity as an MP, Iarosh started to push a bill in parliament that would legalise the UDA as a separate unit preserving its internal hierarchy. At the same time, he stressed that the UDA is “fully subjugated to the [national military] command”, and that there are thus “no conflict situations”. Whereas the remaining group calling itself Right Sector preserved its anti-systemic stance, Iarosh moved away from outrightly revolutionary rhetoric.

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

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

The Freedom party, or Svoboda, is the oldest among the more or less significant Ukrainian far-right forces. In 2004, it emerged as a result of a purposeful rebranding of the East Galician ultra-
nationalist fringe groupuscule Social-National Party of Ukraine. The Freedom party came to prominence in 2012 when it entered, and formed its own faction in, Ukraine’s Supreme Council, after a surprise result of 10.44% in the proportional part of that year’s parliamentary elections. During the Euromaidan, Svoboda’s chairman, Oleh Tiahnybok, was one of the most prominent speakers on Kyiv’s Independence Square. In 2014, the Freedom Party was, for several months, a coalition party of Ukraine’s first post-Euromaidan government.

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

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

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


53 Hladka et al., Dobrobraty, 92.

54 Hladka et al., Dobrobraty, 201.
when we formed, Svoboda helped us a lot (...) [It was] not the state [that] gave us [the equipment], Svoboda bought it with their own money (...). Yet saying that Svoboda equals Sich is wrong. I have never been a Svoboda member\(^55\).

By February 2015, the party claimed that approximately 500 members were fighting in the Donbas within the Sich battalion, the *Karpats’ka Sich* (Carpathian Sich, see below) company and as individuals in other units\(^56\), including Aidar (more on the latter below)\(^57\). In late 2015, the Sich special troops battalion was re-founded as the 4\(^{th}\) Company of the Kyiv Regiment – a police special unit subjugated to the Ministry of the Interior. The Sich group on the *VKontakte* social network indicates that this happened on December 21, 2015\(^58\). No informative public reports about this development have been provided either by the battalion or by the Ministry of Interior.

*Karpats’ka Sich*, a stormtroopers platoon, was created on August 27, 2014. Svoboda announced that it is “not the antitank devices, but the nationalist ideology which makes the ‘Carpathians’ the most dangerous enemy of the Russian forces”\(^59\). The party admitted that the unit consisted of “nationalists who could not get into the National Guard, Sich or other units because of criminal cases related to (...) the Maidan, thedowning of the Lenin memorials and other political cases”\(^60\). In May 2015, the Carpathian Sich “decided to get legalised” by accepting an offer to become part of the 93\(^{rd}\) Separate Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian army, but demanding to keep the Carpathian Sich as a separate unit inside the brigade. Initially, the military command agreed. However, in April 2016, the unit was disbanded. Its members either continued service in the brigade within the regular army structure or resigned\(^61\).

On February 9, 2015, during a Svoboda congress, a party sub-organisation called *Lehion Svobody*, with the double meaning “legion of freedom” and “legion of the Freedom party”, was created\(^62\). It had about 1000 members by 2017\(^63\). The Legion’s task is to unite party members who were or are fighting in different armed units, and to support them as well as their families during and after the war. Oleh Kutsyn, then still commander of the Carpathian Sich, was


\(^{58}\) Ibid.


\(^{61}\) Ibid.


\(^{64}\) Interview with Iurii Syrotiuk, 7 February 2017.
appointed the Legion’s commander. Although the Carpathian Sich was dissolved and the Sich battalion integrated into the police special forces, the Legion continues to uphold a link between the Svoboda party and certain ultra-nationalist soldiers, as documented in numerous entries on its Facebook page. The party thus retains close and institutionalised ties to members actively serving in Ukraine’s armed forces.

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

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

- former vice-speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Ruslan Koshulyns’kyi;
- younger brother of the party leader, Andrii Tiahnybok;
- former deputy head of the Svoboda parliamentary group, Oleksii Kaida; and
- head of Svoboda’s L’viv branch, Markiian Lopachak.

Of these, it is known that Andrii Tiahnybok fought in Sich. The commander of Sich reported that, during their service, the MPs adhered properly to military orders.

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

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

Natsional’nyi korpus (National Corps)

The Azov Battalion was founded as a police special forces battalion on May 5, 2014, reorganised as a regiment on September 17, 2014, and, on November 11, 2014, made, by an order of the Minister of the Interior, part of the National Guard of Ukraine. When asked about the Azov Regiment and the far-right activists serving in the National Guard unit, Arsen Avakov replied: “Is it better when the right radicals are out on the streets, crushing shop windows? Or when they feel responsibility and fight for it for some time?” He and Serhii Taruta, an oligarch who served as the Donets’k oblast’ governor in 2014 and later founded his own party called Osnova.
(Foundation), had provided the initial funding for Azov. They claim to have provided the material support for its first and legendary military operation, the liberation of Mariupol’ in the summer of 2014.

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

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

The above-mentioned Andrii Bilets’kyi, head of the Azov regiment, was also appointed leader of the National Corps. Before 2014, he had made racist statement and been known by the nickname “White Leader”. The Azov battalion and later regiment has been using stylised,
coded neo-Nazi symbols reminiscent of the Black Sun and Wolf’s Hook, yet publicly denied that they refer to German fascism. During the last years, Bilets’kyi has repeatedly denied making various earlier biologically racist statements ascribed to him, and even claimed that “if somebody had called me ‘White Leader’ face-to-face, [that person] would have been beaten”. Bilets’kyi still publicly opposes multiculturalism, but admits that “to be a Ukrainian nationalist today is to believe in values, not racial prejudice”, and his new party does not use an ethnic criterion to define who can and cannot be part of the Ukrainian nation. Nationalist Corps activist Stepan Baida claimed that the “Patriot of Ukraine”, the Khar’kiv groupuscule out of which Azov emerged, had initially been Russian-speaking.

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

For a while, the formal head of the Azov Civil Corps was the well-known politician Roman Zvarych – an immigrant to Ukraine from the US, member of the North American Ukrainian diaspora, activist for the Bandera-wing of the OUN, one-time pupil of Yaroslav Stets’ko, deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, and two-time former Minister of Justice of Ukraine. Zvarych joined Azov in June 2014, and played, until his departure in autumn 2015, some role in the formation and education of the Azov battalion, regiment and movement, with regard to both military and political affairs. In the proportional part of the 2014 parliamentary elections, Zvarych had been candidate no. 82, for the Petro Poroshenko Bloc (BPP, see below), but did not enter parliament.
as he was too low on the BPP’s list. Only in April 2018, long after he had left Azov, he became an MP replacing a BPP deputy who had been nominated to become a government member.\(^9^8\)

While he never made it to the frontline, Zvarych has claimed that he was critically involved in organising combat training for Azov fighters, by Georgian, American, Lithuanian, as well as British instructors, and to have advised Azov to refrain from using symbols and ideas that could be linked to Nazism.\(^9^9\) As Zvarych had left Azov before the National Corps party was created, Bilets’kyi denied that Zvarych played any role in the emergence of the new party.\(^1^0^0\) After his engagement with Azov, Zvarych started to criticise in public the political program of the National Corps.\(^1^0^1\)

### Non-Parliamentary and Emergent Parties

**Politychna partiia “Hromadians’ka pozytsiia” (Political Party “Civic Position”)**

Civic Position describes itself as a centre-right. Its party leader is former Minister of Defense (2005–2007) Anatolii Hrytsenko who took part in the 2014 parliamentary elections in an alliance with *Demokratychnyi al’ians* (Democratic Alliance). Together, they won 3.1% of the vote, thus missing the 5% barrier.\(^1^0^2\) While Hrytsenko is a colonel and received military education in Ukraine and the United States, he did not participate in the ATO. Instead, from the start of the Donbas conflict, Hrytsenko criticised the Ukrainian government for poor decision-making and accused it of “treason”.\(^1^0^3\)

The only IAG member on the party’s electoral list was Oleksandr Kraliuk, head of Civic Position’s Volyns’ka oblast section and an Aidar battalion fighter.\(^1^0^4\) Reportedly, Civic Position, on several occasions, provided material support to IAGs, namely to the “Sviata Mariia” (“Saint Mary”) and “Donbas” battalions.\(^1^0^5\) The leader of the allied Democratic Alliance, Vasyl Hats’ko, declared

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\(^9^9\) Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018.


\(^1^0^2\) In late 2017, according to the above-mentioned DI poll, 0.3% of the voters supported the Democratic Alliance, while the Civic Position, according to the KIIS and DI polls, was then supported by 7.4–8.8% of the population. “Hromads’ka dumka”; “Reitynh pidtrymky parti”.\(^1^0^3\) “Hrytsenko: tse niiaka ne ATO – tse derzhavna zrada!” *Presa Ukrainy*, 29 April 2014, http://uapress.info/uk/news/show/23146 (accessed: 10 February 2018).


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

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

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

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

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


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


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


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

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

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

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

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116 Hladka et al., Dobrobyaty, 485.
Evhen Hendin, a Ukrainian comedian who became a reputed volunteer, reports that “people were protected when [Kolomois’kyi], [Korban], Filatov were around”. However, “Kolomois’kyi spent little time here. Korban was actually managing”\textsuperscript{122}.

Filatov reports that, as:

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

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

**Other Non-Parliamentary Party Projects**

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

For some time, the new *Rukh Novykh Syl Mikhaila Saakashvili* (Mikheil Saakashvili’s Movement of New Forces) looked like an emerging party with some prospect\textsuperscript{126}. It was headed by former Odessa governor and ex-president of Georgia, Saakashvili, as well as by former deputy general

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\textsuperscript{122} Hladka et al., *Dobrobaty*, 219.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 101, 228.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 202.
prosecutors Davit Sakvarelidze and Vitalii Kas’ko. Among the Saakashvili regional teams, one ATO combatant – Serhiy Sichevs’kyi in the Chernivtsi oblast – as well as some volunteers are mentioned.

**Parties with Factions in the 2014–2019 Supreme Council**

**Vseukrains’ke ob’ednannia “Bat’kivshchyna” (All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland”)**

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

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

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

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

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

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134 “Bat’kivshchyna” vede u mis’kradu kombata batal’ionu ‘Ternopil’”, Galas, 1 October 2015, http://galas.te.ua/2015/10/2015/10/%D0%B1%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D0%BA%D1%96%D0%B2%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5-%D1%83-%D0%BC%D1%96%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B1/ (accessed: 13 February 2018).
won 7.4% in the October 2014 parliamentary elections, and 6.7% of the total vote across Ukraine in the 2015 local elections, sharing the fifth-best result with Svoboda. In the summer of 2014, Liashko cooperated closely with the just-created and still relatively small Azov battalion. The Azov Civic Corps site even maintains that Liashko was one of the battalion’s creators. In an article for the website of the Azov battalion, the famous right-wing journalist Olena Bilozers’ka acknowledged Liashko’s role and stated:

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

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

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

- Serhii Mel’nychuk, former commander of the Aidar battalion, in position 3,
- Artem Vitko, commander of the Luhansk-1 battalion, in list position 7,
- Ihor Mosiichuk, a former SNA-PU activist and the first press secretary of Azov, in position 9.

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145 Hladka et al., Dobробатy, 360–361. Mosiichuk either left voluntarily or was kicked out of Azov in the summer of 2014. Interview with Roman Zvarych, Kyiv, 16 January 2018. Mosiichuk was later accused of corruption and had his parliamentary immunity removed, although the court later ruled that this decision was illegal. “Deputat Rady Mosiichuk hotovyi do povtornoi
Andrii Artemenko, affiliated with the Right Sector, in position number 13,
Oksana Korchyns’ka, wife of Dmytro Korchyns’kyi, head of the ultra-nationalist Bratstvo (Brotherhood) Party and St. Mary Battalion, in position 19,
Dmytro Lin’ko, linked to Bratstvo and the St. Mary Battalion, as well as, formerly, to the Azov and Shakhtars’k battalions, in position 20,
Ihor Kryvoruchko, a veteran of the SNA-PU and an “Azov” company commander, in position 23.

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

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

Ob’ednannia “Samopomich” (“Self-Help” Association)

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


attracted, in particular, the middle class vote\footnote{Bohdan Butkevych, “Chomu Samopomich vtrachaie pozytsii”, Tyzhden’, 30 June 2016, http://tyzhden.ua/Politics/168506 (accessed: 13 February 2018).}. In the local elections of October 2015, the party won 6.3% of the vote and finished seventh, with its support mostly concentrated in Western Ukraine\footnote{“Na mitsyevykh vyborakh pokrashchyl rezul’tat til’ky krytyky vlady”, Ukrain’ska Pravda, 9 November 2015, http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/11/9/7088039/ (accessed: 9 February 2018). According to KIIS and DI, the party’s rating, as of December 2017, was at 7.0–7.4%.}. While being closely linked to many activists who went to the ATO, Samopomich did not, unlike the ideologically close Radical Party or Bat’kivshchyna, found or co-found any IAGs officially tied to the party. The party’s Kharkiv branch only provided some material support to the Kharkiv-1 volunteer police battalion which participated in the ATO\footnote{“Batal’ionu ‘Kharkiv-1’ vid ‘Samopomochi’”, Samopomich Kharkiv, 19 December 2014, http://kharkiv.samopomich.ua/news/bataljonu-harkiv-1-vid-samopomochi/ (accessed: 13 February 2018).}.

In mid-2014, Samopomich also started to develop a special partnership with the “Donbas” battalion. This expressed itself, above all, by the fact that some of “Donbas’s” representatives became Samopomich’s list and direct candidates for the 2014 parliamentary elections. They included “Donbas” commander Semen Semenchenko (real name: Kostiantyn Hryshyn) as number two, and Pavlo Kishkar, head of the battalion’s “information war group” as number eleven on the party list\footnote{“Partiia Sadovogo utverdila spisok kandidatov na vybory v Radu”, Ligi.Novosti, 12 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3267517-partya_sadovogo_utverdila_sписок_kandidatov_na_vybory_v_radu.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018).}. Semenchenko reported that “both [the contact with] Samopomich and the decision to run emerged two months before the elections”\footnote{Semen Semenchenko, “Ia dlia 90% rodstvennikov – predatel’, eto stalo prichinoi smeny familii”, 112.ua, 12 May 2016, https://112.ua/interview/ya-dlya-90-rodstvennikov---predisatel-eto-stalo-odnoy-iz-prichin-smeny-familii-310896.html (accessed: 13 February 2018).}.

While not having – unlike Azov or the DUK – an ultra-nationalist background, “Donbas” was one of the more radical and politically engaged IAGs as early as 2014. On November 3, 2014, a “Donbas” battalion fighter, for instance, declared on air that, should Ukraine cede “even a kilometre” of its land to the DNR/LNR, Poroshenko will be overthrown\footnote{“Batal’on ‘Donbass’ vydvynul ult’imatum Poroshenko”, Press Post, 3 November 2014, http://press-post.net/batalon-donbass-vydvinul-ultimatum-poroshenko (accessed: 13 February 2018).}. Semenchenko himself is, perhaps, the most shimmering of Ukraine’s new politicians coming out of the IAGs. He once served with the Soviet Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopo\footnote{Interview with Semen Semenchenko, Kyiv, 19 January 2018.}.

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“Semenchenko is accused of making risky decisions at the front, illegal adoption of a military rank and attempting to hide his past […]. Moreover, [in 2015,] video recordings emerged showing Semenchenko inside the Donetsk regional authority building during its occupation in March 2014”\footnote{Vitalii Atanasov, “Kryvyi Rih needs an alternative”, Open Democracy, 23 February 2016, www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/vitalii-atanasov/kryvyi-rih-needs-alternative (accessed: 13 July 2018).}.

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

potential fighters on 25 April 2014\textsuperscript{159}. He settled in Dnipropetrovs'k, where the Donbas battalion established its base.

Having already become a prolific politician, Semenchenko was later involved in an embarrassing episode in the young party’s history in Kryvyi Rih. A popular local \textit{Samopomich} activist, Iurii Myloboh, narrowly lost to Iurii Vilkul, the father of a prominent Opposition Bloc politician and companion of Ukraine’s richest “oligarch” Rinat Akhmetov, in the second round of mayoral elections of Kryvyi Rih, in November 2015. The party managed to push through a parliamentary decision on a rerun of this election in 2016. However, instead of Myloboh, the party now nominated Semenchenko, who predictably lost. That led to – perhaps unfounded – accusations of a \textit{dogovorniak} (shady deal, fixed game), between \textit{Samopomich} and the Opposition Bloc\textsuperscript{160}.

On January 18, 2016, Donbas members rallied near the presidential administration, demanding to investigate the lost Ilovais’k battle’s circumstances, and prosecute those guilty of the defeat\textsuperscript{161}. On May 3, 2016, Semenchenko coordinated a popular protest against the disbanding of the infamous Tornado battalion, accused of marauding, in Kyiv. On that day, there was a court hearing concerning eight representatives of Tornado who had been detained on suspicion of committing violent crimes, including torture\textsuperscript{162}. Events such as these were early signs of larger developments. During 2017, Semenchenko, together with Ehor Soboliev, coordinated an unsanctioned economic blockade of the occupied Donbas territories and an anti-Poroshenko protest camp under the parliament\textsuperscript{163}.

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

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\textsuperscript{159} Interview with Semen Semenchenko, Kyiv, 19 January 2018.
\textsuperscript{160} “Partiiia Sadovogo utverdila spisok kandidatov na vybory v Radu”, \textit{Liga.Novosti}, 12 September 2014, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3267517-partiiia_sadovogo_utverdila_spisok_kandidatov_na_vybory_v_radu.htm (accessed: 13 February 2018). The problem though may also have been Myloboh himself who, for unknown reasons, decided not to run in the repeat elections where he had to then be replaced and the choice fell on Semenchenko. There may simply have been no fully adequate \textit{Samopomich} alternative to Myloboh available.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Semenchenko’s “Donbas” battalion veterans were, in contrast, protecting Poroshenko’s rival, Mikheil Saakashvili, when he, despite not being legally entitled to do so, entered Ukraine\textsuperscript{165}.

\textit{Blok Petra Poroshenka “Solidarnist'”} (Petro Poroshenko Bloc “Solidarity”, BPP)

President Poroshenko’s BPP party list for the proportional part of the October 2014 elections did not include any representatives of IAGs and not even any other recent combatants. Poroshenko’s Bloc was thus one of those only two major parliamentary parties – the other being the Opposition Bloc – that did not feature prominently serving or demobilised candidates on its list\textsuperscript{166}. This may have had to do with Poroshenko’s intention to position his Bloc as a catch-all party. The purpose of not featuring ATO participants prominently was, perhaps, to avoid controversy over the war record of the fighters and not to alienate Russophile voters in Ukraine’s east and south. Also, as indicated above, some of the most prominent volunteer battalions have ties to the unpopular oligarch Kolomois’kyi. Poroshenko may have, as early as in 2014, seen his then ally Kolomois’skyi as a potential rival for political influence in Ukraine.

At the same time, there were several members of the armed and ATO-related civil volunteer movement who were elected, with the help of the Poroshenko Bloc, in SMDs. Thus, Oleh Petrenko – a former football club fan and temporary Right Sector activist in the spring of 2014 – was elected in an SMD, in his native Cherkasy oblast\textsuperscript{167}. During the Euromaidan, he had been involved in street fighting. In June 2014, Petrenko joined the Azov Civil Corps, and subsequently became close to Bilets’koi. Nevertheless, he was supported by the BPP “Solidarity” party, and became a member of the Poroshenko Bloc’s parliamentary faction, while preserving his link to the Azov Regiment and entering the National Corps\textsuperscript{168}.

Poroshenko’s son, Oleksii, claimed to have fought in the ATO as a volunteer, albeit under a pseudonym, for purposes of security, and was elected in a single-member district\textsuperscript{169}. Andrii Denysenko, who created the “Dnipro-1” battalion\textsuperscript{170}, was also officially elected as an MP from the BPP in the Dnipropetrovs’k oblast. He later joined the UkrOP group in parliament, but left


\textsuperscript{167}Interview with Oleh Petrenko, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.

\textsuperscript{168}Interview with Oleh Petrenko, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.


this association too in 2016. Oleksandr Tret'iakov, one of the most influential MPs in the BPP faction, claims to have provided support to Azov, the Right Sector and three territorial units in 2014.

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

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

*Narodnyi Front (Popular Front)*

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

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

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

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

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

- Andrii Parubii, former Head of the National Security and Defense Council, in position 4,
- Andrii Teteruk, commander of the “Myrotvorets” (Peacekeeper) battalion, in position 5,
- Arsen Avakov, Minister of Internal Affairs, in position 6,
- Iurii Bereza, commander of the “Dnipro-1” battalion, in position 10,
- Anton Herashchenko, the Interior Ministry’s “coordinator of the volunteer battalions”, in position 21.


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


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

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

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

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

182 The MP Kostiantyn Mateichenko, elected on the Popular Front list’s number 26 to the Verkhovna Rada in 2014, was commander of the “Artemovs’k” battalion. Interview of Andreas Heinemann-Grüder with Viktor Chavalan, Kyiv, 13 January 2017.
185 Ibid.
the [police] which was corrupted or had defected to the enemy side". He also believes that, after the ATO is concluded, volunteers should be invited to work in the police. That was in spite of the fact that he de facto expressed himself in support of the sometimes extralegal actions by Kolomoisky “and his team” in Dnipropetrov’ska oblast:

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

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

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

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192 Interview with Andrii Teteruk, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.
193 Interview with Andrii Teteruk, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.
194 Hladka et al., Dobrobaty, 88.
196 Hladka et al., Dobrobaty, 194.
More 2014–2019 Popular Front MPs came out of the armed volunteer movement. Mykhailo Havryliuk, a Maidan hero with later links to the “Zoloti Vorota” battalion198 won an SMD seat in the Rada in October 2014, with the support of the Popular Front. As mentioned above, Andrii Bilets’kyi, Azov commander, ran in Kyiv with unofficial support of the Popular Front. Mykhailo Bodnar, elected in the Lviv region in October 2014, had fought in the Kulchyts’kyi battalion199. Millionaire V’iacheslav Konstantinovs’kyi had volunteered as a fighter in the ATO, within the “Kyiv-centre” rapid response unit of the “Kyiv-1” battalion. Konstantinovs’kyi became famous after he sold his Rolls Royce car and donated the UAH2.5 million he received for it for medical treatment of soldiers injured in the ATO and for purchasing equipment for the units fighting in Donbas200.

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

Conclusions and Elaborations

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

203 Interview with Ihor Laping, Kyiv, 17 January 2018.
Most importantly, by late 2014, a number of IAG commanders had become members of Ukraine’s post-Euromaidan national parliament. Some of them had already been active in politics before their engagement in the armed volunteer movement. Yet, most made the jump into the Verkhovna Rada, in light of, and often with explicit reference to, their service within an IAG. Certain IAG members – as, for example, the above-mentioned Azov affiliates Kryvoruchko and Holovko – tried, but did not manage to enter the national parliament as deputies. Still other IAG representatives were elected to regional and local representative and executive organs, as a result of their participation in the 2015 oblasts’ (region) municipal and hromada (community) elections – a phenomenon we did not cover here comprehensively.

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

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

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

204 Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 671.
205 Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 672.
“[P]articular outcome goals and ideologies tend not to alter the likelihood of militant transition”. Rather,

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

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

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

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

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208 Ahram, Proxy Warriors, p. 36.
209 Ahram, Proxy Warriors, p. 140.
central and local decision-making – above all with regard to Ukraine’s policies vis-à-vis Crimea and the Donbas.

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{211} Malyarenko and Galbreath, “Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine”.

\textsuperscript{212} Ahram, \textit{Proxy Warriors}, p. 36.
influence Ukrainian political affairs, in one or another way. Yet, the IAGs or their successor volunteer units within the regular forces did not seem to have shaped, to a notable degree, Kyiv’s domestic policies, the Ukrainian polity and national-level politics of post-Euromaidan Ukraine, with the exception of decisions taken in relation to the conflict with Russia. Neither in the period of 2014–2015, when the IAGs had been more or less independent, nor afterwards, when most of them were integrated into the troops of the Ministries of Interior or Defense, did the volunteer units as such exert a clearly identifiable and relevant impact on the President’s, government’s or parliament’s decision-making, with regard to – narrowly defined – domestic political matters.

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

Our above survey indicates considerable interpenetration between political parties and IAGs in Kyiv since 2014. Nevertheless, Huseyn Aliev’s recent assertion that the post-Euromaidan volunteer troops are “informal power-holders” in Ukraine is fundamentally misleading, and has no empirical grounding. The power of certain figures once or still linked to the IAGs and their successor units in Ukraine’s regular armed forces is due to the political posts that they occupy. It has little or nothing to do with their potential access to firearms and heavy weapons, or to their links to serving soldiers who could use such weaponry within the context of domestic politics.\(^{213}\)

One of the structural reasons for the, at least until 2019, relatively low internal political salience of the Ukrainian IAGs regarding issues other than the Donbas conflict itself, as well as for the largely smooth transition of its former commanders to civilian politics, is the putatively civil character of the war in Eastern Ukraine.\(^{214}\) Unlike numerous other paramilitaries around the world over the last few decades, the Ukrainian IAGs emerged within the context of a proxy and hybrid war between two already more or less established states: Russia and Ukraine. Contrary

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\(^{213}\) Aliyev, “Bewaffnete Freiwilligenbataillone”.

to the assertion of some observers\textsuperscript{215}, the war in the Donbas was not primarily the result of an internal political rift within one and the same state\textsuperscript{216}. The outbreak of the war was, to be sure, shaped by a number of Ukrainian domestic conditions that eased the Kremlin’s active meddling in the Donbas more so than in other regions where such attempts – as the so-called Glazyev Tapes documented\textsuperscript{217} – were also made\textsuperscript{218}. Yet, the war in the Donets Basin would not have broken out in 2014 without the Russian factor\textsuperscript{219}.

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{220} Costa, “From Bombs to Ballots”, p. 675.
any more. The Right Sector and the DUK as well as some even smaller such entities, however,
constitute altogether exceptions rather than the rule among post-Euromaidan IAGs and parties.

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

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

Comparative explorations of the Ukrainian case that would juxtapose the East European
experiences, with Latin American, Central African, Middle Eastern or East Asian developments
are so far missing. In fact, it may, by 2019, still be too early to do them. Considerable empirical
research, descriptive analysis, and ideographic interpretation remains to be done, before cross-
cultural comparison with other cases will make sense\(^\text{222}\). Yet, conclusions from earlier cross-
cultural studies, such as the above-quoted, already indicate that the emergence of IAGs in
Ukraine in 2014, their subsequent inclusion into state-structures, and their commanders’
transition to electoral politics, may constitute less exceptional phenomena than sometimes
assumed. They may be more easily explicable and interpretable with reference to earlier similar
phenomena in other regions of the world than our above descriptive survey by itself suggests.

\(^{221}\) Ahram, *Proxy Warriors*, p. 135.

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

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

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

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

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

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