

Ukrainian Nationalism Again Under Attack in Ukraine

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Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich (BBC)

Belarus and Ukraine are the only two post-communist countries where the ruling authorities see the nationalism of their countrymen as something to be denounced and combated. Viktor Yanukovich, is the first of four Ukrainian presidents whose team regard Ukrainian nationalism as an evil that they associate – as in Soviet times– with pro-Western opposition, Galicia and the Ukrainian Diaspora. Deputy Prime Minister, Borys Kolesnikov, usually associated with the “pragmatic” business wing of the Party of Regions, described his “Orange” opponents as “nationalist bandits” (Ukrayinska Pravda, May 27). Such language is a throwback to Soviet views of nationalist partisans in Western Ukraine.

Education Minister, Dmytro Tabachnyk, is the most hard line proponent of the new “anti-nationalism.” His concept for school textbooks would radically depart from the last two decades and return to the Soviet view of Ukrainian nationalists as “murderers” and “Nazi collaborators” (www.partyofregions.org.ua/pr-east-west/4c08a20a530d1/).

Tabachnyk divides Josef Stalin into “good” and “bad” in his role in the victory of World War II and his responsibility for the deaths of “many innocent people.” Tabachnyk asserted that: “Stepan Bandera and Yuriy Shukhevych will remain in history as nationalists, and organizers of mass murder and they will forever be stained by the brush of collaborationism.” After the erection of a bust to Stalin in Zaporozhzhia in May, the Communist Party (KPU) has sought to place a Stalin bust in Kyiv (<http://gazeta.ua/index.php?id=338461>). Yanukovich and Tabachnyk refused to denounce the Zaporozhzhia Stalin monument, claiming this was an issue for local authorities. Party of Regions deputy, Vasyl Khary, argued that if Bandera monuments can be erected in Western Ukraine, then Stalin should be displayed in Eastern Ukraine (<http://gazeta.ua/index.php?id=337921>).

However, the Galician population supports Bandera monuments, which is not the case with Stalin in Eastern Ukraine. A survey in May found that 57 percent of Ukrainians oppose Stalin busts, ranging between 76 percent in Western to 57 percent in Eastern Ukraine (only ten percent of Ukrainians support erecting Stalin busts). Moreover, 52 percent of the over 60 age group oppose Stalin monuments (www.uceps.com.ua).

Opponents of the Stalin monument unfurled a banner with the words: “Zaporozhzhia Against Stalin” at a soccer match in the town (<http://photo.unian.net/ukr/detail/277539.html>). These widespread negative sentiments relating to Stalin throughout Ukraine are a product of two decades of education concerning the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism.

The new “anti-nationalism” faces three problems:

1. The former Director of the Security Service (SBU) archives, Volodymyr Viatovych, argues that Tabachnyk’s rationale equating anyone who fought against the Soviet regime as a “collaborator,” is flawed. The only “Ukrainian” state that then existed was the Ukrainian SSR, implying that Germans who opposed the Nazi regime should also be condemned as there was only one German state (<http://gazeta.ua/index.php?id=338556>).

2. The return to using the “Great Patriotic War” ignores Stalin’s three year collaboration with Hitler’s Germany in 1939-1941.

3. Although Tabachnyk does not deny Stalinist crimes, unlike the Belarusian regime, he downplays these issues by focusing on “nationalist” murders, even though Stalinist crimes accounted for the deaths of many millions. This strand of thinking is imported from Russia and views the 1933 famine as a policy, not committed against Ukrainians, but against all Soviet peasants, and therefore not “genocide.”

Viewing the famine as “genocide” is interpreted as being “nationalistic” and “anti-Russian.” Deputy Prime Minister, Dmytro Tabachnyk, during the 2002-2004 Yanukovich government believed that, “recognition of the famine as genocide is an action that revives historical justice”

(<http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/medvedev/4bea70d722b63/>). The Yanukovich administration’s stance on the famine contradicts that of Ukraine’s three previous presidents, including Leonid Kuchma who began an international campaign in 2003 to have the famine recognised as “genocide.” It also ignores a law passed in November 2006 and the January 2010 court ruling, as well as twenty countries recognizing the famine as “genocide.”

The dismantling of two decades of “nationalist” education will target the Institute of National Memory, established in July 2005 by the then President, Viktor Yushchenko, and modelled on Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance. Ihor Yukhnovsky, the Director of the Institute of National Memory, will be replaced as he is considered an obstacle to the introduction of a new nationality policy that is “openly anti-Ukrainian and pro-Soviet,” Viatovych said (www.gazeta.ua, July 12). The authorities may integrate the institute under the State Committee of Archives, whose head is a communist.

The KPU voted with the pro-Kuchma parties to remove the Yushchenko government (April 2001) and twice entered coalitions with the Party of Regions (2006-2007, 2010). Many ex-KPU voters switched to the Party of Regions adding to its neo-Soviet, eastern Slavic, and Russophone identity. During Yanukovich’s press conference with the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, he twice described her as “General-Secretary” (Ukrayinska Pravda, July 3).

The “radical pro-Russian wing of the Party of Regions” wants to control the institute, which “means that the ideological direction of the institute will be radically different,” according to the political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko (<http://gazeta.ua/index.php?id=345945>). The move toward “anti-nationalism” began in the 2002 election, in response to Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine becoming the largest opposition force, winning 24 percent to the KPU’s 20 percent. As Yushchenko posed a serious threat to the authorities’ plans in the 2004 elections, they returned to “anti-nationalism.” An internal document from the 2004 Yanukovich campaign instructed journalists to “show the threat of the coming to power of Viktor Yushchenko backed by nationalists, oligarchs and extremist circles” (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 12, 2004). Yanukovich’s US representatives talked up Yushchenko’s alleged “anti-semitism” and links to the nationalist diaspora “who came to America after World War II from areas where the population collaborated with the Nazis” (Zerkalo Nedeli, November 13, 2004).

The Yanukovich campaign re-phrased “Nashist” (a play on Nasha Ukrayina or Our Ukraine) to “Nazism.” Television programs, inter-mixing World War II Nazi and Yushchenko meetings, were paid for, as campaign materials, by the Party of Regions and broadcast particularly in Donetsk (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 8, 2004).

“Anti-nationalism,” which is central to the on-going “Lukashenka-Lite” nationality policies, will lead to the publication at the end of this year of the first unified Russian-Ukrainian textbook. Some fear that it might prove to be a precursor to the union of both countries.