

The Far Right in Ukraine has proliferated at a remarkable rate since Maidan Revolution ousted the old pro-Russian government. These groups became a vital tool in the early phase of the conflict in the East. However, what is most important about such organisations is not so much their comparative effectiveness in relation to the ill-equipped forces of the Ukrainian state. Instead, their importance is their willingness to fight, writes Cory Turner

In an age when a number of Middle Eastern countries have remained in turmoil for years, it can be easy to forget the significance of how ordinary people can quickly be turned into volunteer soldiers; if not employed by the state itself, then by militia or vigilante organisations. In Ukraine though, nationalism has been underlying in the country. Provided with the opportunity to volunteer themselves to fight against a foreign foe - one which has been either Ukraine's de facto or direct master for centuries - the Far Right and neo-Nazi elements in Ukraine were spurred into action.

Similar neo-Nazi and Far Right nationalist groups also exist in Russia, though they aren't as pro-active as in Ukraine, for President Putin is genuinely believed to be not only a competent but a strong leader who is supposedly the answer for the country's problems. Whilst in Ukraine these organisations demonstrate a frustration with the government and the deliverance of an easy explanation for what are seen as prolific problems facing the country, from immigration and diversity to the illegal Russian invasion itself, within Russia they often reveal a revived unity behind the government. This is despite their broadly similar beliefs and conduct in the form of anti-immigration, racism and homophobic propaganda, a firm belief in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their respective nation states and a violent opposition towards the other country.

This is key in the difficulty for Ukraine not only to recover but to rebuild itself into its new pro-European form (or, in the hopes of groups such as the Azov Battalion, a more solidified and economically independent Ukraine) for a number of reasons. First and foremost is how the popularity of these groups will prevent Ukraine from legitimising itself as a nation state. Many in the separatist-controlled regions of the country will not be able to accept the any post-Euromaidan government if they are not convinced as to the legitimacy of the new state, even if the East can be taken back under control. Plans from 2014 to draw on foreign experts to root out corruption in the state's branches will need to be expanded to do this, as well as decentralisation to make the prospect of rule from Kiev more palatable.

However, with President Porochenko bending to the will of such Far Right extremist groups, for instance in the formal institutionalisation of the Azov Battalion in the state system, any efforts to make Ukraine appear credible will be undermined. Thus, lines will have to be drawn, and a massive project to unify the country under the nation state itself, with its constitutional principles at its centre, will need to be undertaken in order to undermine the popularity of these groups, and renew confidence in the government in its place.

Another fundamental element is the impact the Far Right has had in Ukraine on any future negotiation it may make with Russia. For ordinary Russian people and politicians alike, the Far Right in Ukraine reflects a widespread desire to vanquish Russia and reject its influence, customs and culture, disrespecting its 'rightful' place in the world and in Europe. If the popularity of these groups isn't diminished, with a genuine alternative provided, then all that will result is a gulf of misunderstanding, leading to a much greater escalation of violence, and in a war of attrition between the two countries, Russia will certainly emerge victorious so long as oil prices remain at least relatively stable. Further, the popularity and influence of the Far Right over the Ukrainian government will allow Russian politicians to feed President Putin's propaganda machine, not only allowing him to solidify his position through an ever-rising popularity, but ensuring that greater resources are committed to overcoming the Ukrainian government's defences.

By this method the Kremlin can manage perpetually to spur pro-Russian sentiment in the separatist-controlled regions of Ukraine. By exploiting the rise of the Far Right in Ukraine, it can delegitimise the Ukrainian government and the Maidan Revolution, a popularly-led revolt, and at the same time utilise its own nationalism, and that which it nurtures inside Russia proper and in eastern Ukraine, to legitimise itself to the people there. A plan will need to be devised so Ukraine may attract greater support and create regional stability.

One option is to embrace this nationalist sentiment whilst creating a more efficient state and ridding itself of corruption and crony capitalism, drawing in a large amount of hopeful recruits. However, doing so would involve openly accepting principles and adopting tactics that are incompatible with EU standards, not to mention upsetting many politicians and the people themselves, which could lead to further disenfranchisement and a freeze on further support, and thus diplomatic isolation.

Another option is to reject embracing such groups and extreme ideologies further and provide an alternative, putting constitutional tenets at its centre to spread ideas of tolerance for minority groups, and at the same time ridding the state of corruption, declaring a balanced approach to the invasion in an effort to destroy the credibility of extremist organisations and unify the disenfranchised behind the state instead. However, this would itself involve relying on the willingness of the EU to commit to greater support for the country, something which it remains divided on itself, and will perhaps even be incapable of providing in the future.

Despite this, with unification its priority, Ukraine will need to risk reliance on the EU if it is to recover and sustain its struggle against a new Russian expansionism. Simply to crush the separatist and Russian opposition - a concept which is a great hurdle in its own right - will not be enough to solidify Ukraine's independence from overbearing Russian influence. As the world learned from the Iraq War, if stability and social cohesion is to be achieved, all sections of society will need to be embraced and involved in the administration of the country, with decentralisation being among the clearest answers to this difficulty. Minorities and those with pro-Russian tendencies will need to be convinced that the Ukrainian state is legitimate and credible, and this involves dispelling the myths about a 'Western'-backed coup in Kiev, as well as the influence of the Far Right on the government.

Cory Turner: Student, army cadet and sitting member of the Green Party Defence Policy Working Group, writes in a personal capacity