

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article9024>



Ukraine

# **‘No one has strengthened the Ukrainian far-right more than Putin’**

- Features -

Publication date: Monday 2 June 2025

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**More than three years after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the international left remains divided over the war. Ukrainian leftists are understandably disappointed with this state of affairs, but not surprised given the lack of knowledge about Ukraine and the post-Soviet space among leftists in the West and Global South.**

**Rather than reach out to leftists in Ukraine (as well as Russia and other post-Soviet countries), many have opted to just accept Russian state propaganda, which claims President Vladimir Putin had no option but to invade to defend Russia against an aggressive right-wing neighbour overrun by neo-Nazis. The truth, however, as Ukrainian leftist Andriy Movchan notes, is “no one has done more to promote and strengthen Ukrainian nationalism and far-right movements than Putin.”**

**Movchan is a former activist of several left-wing groups in Ukraine, who now lives in Catalonia where he devotes himself to issues of media activism, art and journalism. In the second part of his wide-ranging conversation with Victor Osprey for [LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#), Movchan delves into the current state of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the role of the far right in both countries, and the challenges Ukraine’s left forces face in building solidarity with their struggles internationally.**

The [first part of the interview](#) looked at the influence of progressive thinkers and the Soviet Union on Ukrainian national consciousness, the tense debates among the Bolsheviks on Ukrainian independence, how the history of Great Russian chauvinism towards Ukraine helps us to understand the nature of the current war, and the thorny issue of language discrimination.

**What is the status of the war? Is Russia slowly taking more territory and striking deeper into Ukraine, or have Ukrainian forces stabilised the situation and advanced along the front lines? What is the state of Ukrainian morale, particularly among conscripted soldiers, compared to the wave of volunteers in 2022?**

As of spring 2025, both armies are extremely depleted, and have problems with personnel and low morale. However, despite the enemy's superiority, Ukrainians continue to resist heroically and hold the front. Ukrainian society is extremely exhausted. No one dreams of victory anymore. No one dreams of the borders of 1991. The most painful issue for society is forced conscription, which is carried out through gross human rights violations. There are almost no people left willing to voluntarily go to the front. Even state leaders have been forced to take these sentiments into account and set more realistic goals. Today, Ukraine’s position is to freeze the conflict along the current front line, with security guarantees and without recognising Russia’s annexations. Most of society agrees with these conditions. Russia, which still wants to “finish” Ukraine, disagrees.

On the other hand, the size of Russia’s population — 140 million — allows it to not involve the masses in the war and fight primarily with mercenaries. Russian society shows no signs of exhaustion. However, the Russian army is exhausted. The warehouses are running out of Soviet military equipment. The wounded are sent into battle. The occupying army is suffering huge losses. Even Russian military bloggers say it will not be possible to keep fighting for much longer.

**How would you politically characterise the Ukrainian government under President Volodymyr Zelensky? Were elections to be held, would Zelensky likely win?**

The Zelensky government is a populist neoliberal government. The current president won the 2019 elections with 73% support. This was largely a protest vote against the right-wing conservative policies of previous president Petro Poroshenko. However, Poroshenko left behind a state apparatus that was already heavily influenced by right-wing policies, and this had a major impact on Zelensky's policies.

Zelenskyy was definitely not a nationalist by his own convictions. But he became a nationalist as a result of the Russian invasion. We have to understand that nationalist tendencies are inherent in any society facing an existential war. Similarly, in these circumstances, states tend to become authoritarian. We can say that in Ukraine, unfortunately, these tendencies are progressing.

After three years of war, against the backdrop of unpopular military conscription, corruption scandals at all government levels, and glaring inequality, Zelensky's support is falling sharply, both among civilians and the military. I think it will be difficult for him to win the next election.

**To what extent has the far-right in Ukraine gained in influence since 2014, and especially since the 2022 invasion? How extensive is their influence? To what degree is it exaggerated by Russian propaganda?**

In 2014, the far right was used by the centre-right opposition as the most determined part of the protest movement against the government. They became the powerhouse of the protests, although the Maidan [uprising] itself was made up of a broad spectrum of participants.

When Russia launched its [proxy invasion of Donbas in April 2014](#), Ukraine's army was unprepared for the confrontation. The [far right came to form the basis](#) for the most motivated units, which were later integrated into the army. It is natural that in times of war, the role of nationalists increases dramatically, and that nationalists are the most determined fighters. This was seen on both sides in Donbas.

Since 2014, the rising far-right has not had a major impact on electoral politics, but it has significantly complicated the situation on the streets, where they often enjoy impunity from the state. When someone says that there is no problem with the far right in Ukraine, it is simply not true. My own experience of having to leave Ukraine after being repeatedly attacked in the street by these far right radicals for my left-wing views confirms this.

Nationalists have also gained significant positions in the army. Again, this is natural. It would be surprising if the most capable soldiers in a war for national survival were liberals or social democrats.

But to call Ukraine a “neo-Nazi state” is a great exaggeration. It is clear that Russian propaganda is fuelling the myth of a “neo-Nazi” Ukraine, which, unfortunately, sells well among the Western left. Yes, we have certain internal problems. But what business is it of Russia's? Is this an excuse to bomb our cities and wipe them off the face of the Earth to “liberate” them? Our problems with right-wing groups are not a reason to conquer our country. Even if Ukraine were twenty times more reactionary than it actually is, this would still not give Russia the right to invade.

In reality, no one has done more to promote and strengthen Ukrainian nationalism and far-right movements than [Russian president Vladimir] Putin. If he had not unleashed two wars — in 2014 and 2022 — the Ukrainian far right would be a relatively marginal phenomenon today.

**What can you tell us about the influence of the far right in Russia, including in the military?**

At first glance, it may seem that the far-right movement is not that visible in Russia. The Russian state does not

tolerate any movements and parties that are independent of it.

At the same time, the Russian state itself has embraced the radical ideology of imperial nationalist expansion and annexationism, which until relatively recently was considered the domain of marginal forces. What Putin says and does today embodies the programs of the most insane part of Russian ultranationalists. All those writers, retired military officers, philosophers and journalists who have been promoting the idea of a Russian “reconquista” in their books, blogs and patriotic demonstrations have suddenly discovered that the state is implementing their program. These people found themselves at the centre of Russia’s invasion, both as soldiers and media servants of the militaristic crusade against Ukraine.

It should also be noted that since 1991, a huge stratum of people and movements has formed in Russia for whom the collapse of the Soviet Union was a personal tragedy. For them, it was a national humiliation. Unlike Ukrainians, Georgians, Kazakhs and other nationalities, these Russians perceived the entire Soviet Union as their national state, not just the Russian part. For them, the Soviet Union was a single Russian-speaking space that was allegedly “artificially” divided. And they dreamed of revenge.

Often such people consider themselves “Communists,” although their primary dream is not social equality, but territorial irredentism. People from other countries should understand that such “Communists” in Russia are more likely to be far-right, even if they hide behind a red flag. We call them red-browns.

However, traditional neo-Nazis have also gained prominence in Russia during the war. There are at least two clearly distinct neo-Nazi units in the Russian army: [Rusich](#) and [Espanola](#). Moreover, persecution of migrants and racially-motivated violence has intensified in the country. A broad network of far-right groups, [Russkaya Obshchina](#), has been formed under the auspices of the state. It persecutes migrants and intimidates indigenous peoples.

### **What about the treatment of minorities, such as Hungarians, Roma, Tatars and Jews, in Ukraine?**

The situation of different minorities varies greatly. Crimean Tatars, for example, are fully supported by the state and society. On the other hand, Hungarians are somewhat distrusted because the current government of Hungary is friendly to Russia. At the same time, Hungarians managed to achieve certain rights through political pressure from their “historical homeland,” which is a member of the European Union.

As for Jews, there are occasional incidents of antisemitism, but mostly at the level of daily life, and no higher than in other Eastern European countries. The complaints of Jewish communities are more often related to the policy of commemoration, when nationalist movement figures associated with the persecution of Jews in the first half of the 20th century are included in the state pantheon.

The situation is most difficult for the Roma, as they face persistent xenophobia in society. Before the war, the far-right repeatedly attacked Roma encampments, knowing the attacks would not receive strong public condemnation.

Has the position of Crimean Tatars remained the same or gotten worse since Russia seized the peninsula in 2014? Is there much sentiment for it to be returned to Ukraine by Tatars and Ukrainians inside and outside Crimea?

Crimean Tatars are the most pro-Ukrainian sector on the peninsula. The trauma of Josef Stalin’s deportation of their people in 1944 is still alive. They are grateful to the independent Ukraine that allowed them to return to their historic lands.

Crimean Tatars were overwhelmingly against Russia's annexation. Thousands of Tatars left Crimea for government-controlled Ukraine, where their political body, the [Mejlis](#), is based. Some Tatars fight in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. At the same time, Tatars in Crimea are constantly repressed by Russian occupation authorities. Most Crimean political prisoners in Russian jails are Tatars.

I think it is unlikely that the Tatars want Ukraine to seize Crimea by military means, as this implies destructive fighting on the peninsula. They would prefer a diplomatic solution. The rest of the population of Crimea is overwhelmingly ethnic Russians who favour annexation.

Currently, the perception in Ukraine is that the return of Crimea is virtually impossible, but only a minority support recognising Russia's annexation of the peninsula as legitimate.

**Given that Russia and the [United States want Ukrainian resources](#)**, such as rare earth materials, and have little to no interest in Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty, let alone progressive social reforms, should Ukraine look elsewhere for allies, whether in the European Union or the Global South?

Ever since Donald Trump came to power in the US, Ukraine has been forced to rely more on Europe. Europe remains Ukraine's only consistent ally in the fight against the aggressor. However, Europe's military potential is many times smaller than the US'. Ukraine cannot simply dismiss the US, as it is existentially dependent on US military technologies and diplomacy.

As for Ukraine's relations with the Global South, I believe that many mistakes were made. Ukraine began its resistance with the hope that the richest and most powerful countries in the world were on its side, and that it could therefore neglect support from the rest. This was a delusion. Many things depend on countries from the Global South, including diplomacy, the effectiveness of anti-Russian sanctions, the munitions market, the problem of mercenaries for the Russian army, and dozens of other important issues.

About a year ago, Ukraine's leaders realised they needed to build diplomatic ties with the Global South: to engage in dialogue with Arab countries, pay visits to South Africa, send humanitarian aid to Palestine, etc. However, we also need to understand the limited capabilities of these countries. What has the Global South done to help Palestine against Israel? Almost nothing. Why then should we hope that it will somehow effectively help Ukraine?

**You are a supporter of [Solidarity Collectives](#)**, a group of Ukrainian anarchists and anti-authoritarians who picked up arms to resist Russia's invasion. While trying to act as independently from the state as possible, they have not managed to become an alternative to the regular Ukrainian army and instead largely integrated into it. Can you explain their point of view, how that has or hasn't changed since the invasion, and their role today?

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian left is a small force that has had to exist in extremely difficult circumstances. After 2014, many activists, including myself, left Ukraine because of problems with the far right. Many others live in internal exile in Ukraine. But there are also those who continue public activities despite the difficulties, mainly anarchists, small socialist groups and trade unions.

Activists from these movements made up the majority of the leftist volunteers who went to defend Ukraine from the invasion. The small size of the Ukrainian left objectively meant it could not become an independent force in the armed resistance. But despite all the contradictions, those leftists who went to war are convinced that the victory of Russia's invasion would be the greatest injustice to the Ukrainian people.

In the eyes of the dogmatic Western left, defending a country dominated by reactionary ideologues and with an extremely weak left seems a contradictory decision, to say the least. However, such views are non-materialist.

As materialists, we have to understand that reactionary backslide has been a historical pattern following the failures of so-called “real existing socialism”. If we look at any country in Eastern Europe, we will not find any country where socialist (let alone revolutionary) movements are strong and popular. At this historical moment, it is simply impossible. It would be strange to expect Ukraine to be an exception.

But does the fact that a country is at a reactionary stage give someone the right to occupy it? Of course not. Reaction does not last forever. If Ukraine defends its right to exist, it will also defend its potential to change in the future for the better — towards a progressive Ukraine.

**What is your opinion of those on the Ukrainian left who hold a different view, that of revolutionary defeatism on both sides, such as the [Workers’ Front of Ukraine](#)?**

As a Ukrainian dissident, I do not condemn those who hold other positions, in particular that of revolutionary defeatism. I understand that you need a certain amount of courage to take such a position in Ukraine. I try to avoid public criticism, because I am not at war myself and have no moral right to call on others to resist. I also understand that such criticism can put others in a position vulnerable to repression (which is common in any country that is struggling with an existential threat).

Nonetheless, I really dislike it when the position of Ukrainian revolutionary defeatists is celebrated by the Western or Russian left. Opposition to the aggressor state and supporting its defeat is the only correct position for the Russian left. As the saying goes: “If Russia stops fighting, it will mean the end of the war; if Ukraine stops fighting, it will mean the end of Ukraine.”

It is a pity that the chauvinism towards Ukraine inherent in most of the Russian left since Stalin’s time does not allow them to take this position of defeatism, although there are pleasant exceptions to this rule.

**Is there anything left of the old, now banned Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, whether in Ukrainian or Russian-held territory?**

The CPU’s story seems to be over as its support for Russian aggression means it is unlikely it will ever regain its position in Ukraine. It will not exist in the occupied territories either, as their members are joining the ranks of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

Russia is trying to eradicate everything Ukrainian from the occupied territories, meaning even the Communist Party cannot be Ukrainian there. In the end, it cannot be Communist either, because any attempts to protest against the occupation authorities end in arrests. The function of such “Communists” is limited to legitimising the invasion and occupation.

**How important is the role of anti-war, anti-militarist and left-wing activists in Russia itself in undermining the Russian war effort and bringing an end to Russian annexationist ambitions in Ukraine? For example, you have written in support of imprisoned [Russian Marxist Boris Kagarlitsky](#), despite disagreements with his analysis in the past.**

Russia is a dictatorship. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the existence of any anti-war movement there. There are

individuals who are against the war. But they do not have the opportunity to express their disagreement within the legal framework. They have no influence on Putin’s actions.

Some of these people have sacrificed their freedom to speak out against the war. This deserves deep respect. Boris Kagarlitsky is among them. In 2014, he took the dishonourable position of supporting Russian imperialism. But his position in 2022 [changed dramatically](#).

In general, [two trends have emerged](#) among Russian leftists who are against the war: patriots and defeatists. The patriotic part gives equal weight to the parties in the conflict and calls for peace through Ukraine’s concessions. [The defeatists](#) insist the aggressor is unequivocally guilty and call for Russian troops to withdraw.

**How does the Spanish left view the war in Ukraine? Is there a distinction between, on the one hand, the more “unitary” left such as the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and Podemos; and, on the other hand, left-independentist parties such as the Catalan Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) or Basque party EH Bildu?**

Unfortunately, in Southern Europe, the left has historically gravitated towards Stalinism and anti-Americanism as the main criterion in politics. For this reason, the issue of Russia’s invasion is perceived by the left — and especially left-wing radicals — as extremely divisive.

The ruling PSOE has consistently advocated for providing Ukraine with weapons to repel Russian aggression, and supports Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Their colleagues in the Sumar coalition [which is in government with the PSOE] also support Ukraine, although they criticise the supply of weapons.

Podemos, on the other hand, radically opposes military aid to Ukraine. The same goes for the left-wing radical Basque and Catalan separatists. They are actually rooting for Ukraine’s defeat. At first glance, they should be sympathetic to Ukraine’s struggle against assimilationist chauvinism. However, they proceed from the primitive formula that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” and hope Ukraine’s defeat will open a window of opportunity for them to gain independence.

**Many Russians in exile have participated in anti-war demonstrations alongside Ukrainians. To what extent has this happened in Spain?**

There are large communities of Russians in Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia, who went into exile after the war started. However, they are not very politically active. Most Russian activists, opposition journalists and intellectuals flocked to Germany and the Baltic states. The less politicised people came to Spain, and are mostly busy setting up their new lives.

Unfortunately, relations between Ukrainians and anti-war Russians are extremely difficult. Ukrainians often avoid contact with Russians because of the trauma of the war. They demand Russians be more active in supporting Ukraine and often accuse them of collective responsibility. All this is not conducive to cooperation.

**What resources would you recommend to better understand contemporary Ukraine from a socialist perspective?**

I recommend reading the English translations of articles published in the Ukrainian magazine [Spilne](#) (Commons). Excellent articles were written at the start of the war by its authors and editors, such as [Taras Bilous](#), a leftist



intellectual who joined the armed resistance in the very first days.

I also recommend reading Russian left-wing political scientists, such as [Ilya Matveev](#) and [Ilya Budraitskis](#), who provide a clear picture of Putin’s Russia.

But even more, I would advise foreign observers to understand the historical context of Ukraine and read books such as *National Bolshevism : Stalinist mass culture and the formation of modern Russian national identity, 1931-1956* by David Brandenberger, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* by Terry Martin, and ‘You, Stalin, are the traitor’. *The End of Left-wing Solidarity. The Comintern and Communist Parties in the Second World War 1939-1941* by Bernhard Bayerlein.

The biggest problem I have seen with the Western left is ignorance about the rest of the world, combined with a strange belief that they know everything better than anyone else. I really want to overcome this.

1 June 2025

Source: Links-Â»<https://links.org.au/no-one-has-strengthened-ukrainian-far-right-more-putin>

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