

Background
on the
Russian
Invasion



any investment in the political development of this place in the future has to be on the side of the people here right now. We want to make some inroads towards being connected with people here on a larger scale, towards getting organized with them. Our long-term task, our dream, is to become a visible political force within this society in order to secure a real opportunity to promote a message of social liberation for people.”

In response to the statement that the “whole population is confronting the invasion,” we inquired as to whether that included the people in the “republics,” the Luhansk People’s Republic [LPR] and Donetsk People’s Republic [DPR]—the regions in eastern Ukraine that have been occupied by Russian-armed and funded separatist forces since 2014, which Putin just recognized as “independent.”

“Honestly,” the spokesperson answered, “I have little perspective about the people in the so-called republics; I have only lived here for several years”—having grown up in a neighboring country—and have never been to the southeast. It’s true that there have been some conflicts about language, and local far-right people have exacerbated these conflicts needlessly and severely. For this reason, in the ‘republics,’ we saw some people waving Russian state flags to welcome the troops, even though this ‘independence’ will mean the opposite, it will mean being totally subservient to Putin. At the same time, nearby across the trenches, on the other side of the battle lines, we saw thousands of people waving Ukraine’s national flags. We don’t like this, either, as anarchists, but it does mean that people are ready to fight—that they are ready to defend their independence not only as a state but as a society.”

INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion poses thorny questions for anarchists. How do we oppose Russian military aggression without simply playing into the agenda of the United States and other governments? How do we continue to oppose Ukrainian capitalists and fascists without helping the Russian government to craft a narrative to justify direct or indirect intervention? How do we prioritize both the lives and the freedom of ordinary people in Ukraine and the neighboring countries?

And what if war is not the only danger here? How do we avoid reducing our movements to subsidiaries of statist forces without winding up irrelevant in a time of escalating conflict? How do we continue to organize against all forms of oppression even in the midst of war, without adopting the same logic as state militaries?

If anarchists are going to work alongside statist groups—as has already occurred in Rojava and elsewhere—that makes it all the more important to articulate a critique of state power and to develop a nuanced framework by which to evaluate the results of such experiments.

The best alternative to militarism would be to build an international movement that could incapacitate the military forces of all nations. We have seen understandable expressions of cynicism from Ukrainian radicals regarding the likelihood that ordinary Russians will do anything to hinder Putin’s war efforts. This calls to mind the 2019 revolt in Hong Kong, which some participants also framed in ethnic terms. In fact, the only thing that could preserve Hong Kong from the domination of the Chinese government would be powerful revolutionary movements inside China proper.

Considering that Russia was able to establish a foothold for its agenda within the Donbas region in Ukraine in part because of tensions between Ukrainian and Russian identity, anti-Russian sentiment will only play into Putin’s hands. Anything that polarizes against Russian people, language, or culture will facilitate the Russian state’s efforts to create a little breakaway republic. Likewise, looking at the history of nationalism, we can see that any resistance to Russian military aggression that deepens the power of Ukrainian nationalism will only pave the way for future bloodshed.

Just as the uprising in Kazakhstan was ultimately crushed by brute force, nearly all of the uprisings around the world since 2019 have failed to overthrow the governments they challenged. We are in a time of interlinked

worldwide repression and we have yet to solve the fundamental problems it poses. The bloody civil war that drew out in Syria—partly as a consequence of Putin’s support for Assad—offers an example of what many parts of the world may look like if revolutions continue to fail and civil wars emerge in their place. We may not be able to forestall the wars ahead, but it is still up to us to figure out how to continue to pursue revolutionary change amidst them.

INTERVIEW: “ANARCHISTS AND WAR IN UKRAINE”

This interview was conducted in January 2022 by a Belarusian anarchist currently living abroad with an anarchist activist involved in different struggles in Ukraine. The audio version can be found at Elephant in the Room podcast.

ALREADY, FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, RUSSIAN FORCES HAVE BEEN GATHERING AT THE UKRAINIAN BORDER, WITH A POSSIBILITY OF INVASION. WE GOT IN TOUCH WITH A COMRADE WHO CAN EXPLAIN TO US A LITTLE BIT MORE WHAT IS HAPPENING THERE AND WHAT TO EXPECT. TODAY, WE HAVE A COMRADE AND A FRIEND, ILYA, AN ANARCHIST ACTIVIST WHO'S CURRENTLY STAYING IN UKRAINE. HEY, ILYA.

Hello, hello.

Thanks a lot for actually agreeing to this interview. Today, we’ll be talking a lot about different things. I think for a lot of people what is happening in Ukraine is really confusing, and there’s a lot of misunderstanding and a lot of propaganda going on from both sides, I believe. But before we jump to the story of the current possibility of an invasion, I would like to talk about the position of Ukraine in post-Soviet times. Where was it politically after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and why was it so important for Russian elites to maintain influence and exercise control over the political processes in Ukraine?

First of all, thanks a lot for having me here.

About the position of Ukraine after the Soviet Union collapsed, I would say that it was quite turbulent. It passed through several different phases.

example, in Mariupol’, some participants brought material support to the center hosting children orphaned by the war—and will assist some comrades in escaping from the conflict zone, though “dozens and dozens” of anarchists and anti-fascists are participating in the resistance.

As of now, the participants are watching to see what mutual aid projects will emerge in Kyiv out of efforts on the part of the population as a whole, and which ones they can participate in most effectively as anarchists.

The person we spoke with is currently located in Kyiv; others have already departed to participate in territorial defense in the regions surrounding Kyiv. In Kyiv, many people are leaving the city, but there has not been aerial bombing since the morning, when the Russian air force attacked military targets around the city and also hit some civilian housing areas in outlying towns, including Bровары, killing dozens of people.

In Kyiv, the atmosphere is tense, but there is no fighting in the city yet, only the aircraft attacks of the morning. Thus far, anarchists have experienced no known casualties, but they are facing serious dangers. It is a hard situation, but so far, the participants’ spirits are high.

The majority of the participants in this project were expecting the invasion to begin soon, generally speaking, but they were not expecting it today, and were not entirely mentally prepared for it. In fact, they planned and prepared for months, but now they are discovering everything that remained unfinished in their preparations. Still, in the course of hasty meetings, they have pulled together this coordination project.

The spokesperson described their immediate goal: it is not to protect the Ukrainian state, but to protect Ukrainian people and the form of Ukrainian society, which is still pluralistic, even though the Ukrainian state itself is neoliberal and a nationstate with nationalism and all the other terrible things that come with that. “Our idea is that we have to defend the spirit of this society against being smashed by Putin’s regime, which threatens the entire existence of the society.”

Panning back from that immediate goal, the spokesperson said that they hope to confront Russian military aggression while promoting anarchist perspectives both within Ukrainian society and throughout the world—to show that anarchists are involved in this struggle, that they have taken sides in it—not with the state, but with the people who are impacted by the invasion, with the society of the people who live in Ukraine.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that the whole population is confronting the invasion. Of course, some people are fleeing, but any force that has

police in the event of an attack by the police or the far right, anarchists offer to cooperate with other groups that suffer from a similar problem and come to the defense of institutions or events if there is a possibility of an attack.

Anarchists are now trying to create horizontal grassroots ties in society, based on common interests, so that communities can address their own needs, including self-defense. This differs significantly from ordinary Ukrainian political practice, in which it is often proposed to unite around organizations, representatives, or the police. Organizations and representatives are often bribed and the people who have gathered around them remain deceived. The police may, for example, defend LGBT events but get mad if these activists join a riot against police brutality. Actually, this is why we see potential in our ideas—but if a war breaks out, the main thing will again be the ability to participate in armed conflict.

INTERVIEW: THE COMMITTEE OF RESISTANCE, KYIV

We conducted an audio interview with a spokesperson from “The Committee of Resistance,” the newly formed anarchist coordinating group in Ukraine, on February 24, after the beginning of the Russian invasion. They will be fielding public inquiries about what anarchists are doing and experiencing in Ukraine here: <https://linktr.ee/Theblackheadquarter>

“The Committee of Resistance” is a coordination center connecting anarchists who are participating in resisting the invasion in a variety of ways. Some are currently on the front; some are engaged in media work about the conditions arising during this resistance, in hopes of clarifying the situation in Ukraine to those who have never been there and explaining to anarchists elsewhere why they believe that resisting Putin is connected with liberation. The project will also be engaging in some support projects in whatever remains of Ukrainian civil society as the invasion proceeds—for

Under President [Leonid] Kuchma and through most of the 1990s, it was a loose state of different oligarchical groups competing for different spheres of power. (To some extent, it exists like this through today.) But also, it’s important to note that in this period, in the 1990s, the Russian state’s policy was very different from how it is now. Under the Yeltsin presidency, it was not a particularly imperialist policy, as far as I can estimate at least. Of course, there was very close interaction between the two governments, both business and state authorities between Russia and Ukraine. But it was not as though Ukraine was expected to be subordinate to Russia, even though a lot of economic ties and dependencies had already existed already between Russia and Ukraine within the Soviet Union, ties which continued to exist after it collapsed.

The situation changed when Kuchma left the presidency and a competition between the [Ukrainian] Presidents [Viktor] Yanukovych and [Viktor] Yushchenko emerged. Viktor Yushchenko represented this more Western- and national-oriented perspective. This conflict came to its peak during the first Maidan protests¹ in 2004, I would say. Yushchenko won, and because of this, this more Western course of politics and this course of distancing from Russia was the prevailing political current for a while in Ukraine. In 2008, when the war in Georgia (over southern Ossetia) happened, Ukraine definitely took sides—just politically, not militarily—more with the Georgian side of that conflict.

But it’s important to understand that within Ukraine, there are many different cultural groups, groups of business and political interests, and groups of different ideological tendencies. They are not all equal to each other. It’s a really complex and multi-layered mosaic, which creates a lot of confusion and a lot of different political currents and developments. These are not easy to follow and understand even from inside of Ukraine, sometimes.

So even though Yushchenko won for a while, conflict existed between—for example—more Western and more anti-Russian oriented groups of the population, on one side, and on the other side, more pro-Russian groups, or, I might say, groups with a post-Soviet or Soviet mentality. And this

1 Maidan Nezalezhnosti (“Independence Square”) is the central square of Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine. It was the site of massive protests in 2004, during the so-called “Orange Revolution,” and again in 2013 through 2014 during the events that led to the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014.

conflict was also taking place between political groups that promoted a more Western course and those, like some oligarchical clans and mafia clans, who were more open to interacting with Russia and with the Russian authorities. It's important to understand that in Ukraine, there is a lot of corruption; a lot of shady politics are going on behind closed doors all the time. Much more than in Europe, for example—even though we all know that in Europe these also exist—the official declarations of the local authorities don't necessarily correspond with their actual activities.

So after the presidency of Yushchenko, Yanukovych returned to running for the presidency and finally won elections [in 2010]. After this, the situation became very unclear, because he took a very sly approach, I would say—constantly trying to pretend to deal both with the West and with Russian authorities. Because of this, he created a lot of confusion within the population. After first making some agreements with the European Union, he unexpectedly tried to cancel them and to move more officially into the sphere of Russian influence. This created a lot of disagreement and unrest, which gave rise to the [second] Maidan protests, which started in the late autumn of 2013.

TALKING ABOUT THE MAIDAN PROTESTS: CAN YOU SUM UP A LITTLE BIT WHAT HAPPENED THERE (BUT IN A REALLY SHORT VERSION, BECAUSE THE STORY IS REALLY LONG), WITH THE KEY POINTS THAT MIGHT BE INTERESTING ABOUT WHO WAS PARTICIPATING, WHY WAS IT PROVOKED, AND WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF THE MAIDAN?

Yeah, sure. Of course, it's very hard really to describe it briefly, but I will try the best I can. At first, it began with mainly student protests. These appeared after the [aforementioned] political steps by Yanukovych, which were very unpopular among the population, and among the youth especially. Many people were very supportive of becoming closer to the European Union: of having the possibility to go to the EU without visas and other forms of collaboration. So when Yanukovych stepped back from this line that he had previously declared, it was the trigger for the large protests involving youth, mainly student youth, in November 2013.

But it was not only the youth who were unhappy with the politics of Yanukovych. So, after the youth were beaten badly by riot police, this provoked an intense retaliation from broader parts of Ukrainian society. Starting from that point, the protests became multi-layered, multi-class

The outdated approach of anarchists' economic agenda has also changed: if before, the majority worked at low-paid jobs "closer to the oppressed," now many are trying to find a job with a good salary, most often in the IT sector.

Street anti-fascist groups have resumed their activities, engaging in retaliatory actions in cases of Nazi attacks. Among other things, they held the "No Surrender" tournament among antifa fighters and released a documentary entitled "Hoods," which tells about the birth of the Kyiv antifa group. (English subtitles are available.)

Anti-fascism in Ukraine is an important front, because in addition to a large number of local ultra-right activists, many notorious Nazis have relocated here from Russia (including Sergei Korotkikh and Alexei Levkin) and from Europe (such as Denis "White Rex" Kapustin), and even from the USA (Robert Rando). Anarchists have been investigating the activities of the far right.

There are activist groups of various kinds (classical anarchists, queer anarchists, anarcho-feminists, Food Not Bombs, eco-initiatives, and the like), as well as small information platforms. Recently, a politically charged anti-fascist resource has appeared in the telegram @uantifa, duplicating its publications in English.

Today, the tensions between groups are gradually smoothing out, as recently there have been many joint actions and common participation in social conflicts. Among the biggest of these is the campaign against the deportation of the Belarusian anarchist Aleksey Bolenkov (who managed to win a trial against the Ukrainian special services and remain in Ukraine) and the defense of one of the districts in Kyiv (Podil) from police raids and attacks by the ultra-right.

We still have very little influence on society at large. This is largely because the very idea of a need for organization and anarchist structures was ignored or denied for a long time. (In his memoirs, Nestor Makhno also complained about this shortcoming after the defeat of the anarchists). Anarchist groups were very quickly dashed by the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine] or the far right.

Now we have come out of stagnation and are developing, and therefore we are anticipating new repression and new attempts by the SBU to take control of the movement.

At this stage, our role can be described as the most radical approaches and views in the democratic camp. If liberals prefer to complain to the

dictatorship, we see potential in Ukrainian society, which is one of the most active, independent, and rebellious in the region. The long history of resistance of the people over the past thirty years is a solid proof of this. This gives us hope that the concepts of direct democracy have a fertile ground here.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ANARCHISTS IN UKRAINE AND NEW CHALLENGES

The outsider position during the Maidan and the war had a demoralizing effect on the movement. Outreach was hampered as Russian propaganda monopolized the word “anti-fascism.” Due to the presence of the symbols of the USSR among the pro-Russian militants, the attitude towards the word “communism” was extremely negative, so even the combination “anarcho-communism” was perceived negatively. The declarations against the pro-Ukrainian ultra-right cast a shadow of doubt on anarchists in the eyes of ordinary folks. There was an unspoken agreement that the ultra-right would not attack anarchists and anti-fascists if they did not display their symbols at rallies and the like. The right had a lot of weapons in their hands. This situation created a feeling of frustration; the police did not function well, so someone could easily be killed without consequences. For example, in 2015, the pro-Russian activist Oles Buzina was killed.

All this encouraged anarchists to approach the matter more seriously.

A radical underground began to develop starting from 2016; news about radical actions started to appear. Radical anarchist resources appeared that explained how to buy weapons and how to make caches, as opposed to the old ones, which were limited only to Molotov cocktails.

In the anarchist milieu, it has become acceptable to have legal weapons. Videos of anarchist training camps using firearms began to surface. Echoes of these changes reached Russia and Belarus. In Russia, the FSB liquidated a network of anarchist groups that had legal weapons and practiced airsoft. The arrestees were tortured with electric current in order to force them to confess to terrorism, and sentenced to terms ranging from 6 to 18 years. In Belarus, during the 2020 protests, a rebellious group of anarchists under the name “Black Flag” was detained while trying to cross the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. They had a firearm and a grenade with them; according to the testimony of Igor Olinevich, he bought the weapon in Kyiv.

protests, which drew in different strata from society to participate. Many people from different regions of Ukraine came into the streets of Kiev and also to many other cities, in both eastern and western parts of the country. People came to the streets and also, after a while, started to occupy administrative buildings. The most intense protests took place in Kiev and also in several western cities, which are believed to be more pro-Western, more distant from Russia, more Ukrainian speaking, and the like.

The conflict went through several stages of worsening confrontations, then a temporary pacification. But then, in February [2014], it came to its peak. The final conflict started as protesters tried to occupy the parliamentary building in Kiev, and also to come to the presidential office demanding the immediate resignation of President Yanukovych due to his repression, corruption, and pro-Russian politics. The retaliation from the riot police and special forces was super harsh; about one hundred people were killed. Then it came to a stage of open confrontation, even armed confrontation we could say, between the side of the protesters and the side of the government. That was the moment when some shady stuff started to develop. Yanukovych just disappeared after several days in mid-February and then appeared in Russia.

When he fled, that was the moment of the collapse of the more pro-Russian regime in Ukraine. This was the turning point from which current situation started to develop.

A LOT OF PEOPLE IN THE WEST, INFLUENCED BY RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA AND THE DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN, STARTED TO BELIEVE THE NARRATIVE THAT WHAT HAPPENED IN UKRAINE BACK IN 2014 WAS A FASCIST COUP SUPPORTED BY NATO. SOME JOURNALISTS—ALSO LIBERALS, BUT BESIDES LIBERALS, THERE WERE ALSO ANARCHISTS AND LEFTISTS WHO REPRODUCED THAT NARRATIVE—ARGUED THAT IT WAS A NATO COUP AND THAT A FASCIST GOVERNMENT WAS ESTABLISHED AFTERWARDS.

CAN YOU EVALUATE THAT NARRATIVE? WAS IT LIKE THAT, OR WAS THERE SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENING AT THAT POINT?

Yes, I think I can speak about it confidently, because I participated in the events myself. I was in Kiev for nine days in the very hot phase of the conflict in February. So what I witnessed personally was the really popular movement in which hundreds of thousands of people [participated].

When I discussed it later with some Western comrades, I heard these speculations about what NATO did behind the scenes and a Nazi coup and stuff like this. Other people answered that, OK, if there were hundreds of thousands of people on the streets, it could not be just an orchestrated coup or something like that.

The far right participated in this, of course. They participated actively, made effective political developments in this, and were very aggressive, very dominant, and successful to a certain point. But they were still a minority in these protests, of course. And even though their ideological influence—it did really exist, it's true, but they were not the ones who were legislating the protests, or who really designed the demands and the ideological face of these events.

I saw a lot of very spontaneous popular self-organization. I saw a lot of very sincere popular unrest and anger against the state establishment, which really made this country poor and humiliated. So to the biggest extent, it was absolutely an authentic popular uprising. Even though, of course, all of the political powers who could benefit from it tried to influence it as hard as they could. And they were partly successful.

But I take this mostly as the question to us—to libertarians, anarchists, the radical left if you want—why weren't we organized enough to compete effectively with fascists? This is not a question to the Maidan movement or to the people of Ukraine, but to us. And once again, to summarize, Maidan was first of all a popular uprising.

AFTER MAIDAN, WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT PUTIN WAS DISAPPOINTED, THERE WERE A LOT OF POLITICAL SPECULATIONS AND POLITICAL STRUGGLES, AND EVENTUALLY THE [RUSSIAN] OCCUPATION OR TAKEOVER OF CRIMEA, AND THEN THE MOVE [TOWARDS THE RUSSIA-BACKED SEPARATIST WAR] IN DONBAS. CAN YOU SUMMARIZE A BIT OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED BETWEEN 2014-2015 AND NOW? HOW MUCH OF A CONFLICT WAS BREWING THERE, OR DID THE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING THERE JUST POP UP OUT OF NOWHERE?

When the Ukrainian regime of Yanukovych started to crash, it was the moment of truth, the point when all stability and all clear things were somehow broken. Then the Russian authorities started to react very harshly—and also impulsively. They wanted to take counter-measures against the Maidan movement, which had the tendency to move Ukraine away

Our position is based on the fact that we do not want to run away, we do not want to be hostages, and we do not want to be killed without a fight. You can look at Afghanistan and understand what "No to War" means: when the Taliban advances, people flee en masse, die in the chaos at the airports, and those who remain are purged. This describes what is happening in Crimea and you can imagine what will happen after the invasion of Russia in other regions of Ukraine.

As for the attitude towards NATO, the authors of this text are divided between two standpoints. Some of us have a positive approach towards this situation. It is obvious that Ukraine cannot counter Russia on its own. Even taking into consideration the large volunteer movement, modern technologies and weapons are needed. Apart from NATO, Ukraine has no other allies who can help with this.

Here, we can recall the story of Syrian Kurdistan. The locals were forced to cooperate with NATO against ISIS—the only alternative was to flee or be killed. We are well aware that support from NATO can disappear very quickly if the West develops new interests or manages to negotiate some compromises with Putin. Even now, the Self-Administration is forced to cooperate with the Assad regime, understanding that they don't have much of an alternative.

A possible Russian invasion forces the Ukrainian people to look for allies in the fight against Moscow. Not on social media, but in the real world. Anarchists do not have sufficient resources in Ukraine or elsewhere to respond effectively to the invasion of Putin's regime. Therefore, one has to think about accepting support from NATO.

The other standpoint, which others in this writing group subscribe to, is that both NATO and the EU, in strengthening their influence in Ukraine, will cement the current system of "wild capitalism" in the country and make the potential for a social revolution even less feasible. In the system of global capitalism, the flagship of which is the USA as the leader of NATO, Ukraine is assigned the spot of a humble frontier: a supplier of cheap labor and resources. Therefore, it is important for Ukrainian society to realize the need for independence from all the imperialists. In the context of the country's defense capability, the emphasis should not be on the importance of NATO technology and support for the regular army, but on the potential of society for grassroots guerrilla resistance.

We consider this war primarily against Putin and the regimes under his control. In addition to the mundane motivation not to live under a

so-called DNR and LNR) published an article declaring that “the empire must expand, otherwise it will perish.” In Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan over the past two years, the protest movement has been brutally suppressed and independent and opposition media are being destroyed. We recommend reading more about Russia’s activities here.

All things considered, the likelihood of a full-scale war is high—and somewhat higher this year than last year. Even the sharpest analysts are unlikely to be able to predict exactly when it will start. Perhaps a revolution in Russia would relieve tension in the region; however, as we wrote above, the protest movement there has been smothered.

Anarchists in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia mostly support Ukrainian independence directly or implicitly. This is because, even with all the national hysteria, corruption, and a large number of Nazis, compared to Russia and the countries controlled by it, Ukraine looks like an island of freedom. This country retains such “unique phenomena” in the post-Soviet region as the replaceability of the president, a parliament that has more than nominal power, and the right to peaceful assembly; in some cases, factoring in additional attention from society, the courts sometimes even function according to their professed protocol. To say that this is preferable to the situation in Russia is not to say anything new. As Bakunin wrote, “We are firmly convinced that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy.”

There are many problems inside Ukraine, but these problems are more likely to be solved without the intervention of Russia.

Is it worth it to fight the Russian troops in the case of an invasion? We believe that the answer is yes. The options that Ukrainian anarchists are considering at the present moment include joining the armed forces of Ukraine, engaging in territorial defense, partisanship, and volunteering.

Ukraine is now at the forefront of the struggle against Russian imperialism. Russia has long-term plans to destroy democracy in Europe. We know that little attention has yet been paid to this danger in Europe. But if you follow the statements of high-profile politicians, far-right organizations, and authoritarian communists, over time, you will notice that there is already a large spy network in Europe. For example, some top officials, after leaving office, are given a position in a Russian oil company (Gerhard Schröder, François Fillon).

We consider the slogans “Say No to War” or “The War of Empires” to be ineffectual and populist. The anarchist movement has no influence on the process, so such statements do not change anything at all.

from Russian state influence. After this, they occupied the Crimean peninsula. They also took a stand in the local population to a large extent, because the local population there is not that much—of course, we cannot generalize, but many people there do not identify with Ukraine, do not associate themselves with Ukraine. That was the basis that gave Russia the opportunity to successfully take it from Ukraine.

They [the Russian authorities] also influenced the events in Donbas a lot, because the new Ukrainian authorities, the provisional government, made some very stupid moves against the Russian language. This gave Russian propagandists the opportunity to portray the Maidan events as “anti-Russian,” in the national sense of these words. This was not true to a larger extent, but to the people of Donbas—which is a very Russian-speaking and very psychologically close to Russia, as far as I can estimate, even though a lot of different people are living there—it created the opportunity for the Russian authorities to extend [their influence] there, to send forces there² and to support local secessionist groups to fight effectively, or at least to survive against the Ukrainian army which tried to assure the integrity of the Ukrainian state. At this point, some dramatic military events happened in Donbas, where some portion of the population declared they did not want to be a part of Ukraine any more. But without Russian state support, it would not have been possible for that movement to grow to such a great extent. And we need to recall that millions of refugees from Donbas then came both to Russia and to Ukraine.

A lot of people from Donbas still feel themselves close to Ukraine. But this is not a question that can really be solved within this state logic of two national states, or rather, the Russian imperialist state and Ukrainian nation-state. It’s a question that really needs a confederal solution. But as usual, both state sides used this conflict for their own benefit, and this was the point that started to increase nationalistic opinion, both in Russia and in Ukraine, I would say.

RIGHT. THERE WERE THESE MINSK AGREEMENTS [IN 2015] THAT WERE KIND OF A SETTLEMENT BETWEEN PUTIN, MERKEL, AND THE WEST/EAST PRETTY MUCH. BUT JUST TO GIVE AN IMPRESSION IN DONBAS: WAS THERE SOMETHING HAPPENING THERE OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, OR WAS IT TRUE THAT NO MILITARY ACTIONS WERE HAPPENING AND NO VIOLENCE OF ANY KIND WAS HAPPENING?

2 The Russian government denies sending troops into the Donbas region of Ukraine.

Of course, it's important to know that up to today, those Minsk agreements were never really implemented. And even though the active phase of conflict—during which the front line went up and down and significant movements of armies took place—is really finished, this is still a zone of constant conflict, of constant smaller clashes, with deaths every week definitely and sometimes even every day. Shellfire from both sides still takes place a lot. This is a wound that never healed. This is still something going on constantly, even at low intensity.

SO WITH THESE EVENTS HAPPENING, WHAT WAS ACTUALLY THE REACTION OF THE LOCAL ANARCHIST MOVEMENT, OR THE ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENT? AS I REMEMBER, THE “ANTI-FASCIST” PART OF THE ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENT JOINED THE FIGHT AGAINST RUSSIANS AND WENT TO WAR IN DONBAS... BUT WHAT'S UP WITH THE ANARCHISTS AND THE REST OF THE ANTI-FASCISTS WHO WERE NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE WAR?

At this point, I need to say first of all that in periods we are discussing, I was not living in Ukraine yet, in 2015, 2016, 2017 and so on. But still even today, I can evaluate somehow and of course I had my fingers on the pulse of this movement even before.



crash. Ukraine constantly experiences hacker attacks and bomb threats, not only in state buildings but also inside the schools and kindergartens.

In Belarus in 2020, Lukashenka boldly declared himself the winner of the elections with a result of 80% of the vote. The uprising in Belarus even led to a strike of Belarusian propagandists. But after the landing of Russian FSB planes, the situation changed dramatically and the Belarusian government succeeded in violently suppressing the protests.

A similar scenario played out in Kazakhstan, but there, the regular armies of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan were brought in to help the regime suppress the revolt as part of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) cooperation.

Russian special services lured refugees from Syria to Belarus in order to create a conflict on the border with the European Union. A group of the Russian FSB was also uncovered that was engaged in political assassinations using chemical weapons—the already familiar “novichok.” In addition to the Skripals and Navalny, they have also killed other political figures in Russia. Putin’s regime responds to all accusations by saying “It’s not us, you all are lying.” Meanwhile, Putin himself wrote an article half a year ago in which he asserts that Russians and Ukrainians are one nation and should be together. Vladislav Surkov (a political strategist who builds Russian state policy, connected with the puppet governments in the

anarchist symbols. He previously considered himself an anarchist, but in Russia, he openly works for the ruling United Russia party and serves as a deputy in the Duma.

To summarize the pro-Russian “left” camp, we see the work of the Russian special services and the consequences of ideological incapacity. After the occupation of Crimea, employees of the Russian FSB approached local anti-fascists and anarchists in conversation, offering to permit them to continue their activities but suggesting that they should henceforward include the idea that Crimea should be a part of Russia in their agitation. In Ukraine, there are small informational and activist groups that position themselves as anti-fascist while expressing an essentially pro-Russian position; many people suspect them of working for Russia. Their influence is minimal in Ukraine, but their members serve Russian propagandists as “whistleblowers.”

There are also offers of “cooperation” from the Russian embassy and pro-Russian members of Parliament like Ilya Kiva. They try to play on the negative attitude towards Nazis like the Azov battalion and offer to pay people to change their position. At the moment, only Rita Bondar has openly admitted to receiving money in this way. She used to write for left-wing and anarchist media outlets, but due to the need for money, she wrote under a pseudonym for media platforms affiliated with the Russian propagandist Dmitry Kiselev.

In Russia itself, we are witnessing the elimination of the anarchist movement and the rise of authoritarian communists who are ousting anarchists from the anti-fascist subculture. One of the most indicative recent moments is the organizing of an anti-fascist tournament in 2021 in memory of “the Soviet soldier.”

IS THERE A THREAT OF FULL-SCALE WAR WITH RUSSIA? AN ANARCHIST POSITION

About ten years ago, the idea of a full-scale war in Europe would have seemed crazy, since secular European states in the 21st century seek to play up their “humanism” and mask their crimes. When they do engage in military operations, they do so somewhere far away from Europe. But when it comes to Russia, we have witnessed the occupation of Crimea and subsequent fake referendums, the war in Donbas, and the MH17 plane

Yes, some part of the anarchist movement really got this “patriotic” sentiment, or, if you want, this “anti-imperialist” sentiment, and they took this defensive side—that is, some people joined the voluntary units and also the army, the regular army, motivated by the necessity to confront the bigger evil of the Putin imperialist state. Some people took maybe a more moderate and more internationalist position, trying to stress that both sides are in no way good, that both sides represent oppressive and bad politics—both the Russian state side and the Ukrainian state side.

But at the moment, I think the absolute majority of the local anarchist community are super hostile to any Russian invasion, and do not believe all the speculations of the Putin side that this is somehow an anti-fascist action confronting the Ukrainian far-right politics and so on. No way. It is just an imperialist move. This is clear to all the local comrades.

THIS YEAR STARTED AS A HUGE SHITSTORM. RUSSIANS INVADED KAZAKHSTAN WITH THEIR PARTNERS AND HELPED TO STABILIZE THE TOKAYEV REGIME. NOW THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A WAR IN UKRAINE. CAN YOU GIVE YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHY PUTIN STARTED THESE REALLY AGGRESSIVE MOVES SO QUICKLY? IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS, I THINK, SINCE THEY STARTED MOVING THE ARMY TO THE UKRAINIAN BORDER, AND THE KAZAKH CRISIS, AND SO ON. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE REASONS WHY THIS IS HAPPENING?

Speaking very generally and overall, the Putin regime is in a desperate situation. On the one hand, it is still very powerful, having a lot of resources and a lot of control over its own territory. But at the same time, their power is slipping away like sand between their fingers. In different places, there are clear cracks in this Putin-designed system of border states that are supposed to be satellites of his regime, like Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. Very big social currents, major social uprisings and protests, are taking place in every country I just mentioned. Geopolitically, there is a serious threat that his control over these neighboring territories will decrease.

Also, internally, the economic situation in Russia started to degrade since 2014, actually since these Maidan events, the Crimean takeover, and the big sanctions from the Western powers against Russia. It triggered a constant economic decrease, and now a lot of the popularity that Putin gained after the Crimean takeover is already gone. Also, this was

galvanized under the COVID-19 pandemic, which didn't contribute at all to his popularity among the population. Now, to a big extent, he is not that popular of a leader even inside Russia.

So this is the situation, if you are Putin: you are still very powerful, but at the same time, you see situations playing out that are not in your favor. I think all these aggressions are desperate attempts to prevent his power from slipping away, to somehow still preserve his authoritarian rule.

I THINK ALL THE BULLSHIT PUTIN HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN DOING IN ALL THESE OTHER COUNTRIES WAS NORMALLY AN EFFORT TO TAKE ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS, AS YOU WERE MENTIONING. HOW POPULAR IS THE CURRENT CONFLICT WITH UKRAINE IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY, ACTUALLY? IS IT A PATRIOTIC EUPHORIA, LIKE, "YEAH, LET'S FUCKING TAKE IT"? OR IS THERE A RESISTANCE, DOES NOBODY SUPPORT THAT? WHAT IS BREWING INSIDE OF THE BIG RUSSIAN COMMUNITY?

For me, this is a bit hard to estimate correctly, because I haven't been in Russia for almost three years. But at the same time, I can say that of the people who I've stayed in contact with, they are super pessimistic with this war perspective. Of course, the people I am in contact with represent a specific ideological frame. Normal people, as far as I can guess and assume and as far as I can see in the examples of the ordinary people with whom I'm familiar... I would say they are still not very optimistic about the prospects of a big war with anybody, because they understand that it will result in deaths, and in even further economic downturn. Even the television propaganda, which is becoming more and more terrible in Russia year after year—it's kind of a constant tide of shit going directly into the brains of the people—even this is not actually capable of really turning the people in favor of war.

So no, there is no patriotic euphoria as far as I can see at all in Russia. This is actually a kind of depressive time after all these waves of the pandemic, after all these battles about QR codes and vaccination, and also some other unpopular steps from the authorities, like the obvious electoral fraud that we witnessed this autumn in Russia: all of these are a very bad foundation for people to become really hysterical[ly pro-war].

Of course, if a war is started, I assume that initially it could provoke some increase in patriotism, as almost always happens. But I think it will not be stable or really significant. And if Russia faces any determined

fascism and the Kyiv junta. This branding induced sympathy among the authoritarian left—for example, in Ukraine, including the “Borotba” organization. During the most significant events of 2014, they first took a loyalist position and then later a pro-Russian position. In Odessa, on May 2, 2014, several of their activists were killed during street riots. Some people from this group also participated in the fighting in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, and some of them died there.

“Borotba” described their motivation as wishing to fight against fascism. They urged the European left to stand in solidarity with the “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic.” After the e-mail of Vladislav Surkov (Putin’s political strategist) was hacked, it was revealed that members of Borotba had received funding and were supervised by Surkov’s people.

Russia’s authoritarian communists embraced the breakaway republics for similar reasons.

The presence of far-right supporters in the Maidan also motivated apolitical anti-fascists to support the “DNR” and “LNR.” Again, some of them participated in the fighting in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, and some of them died there.

Among Ukrainian anti-fascists, there were “apolitical” anti-fascists, subculturally-affiliated people who had a negative attitude towards fascism “because our grandfathers fought against it.” Their understanding of fascism was abstract: they themselves were often politically incoherent, sexist, homophobic, patriots of Russia, and the like.

The idea of supporting the so-called republics gained wide backing among the left in Europe. Most notable among its supporters were the Italian rock band “Banda Bassotti” and the German party Die Linke. In addition to fundraising, Banda Bassotti made a tour to “Novorossia.” Being in the European Parliament, Die Linke supported the pro-Russian narrative in every possible way and arranged video conferences with pro-Russian militants, going to Crimea and the unrecognized republics. The younger members of Die Linke, as well as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (the Die Linke party foundation), maintain that this position is not shared by every participant, but it is broadcasted by the most prominent members of the party, such as Sahra Wagenknecht and Sevim Dağdelen.

The pro-Russian position did not gain popularity among anarchists. Among individual statements, the most visible was the position of Jeff Monson, a mixed martial arts fighter from the USA who has tattoos with

All these actions were the individual initiatives of particular people and groups. They did not happen within the framework of a single strategy.

One of the most significant phenomena of that period was a formerly large radical nationalist organization, “Autonomnyi Opir”(autonomous resistance). They started leaning left in 2012; by 2014, they had shifted so much to the left that individual members would even call themselves “anarchists.” They framed their nationalism as a struggle for “liberty” and a counterbalance to Russian nationalism, using the Zapatista movement and the Kurds as role models. Compared to the other projects in Ukrainian society, they were seen as the closest allies, so some anarchists cooperated with them, while others criticized this cooperation and the organization itself. Members of the AO also actively participated in volunteer battalions and tried to develop the idea of “anti-imperialism” among the military. They also defended the right of women to participate in the war; female members of the AO participated in the combat operations. AO assisted training centers in training fighters and doctors, volunteered for the army, and organized the social center “Citadel” in Lviv where refugees were accommodated.

PRO-RUSSIANS

Modern Russian imperialism is built on the perception that Russia is the successor of the USSR—not in its political system, but on territorial grounds. The Putin regime sees the Soviet victory in World War II not as an ideological victory over Nazism, but as a victory over Europe that shows the strength of Russia. In Russia and the countries it controls, the population has less access to information, so Putin’s propaganda machine does not bother to create a complex political concept. The narrative is essentially as follows: The USA and Europe were afraid of the strong USSR, Russia is the successor of the USSR and the entire territory of the former USSR is Russian, Russian tanks entered Berlin, which means that “We can do it again” and we’ll show NATO who is the strongest here, the reason Europe is “rotting” is because all of the gays and emigrants are out of control there.

The ideological foundation maintaining a pro-Russian position among the left was the legacy of the USSR and its victory in World War II. Since Russia claims that the government in Kyiv was seized by Nazis and the junta, the opponents of the Maidan described themselves as fighters against

resistance, any big problems in Ukraine, I think all this pro-state patriotism will fade away very soon and turn into its opposite.

ON THE OTHER SIDE, RIGHT NOW, THE UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO USE THE SITUATION AS WELL—FOR EXAMPLE, MOVING REALLY FAST WITH THE WESTERN ALLIES, GETTING WEAPONS, AND SO ON. BUT CAN YOU SUMMARIZE THE REACTION INSIDE OF UKRAINIAN SOCIETY TO ACTIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT? WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO DO APART FROM ALL THESE MOBILIZATION EFFORTS?

Actually, the situation is not very clear to me now. Since 2004, as I mentioned already, before this conflict in the east of Ukraine, [the conflict benefitted] both the Putin regime and the local authorities, because when you have this defensive nationalist patriotic hysteria, it is really easier to protect yourself from any questions from below, from the grassroots level. Questions like, what’s going on in our country? Why is it so poor? Why is it so deep in shit? There was a clear, fast answer to those questions: this is all because of the external enemy.

That was the tool used a lot by local authorities, this attitude of, “We will take measures on all the internal problems after the external threat goes away.” This line is actually not very popular in Ukraine, but it exists, and it is expressed vocally in some parts of the society.

It is clear that the Zelensky government is fighting in many different ways with its political opponents—both with former president Poroshenko, who is now facing criminal prosecution, and also more pro-Russian forces like Medvedchuk, who is also facing criminal prosecution now and his party is experiencing repression. Somehow, the far right also came under repression, since their beloved patron, Interior Minister Avakov, resigned several months ago. After this, some people from the Azov movement—from this national corps, which is the largest far-right party in Ukraine at the moment—they were put under arrest as well.

So the Ukrainian state has consolidated itself, somehow. This much is visible. As for how that affects internal politics around this threat, that is not very clear to me as of now. But we can see some really alarming tendencies threatening to concentrate executive power in the hands of the president and his crew.

SPEAKING OF THE POLITICS OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM? I REMEMBER ZELENSKY BEING A POPULIST—LIKE

SAYING, YEAH, WE WILL FIGHT CORRUPTION, WE WILL MAKE EVERYBODY HAPPY, AND SO ON. WHAT ARE HIS POLITICS RIGHT NOW? THERE IS ALSO A NARRATIVE THAT I HEAR IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE THAT THE WAR DOESN'T MATTER SO MUCH BECAUSE IT'S BASICALLY REPLACING ONE FASCIST REGIME WITH ANOTHER FASCIST REGIME. HOW MUCH DO THE POLITICS AND "LIBERAL FREEDOMS" IN UKRAINE DIFFER FROM RUSSIA RIGHT NOW?

First of all, the Zelensky regime is definitely not fascist, at least not right now—if only because it still does not have that much control. This is because in Ukraine, the state's power is not as consolidated as it is in Russia or in Belarus. But this regime is still in no way “good,” of course. They are still corrupt liars who are doing basically neoliberal bullshit. This is the design of most of their politics, I would say. But still, this country is much less authoritarian in its social structure, at least, even though it's super shitty in its economic structure. This is the reason why so many political dissidents from Belarus, Russia, and also Kazakhstan, too, for example, are sheltering here. Because here, there is not such a unified state line, there is not that much opportunity or possibility for the state to control and design the entire social landscape—even though, as I said before, the state is trying to do it more now.

So a takeover of Ukraine by the Russian authorities or a clearly pro-Russian government will be a catastrophe, because a somewhat freer area—or I would say, more of a “gray zone,” as Ukraine is now—will shift to being under the control of the authoritarian and harsh dictatorship of Putin. To be clear, the Ukrainian state is still a super shitty populist regime that has not made any positive political steps, as far as I can tell, since Zelensky came into power. The only concrete step which I can remember right now was this law about agricultural lands, which can be now freely bought and sold on the market, whereas before there were some obstacles. We believe that this legislation will soon result in the concentration of agricultural lands in the hands of several big agricultural corporations. So all the neo-liberal politics like this are being put into place.

But still, we see a lot of poverty, both in Ukraine and in Russia. Of course, Ukraine is a poorer country because it doesn't have as much oil and gas. But if Russia will occupy Ukraine, do we really believe that local working class and poor people will gain some economic benefits from the new occupation regime? Of course not. It's really hard for me to believe in that. Because the Russian economic situation is getting worse and worse, and

police, and politicians; they do not represent a really independent political force. The discussions of the problem of the far-right are becoming more frequent within the democratic camp, where people are developing an understanding of the symbols and organizations they are dealing with, rather than silently dismissing concerns.

ANARCHISTS' AND ANTI-FASCISTS' ACTIVITY DURING THE WAR

With the outbreak of military operations, a division appeared between those who are pro-Ukrainian and those who support the so-called DNR/LNR (“Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic”).

There was a widespread “say no to war” sentiment within the punk scene during the first months of the war, but it did not last long. Let's analyze the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian camps.

PRO-UKRAINIANS

Due to the lack of a massive organization, the first anarchist and anti-fascist volunteers went to war individually as single fighters, military medics, and volunteers. They tried to form their own squad, but due to lack of knowledge and resources, this attempt was unsuccessful. Some people even joined the Azov battalion and the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists). The reasons were mundane: they joined the most accessible troops. Consequently, some people converted to right-wing politics.

Anti-fascists receiving training at the Right Sector base in Desna. It is worth noting that this photo includes two Moscow anti-fascists who joined the armed conflict.

People who didn't take part in the battles raised funds for the rehabilitation of people injured in the East and for the construction of a bomb shelter in a kindergarten located near the front line. There was also a squat named “Autonomy” in Kharkiv, an open anarchist social and cultural center; at that time, they concentrated on helping the refugees. They provided housing and a permanent really free market, consulting with new arrivals and directing them to resources and conducting educational activities. In addition, the center became a place for theoretical discussions. Unfortunately, in 2018, the project ceased to exist.

battalion. At the beginning, it consisted of 70 fighters; now it is a regiment of 800 people with its own armored vehicles, artillery, tank company, and a separate project in accordance with NATO standards, the sergeant school. The Azov battalion is one of the most combat-effective units in the Ukrainian army. There were also other fascist military formations such as the Volunteer Ukrainian Unit “Right Sector” and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, but they are less widely known.

As a consequence, the Ukrainian right wing accrued a bad reputation in the Russian media. But many in Ukraine considered what was hated in Russia to be a symbol of struggle in Ukraine. For example, the name of the nationalist Stepan Bandera, who is known chiefly as a Nazi collaborator in Russia, was actively used by the protesters as a form of mockery. Some called themselves Judeo-Banderans to troll supporters of Jewish/Masonic conspiracy theories.

Over time, the trolling contributed to a rise in far-right activity. Right-wingers openly wore Nazi symbols; ordinary supporters of the Maidan claimed that they were themselves Banderans who eat Russian babies and made memes to that effect. The far right made its way into the mainstream: they were invited to participate in television shows and other corporate media platforms, on which they were presented as patriots and nationalists. Liberal supporters of the Maidan took their side, believing that the Nazis were a hoax invented by Russian media. In 2014 to 2016, anyone who was ready to fight was embraced, whether it was a Nazi, an anarchist, a kingpin from an organized crime syndicate, or a politician who did not carry out any of his promises.

The rise of the far right is due to the fact that they were better organized in critical situations and were able to suggest effective methods of fighting to other rebels. Anarchists provided something similar in Belarus, where they also managed to gain the sympathy of the public, but not on as significant a scale as the far right did in Ukraine.

By 2017, after the ceasefire started and the need for radical fighters decreased, the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) and the state government co-opted the right-wing movement, jailing or neutralizing anyone who had an “anti-system” or independent perspective on how to develop the right-wing movement—including Oleksandr Muzychko, Oleg Muzhchil, Yaroslav Babich, and others.

Today, it is still a big movement, but their popularity is at a comparably low level and their leaders are affiliated with the Security service,

they simply have no resources to share with other people. To construct this big bridge from continental Russia to Crimea, it necessitated ceasing the construction of several bridges in Siberia and in other parts of Russia. So they have no resources to share with local people here, even if they would want to buy them off somehow. And in the sphere of politics and society, of course, we can expect nothing better from the Putin regime. In terms of dictatorship, regarding state control and state oppression, the Putin regime is currently much more dangerous than the local regime. The local regime is not “better,” it is just less powerful.

A LOT OF THE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING WITH RUSSIA, THE THINGS THAT PUTIN HAS ALLOWED HIMSELF IN THE LAST FIFTEEN OR SO YEARS, HAPPENED WITH SOME KIND OF TACIT OK FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. OR [THEY ONLY RESULT IN AN EMPTY STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT] “WE CONDEMN THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS,” BLAH BLAH BLAH. LIKE THE SITUATION IN KAZAKHSTAN, FOR EXAMPLE—THE MOST RECENT ONE, DIDN’T ACTUALLY CAUSE ANY POLITICAL OR SOCIAL BACKLASH FROM OTHER PLAYERS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. FOR ME, IT’S INTERESTING TO ASK WHAT THE REACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MIGHT BE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE INVASION OF UKRAINE? IS IT LIKE, OK, WE’RE GOING TO GO INTO THE WAR AND WE’RE ALL GOING TO FUCK UP RUSSIA? OR IS IT MORE LIKE, WE WILL BE “CONCERNED” IF RUSSIA TAKES OVER UKRAINE, BLAH BLAH BLAH?

Well, I’m not sure if my picture is really correct from here, but of course, every day in the news we hear and see that, for example, the American [i.e., US] president and American government are threatening Russia with huge economic sanctions in the case of military aggression. And also, we learned recently that some military support has come to Ukraine as well—not military personnel, but some weapons. So I think there is some reaction from the so-called international community.

But from here, it always looks like the West is constantly promising but never actually taking the crucial steps that could actually prevent Putin’s aggression. So the people of Ukraine, I think even those who had some sympathy with Western countries, feel themselves more and more abandoned by the powers that they once believed in.

TALKING ABOUT THE ANARCHISTS IN UKRAINE—I KNOW THAT THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT IN UKRAINE IS NOT THE STRONGEST IN THE REGION,

AND IT SUFFERED FROM THE RECENT CONFLICTS IN DONBAS AND SO ON. WHAT IS THE CURRENT REACTION TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION? WHAT ARE ANARCHISTS TALKING ABOUT? WHAT ARE ANARCHISTS THINKING ABOUT, OR MOBILIZING TO DO IN CASE THE RUSSIAN FORCES MARCH IN?

Well, I would say that there are two different modes within the anarchist community here. Of course, we discuss it a lot, almost every day, and in every meeting, and some people are really interested in participating in resistance. Some in military terms, and some also in terms of peaceful volunteering, some logistics volunteering, and so on. Of course, some other people are thinking more about fleeing and taking refuge somewhere. I am more in sympathy (and this is my personal position, but also political) with the first idea. If you flee, you are out of any political and social protest. We as revolutionaries, we need to take some active stand, not a passive stand of just observing or fleeing. We need to intervene in these events. This is for sure.

The biggest challenge, and the biggest question, is: in what way should we intervene in them? Because if, as it happened in 2014-15, we just individually go and join some Ukrainian troops to confront the aggression, that is not actually a political activity. It is just an act of self-assimilation into state politics, into the politics of the nation-state.

Fortunately, this is not only my opinion. Many people are thinking here about making some organized structure... which may be in some collaboration with the state structures of self-defense, but will still be autonomous and under our influence, and will be composed of comrades. So this will be organized participation with our own agenda and our own political message, for our own organizational benefit. Not just taking sides with some state player in this conflict.

RIGHT, BUT SOME PEOPLE WOULD BE SAYING FOR SURE THAT, "HEY, YOU'RE ANARCHISTS AGAINST THE STATE, AND NOW YOU'RE PROTECTING THE STATE." I'M PRETTY SURE THAT SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT ANARCHISTS SHOULD BE OUT OF THOSE CONFLICTS ALTOGETHER. WHAT WOULD YOU ANSWER TO THEM?

First of all, I would answer them—thanks, this is a valuable critique. We really need to evaluate how to intervene so as not to just become a tool in

SUPPORTERS OF THE UNRECOGNIZED REPUBLICS

The ideological basis of the opponents of the Maidan was also diverse. The main unifying ideas were discontent with violence against the police and opposition to rioting in Kyiv. People who were brought up with Russian cultural narratives, movies, and music were afraid of the destruction of the Russian language. Supporters of the USSR and admirers of its victory in World War II believed that Ukraine should be aligned with Russia and were unhappy with the rise of radical nationalists. Adherents of the Russian Empire perceived the Maidan protests as a threat to the territory of the Russian Empire. The ideas of these allies could be explained with this photo showing the flags of the USSR, the Russian Empire, and the St. George ribbon as a symbol of victory in the Second World War. We could portray them as authoritarian conservatives, supporters of the old order.

The pro-Russian side consisted of police, entrepreneurs, politicians, and the military who sympathized with Russia, ordinary citizens frightened by fake news, various ultra-right individuals including Russian patriots and various types of monarchists, pro-Russian imperialists, the Task Force group “Rusich,” the PMC [Private Military Company] group “Wagner,” including the notorious neo-Nazi Alexei Milchakov, the recently deceased Egor Prosvirnin, the founder of the chauvinistic Russian nationalist media project “Sputnik and Pogrom,” and many others. There were also authoritarian leftists, who celebrate the USSR and its victory in the Second World War.

THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT IN UKRAINE

As we described, the right wing managed to gain sympathy during the Maidan by organizing combat units and by being ready to physically confront the Berkut. The presence of military arms enabled them to maintain their independence and force others to reckon with them. In spite of their using overt fascist symbols such as swastikas, wolf hooks, Celtic crosses, and SS logos, it was difficult to discredit them, as the need to fight the forces of the Yanukovych government caused many Ukrainians to call for cooperation with them.

After the Maidan, the right wing actively suppressed the rallies of pro-Russian forces. At the beginning of the military operations, they started forming volunteer battalions. One of the most famous is the “Azov”

1. The Ukrainian military realized that weapons, volunteers, and military specialists were coming from Russia. Therefore, on July 12, 2014, they began an operation on the Ukrainian-Russian border. However, during the military march, the Ukrainian military was attacked by Russian artillery and the operation failed. The armed forces sustained heavy losses.
2. The Ukrainian military attempted to occupy Donetsk. While they were advancing, they were surrounded by Russian regular troops near Ilovaisk. People we know, who were part of one of the volunteer battalions, were also captured. They saw the Russian military firsthand. After three months, they managed to return as the result of an exchange of prisoners of war.
3. The Ukrainian army controlled the city of Debaltseve, which had a large railway junction. This disrupted the direct road linking Donetsk and Lugansk. On the eve of the negotiations between Poroshenko (the president of Ukraine at that time) and Putin, which were supposed to begin a long-term ceasefire, Ukrainian positions were attacked by units with the support of Russian troops. The Ukrainian army was again surrounded and sustained heavy losses.

For the time being (as of early February 2022), the parties have agreed on a ceasefire and a conditional “peace and quiet” order, which is maintained, though there are consistent violations. Several people die every month.

Russia denies the presence of regular Russian troops and the supply of weapons to territories uncontrolled by the Ukrainian authorities. The Russian military who were captured claim that they were put on alert for a drill, and only when they arrived at their destination did they realize that they were in the middle of the war in Ukraine. Before crossing the border, they removed the symbols of the Russian army, the way their colleagues did in Crimea. In Russia, journalists have found cemeteries of fallen soldiers, but all information about their deaths is unknown: the epitaphs on the headstones only indicate the dates of their deaths as the year 2014.

some state’s hands. But definitely, if we apply some smart politics—if we apply the art of politics, I would say—we have a chance to do this. If we stay away from the state conflicts, then we stay away from actual politics, as I said before. This is now one of the most significant social conflicts that is going on in our region. If we isolate ourselves from it, we isolate ourselves from the actual social process. So we need somehow to participate.

Of course, it is beyond question that we need to confront Putinist imperialism. If we need any kind of collaboration in this way, then we need it. Of course, we have to evaluate very carefully, very cautiously, how not to become dependent on some very reactionary and negative powers. This is really a question and a challenge, but this is the difficult path that we can go on. Running from those challenges just equals surrender in terms of promoting anarchy and promoting social liberation and revolution in our region. And this is not an acceptable position for me and for many other comrades.

I THINK FOR ME IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT HERE TO POINT OUT THAT ALL IN ALL, UKRAINE IS KIND OF LIKE A LAST STAND AMONG THE FORMER SOVIET COUNTRIES. CURRENTLY, THE EXPANSION OF PUTIN'S EMPIRE IS TAKING MORE AND MORE AGGRESSIVE STEPS—AGAIN, THE KAZAKHSTAN STORY, THE BELARUS STORY, THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE LUKASHENKO REGIME UNDER CERTAIN TERMS OF REINTEGRATION OF BELARUS INTO RUSSIA—ALL OF THESE STEPS ARE AIMING TO BRING THE WHOLE REGION BACK UNDER PUTIN'S AUTHORITARIANISM. FOR US AS ANARCHISTS, IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO GIVE AN ANSWER TO THAT AND NOT JUST SIT ON OUR THRONES AND SAY, "OH THAT'S SO GREAT, WE ARE ANARCHISTS; WE ARE AGAINST THE STATE, AND ALL THOSE SIMPLE, STUPID POLITICS OF THE STATE DO NOT TOUCH US."

That's correct, of course. But at the same time, I want to stress that we also should not take sides with the local nationalist circles and local nation-states. Because these are by no means progressive political entities or progressive political voices. They also really produce a lot of oppression and exploitation, and this also really needs to be confronted, both vocally and by means of our activities.

EXACTLY. I TOTALLY AGREE WITH THAT. TO [READERS] WHO ARE NOT IN THE REGION, HOW CAN PEOPLE SUPPORT YOU? OR HOW CAN PEOPLE ACTUALLY GET MORE INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION?

Well, first of all, support could be informational; if you follow what is going on here attentively and spread information, spread the word, this would already be a really big thing. Also, I think if you have an opportunity to come in contact with local anarchist comrades, it is possible to request some kind of support: maybe solidarity actions, maybe preparing some conditions for people who need to flee, for example, to escape the region. Also, some financial support may be required at some time. If we will have some organizational presence in this conflict, that will require a lot of material things and finances.

Unfortunately, at the moment I cannot recommend some unified website or Telegram channel or something like that, which you could follow in order to know everything. There is still a multitude of different smaller media projects and smaller groups, not some really big unified union or unified organization. But definitely, if you make some effort, you will easily come into contact with this or that faction of the local anarchist movement, so you can keep an eye on the situation and be ready to react somehow. This will be already extremely appreciated.

COOL. THANKS A LOT FOR THE CONVERSATION. TAKE CARE, AND HOPEFULLY THE WAR WON'T HAPPEN AND THE RUSSIANS WILL FUCK OFF, AND THERE WILL BE OTHER THINGS TO TAKE CARE OF IN THE STRUGGLE RATHER THAN ACTUALLY ORGANIZING RESISTANCE TO THE RUSSIAN INVASION.

Yes, hopefully.

A VIEW FROM KIEV

This text was composed at the very beginning of February 2022 by a Ukrainian from Luhansk, living in exile in Kiev.

Ukraine has been at war with Russia and its proxies for eight years now. The death toll has already exceeded 14,000. Yet as Russian troops gather along our northern and eastern borders, it's the first time in the history of this war—or even in the entire history of Ukraine as I recall it—that I

to destroy the Russian-speaking population (although Kyiv is also a predominantly Russian-speaking city). In their disinformation statements, the propagandists used photos of the far right and spread all kinds of fake news. During the hostilities, one of the most notorious hoaxes appeared: the so-called crucifixion of a three-year-old boy who was allegedly attached to a tank and dragged along the road. In Russia, this story was broadcasted on federal channels and went viral on the Internet.

In 2014, in our opinion, disinformation played a key role in generating the armed conflict: some residents of Donetsk and Lugansk were scared that they would be killed, so they took up arms and called for Putin's troops.

ARMED CONFLICT IN THE EAST OF UKRAINE

"The trigger of the war was pulled," in his own words, by Igor Girkin, a colonel of the FSB (the state security agency, successors to the KGB) of the Russian Federation. Girkin, a supporter of Russian imperialism, decided to radicalize the pro-Russian protests. He crossed the border with an armed group of Russians and (on April 12, 2014) seized the Interior Ministry building in Slavyansk to take possession of weapons. Pro-Russian security forces began to join Girkin. When information about Girkin's armed groups appeared, Ukraine announced an anti-terrorist operation.

A part of Ukrainian society determined to protect national sovereignty, realizing that the army had poor capacity, organized a large volunteer movement. Those who were somewhat competent in military affairs became instructors or formed volunteer battalions. Some people joined the regular army and volunteer battalions as humanitarian volunteers. They raised funds for weapons, food, ammunition, fuel, transport, renting civil cars, and the like. Often, the participants in the volunteer battalions were armed and equipped better than the soldiers of the state army. These detachments demonstrated a significant level of solidarity and self-organization and actually replaced the state functions of territorial defense, enabling the army (which was poorly equipped at that time) to successfully resist the enemy.

The territories controlled by pro-Russian forces began to shrink rapidly. Then the regular Russian army intervened.

We can highlight three key chronological points:

THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR: THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

The armed conflict with Russia began eight years ago on the night of February 26-27, 2014, when the Crimean Parliament building and the Council of Ministers were seized by unknown armed men. They used Russian weapons, uniforms, and equipment but did not have the symbols of the Russian army. Putin did not recognize the fact of the participation of the Russian military in this operation, although he later admitted it personally in the documentary propaganda film “Crimea: The way to the Homeland”.

Here, one needs to understand that during the time of Yanukovych, the Ukrainian army was in very poor condition. Knowing that there was a regular Russian army of 220,000 soldiers operating in Crimea, the provisional government of Ukraine did not dare to confront it.

After the occupation, many residents have faced repression that continues to this day. Our comrades are also among the repressed. We can briefly review some of the most high-profile cases. Anarchist Alexander Kolchenko was arrested along with pro-democratic activist Oleg Sentsov and transferred to Russia on May 16, 2014; five years later, they were released as a result of a prisoner exchange. Anarchist Alexei Shestakovich was tortured, suffocated with a plastic bag on his head, beaten, and threatened with reprisals; he managed to escape. Anarchist Evgeny Karakashev was arrested in 2018 for a re-post on Vkontakte (a social network); he remains in custody.

DISINFORMATION

Pro-Russian rallies were held in Russian-speaking cities close to the Russian border. The participants feared NATO, radical nationalists, and repression targeting the Russian-speaking population. After the collapse of the USSR, many households in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus had family ties, but the events of the Maidan caused a serious split in personal relations. Those who were outside Kyiv and watched Russian TV were convinced that Kyiv had been captured by a Nazi junta and that there were purges of the Russian-speaking population there.

Russia launched a propaganda campaign using the following messaging: “punishers,” i.e., Nazis, are coming from Kyiv to Donetsk, they want

am regularly receiving messages from my foreign friends, some of whom I haven’t heard from in years, all eager to learn whether I am safe and if the threat is as significant as they have been told. These friends vary in their political views, ages, occupations, life experiences, and backgrounds. The one thing they all have in common is that they’re all from the United States.

The rest of my comrades around the world seem to have less anxiety about this. Last week, I hosted one friend from Greece and another from Germany, both of whom seemed surprised to learn that they had landed in a country that is supposed to become the epicenter of the Third World War any minute now (which is probably why their plane tickets only cost eight euros). I would have been surprised, too, if it weren’t for the fact that I also happen to watch US television myself. Over the past few weeks, I noticed a surge of references to Ukraine’s situation on all sorts of talk shows I see online. It almost feels as if there’s more talk about Ukraine in the United States now than there was during Joe Biden’s son’s corruption scandal.

For a Ukrainian, what this sudden rise in interest in our endless fight against our abusive imperialist neighbor makes you feel will depend on your political stance. When we agreed to give up our nuclear weapons in 1994, joining the Budapest memorandum, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the USA promised to respect and protect the independence, sovereignty, and existing borders of Ukraine and to refrain from any threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine. When all of those promises were proven to be completely worthless just twenty years later, many people here couldn’t help but feel betrayed. Many of these people now feel like it’s right about time for the US to step up its game delivering on its promises. Without this context, it would be extremely challenging to understand why some people in Ukraine would applaud when an offshore empire that refers to Ukraine as “Russia’s backyard” flies war planes filled with soldiers over this sovereign country.

However, there are some others in Ukraine who, like myself, don’t limit their mistrust to the empire that we are unfortunate enough to share a border with, but extend this well-earned lack of confidence to the rest of them. Even for the people who truly believe that the enemy of their enemy is their friend, it’s worth asking how many such friends that the US has made around the world—Vietnamese, Afghans, Kurds, and more—have not regretted acquiring such an ally.

This fairly low bar of critical thinking is unfortunately not nearly as common in Ukraine as short-sighted patriotism, nationalism, and militarism, all of which are gaining momentum here as war hysteria grows. In Ukraine, there is not much discussion about why we are finally being noticed by the US and UK now, after eight painful years of losing lives and territories—including my hometown of Lugansk. And this absence of curiosity about the motives of the empires works both ways: just as most of us couldn't care less what Biden's administration stands to gain from this power play, our understanding of why Putin would attempt to invade further now is limited to "This bloodthirsty maniac is simply mad." Hardly anyone entertains a possibility that there could be something more going on.

Even fewer question the claim that Russia has indeed increased its presence on the Ukrainian border in a way that makes our current situation more threatening than it was a year ago.

I am not saying that the threat of the invasion of the very real Russian troops amassing at our borders is insignificant. But I question whether the involvement of the US is truly aimed at de-escalating this conflict to benefit the people of Ukraine.

Unfortunately, being here on the ground doesn't really give me any particular expertise to rely on. Back in early 2014, seeing everything that was happening around the country, I refused to believe that Ukraine was about to go to war until the very moment it happened. In retrospect, it seems like it was inevitable. Now, none of us truly know if the war will happen, and if it does, when it will escalate.

Some people have already fled the country. Most people can't afford even a brief short-distance trip abroad, so they are bound to keep calm and carry on. Beyond corruption and war, the reason why most people in Ukraine are so desperately poor may or may not coincide with the fact that Ukraine outlawed communism in 2015 and is currently the only country in Europe in which the parliament consists entirely of different shades of right-wing parties.

When events like this unfold almost 6000 miles away from you, it's natural for an overseas anti-authoritarian to seek to make sure that they're not rooting for the bad people. Not everyone standing up for themselves is Zapatistas, Kurds, or Catalonians. A wide spectrum of different groups around the world resist imperialist aggression. On this spectrum, many of the people claiming to guard Ukraine fall much closer to groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Are many of them xenophobic, conservative, sexist,

of Anarcho-Syndicalists (RCAS of Makhno), but at the beginning of the riots, it dissolved itself, as the participants could not develop a strategy for the new situation.

The events of the Maidan were like a situation in which the special forces break into your house and you need to take decisive actions, but your arsenal consists only of punk lyrics, veganism, 100-year-old books, and at best, the experience of participating in street anti-fascism and local social conflicts. Consequently, there was a lot of confusion, as people attempted to understand what was happening.

At the time, it was not possible to form a unified vision of the situation. The presence of the far-right in the streets discouraged many anarchists from supporting the protests, as they did not want to stand beside Nazis on the same side of the barricades. This brought a lot of controversy into the movement; some people accused those who did decide to join the protests of fascism.

The anarchists who participated in the protests were dissatisfied with the brutality of the police and with Yanukovych himself and his pro-Russian position. However, they could not have a significant impact on the protests, as they were essentially in the category of outsiders.

In the end, anarchists participated in the Maidan revolution individually and in small groups, mainly in volunteer/non-militant initiatives. After a while, they decided to cooperate and make their own "hundred" (a combat group of 60-100 people). But during the registration of the detachment (a mandatory procedure on the Maidan), the outnumbered anarchists were dispersed by the far-right participants with weapons. The anarchists remained, but no longer attempted to create large organized groups.

Among those killed on the Maidan was the anarchist Sergei Kemsky who was, ironically, ranked as postmortem Hero of Ukraine. He was shot by a sniper during the heated phase of the confrontation with the security forces. During the protests, Sergei put forward an appeal to the protesters entitled "Do you hear it, Maidan?" in which he outlined possible ways of developing the revolution, emphasizing the aspects of direct democracy and social transformation. The text is available in English [here](#).

In response, the protesters produced DIY grenades and explosives and brought firearms to the Maidan. The manufacturing of Molotov cocktails resembled small divisions.

In the 2014 Maidan protests, the authorities used mercenaries (titushkas), gave them weapons, coordinated them, and tried to use them as an organized loyalist force. There were fights with them involving sticks, hammers, and knives.

Contrary to the opinion that the Maidan was a “manipulation by the EU and NATO,” supporters of European integration had called for a peaceful protest, deriding militant protesters as stooges. The EU and the United States criticized the seizures of government buildings. Of course, “pro-Western” forces and organizations participated in the protest, but they did not control the entire protest. Various political forces including the far right actively interfered in the movement and tried to dictate their agenda. They quickly got their bearings and became an organizing force, thanks to the fact that they created the first combat detachments and invited everyone to join them, training and directing them.

However, none of the forces was absolutely dominant. The main trend was that it was a spontaneous protest mobilization directed against the corrupt and unpopular Yanukovych regime. Perhaps the Maidan can be classified as one of the many “stolen revolutions.” The sacrifices and efforts of tens of thousands of ordinary people were usurped by a handful of politicians who made their way to power and control over the economy.

THE ROLE OF ANARCHISTS IN THE PROTESTS OF 2014

Despite the fact that anarchists in Ukraine have a long history, during the reign of Stalin, everyone who was connected with the anarchists in any way was repressed and the movement died out, and consequently, the transfer of revolutionary experience ceased. The movement began to recover in the 1980s thanks to the efforts of historians, and in the 2000s it received a big boost due to the development of subcultures and anti-fascism. But in 2014, it was not yet ready for serious historical challenges.

Prior to the beginning of the protests, anarchists were individual activists or scattered in small groups. Few argued that the movement should be organized and revolutionary. Of the well-known organizations that were preparing for such events, there was Makhno Revolutionary Confederation

homophobic, anti-Semitic, racist, pro-capitalist, or even outright fascist? Yes. But are they fighting an uneven fight against an extremely powerful and violent neighboring state, in which they seem to be the only hope for any meaningful resistance whatsoever? Also yes.

And these aren’t the hardest questions.

If an autocratic empire is trying to destroy another state that is defended, in part, by fascists, do we sit back and rejoice there are going to be a few less fascists in the world? What if the deaths will also include thousands of innocent people who are trying to defend themselves or are simply at the wrong place at the wrong time? Do we step in, understanding that these divisions between people only benefit those who are already powerful, never the people being divided?

This begs another question: what does “stepping in” mean? Is there a way to “step in” here that is both substantial and without negative consequences? Neither of the two strategies that the United States has employed so far have shown much success. Antagonizing Russia only makes things worse for everyone, while many people here believe that the alternative—expressing “deep concern” without standing in Putin’s way—is what led to the war getting started in 2014 in the first place. This is why I doubt that any solution to the problem of the imperial appetite that doesn’t involve the simultaneous abolition of both empires can be anything more than a bandaid for an issue of this scale. The truth is, Ukraine is not the first victim of the hunger for power, nor will it be the last. As long as we keep these monsters alive, it won’t matter whether they are friends or foes, tamed or rabid, chained or free. They will always be hungry.

I do hope, however, that there is still a lot more that people in the US and the rest of the world can do. I hope we can all organize and create communities that transcend the superficial divisions imposed on us by the noxious ideologies of capitalism, conservatism, and individualism, striving to remember that it is only when we are separated, segregated, careless of one another, or at each other’s throats that we are truly weak and helpless. With education and solidarity, we can try to create a world in which a senseless conflict like this would make even less sense. Until we can do that, we can do our very best to provide support to those around the world who fall victim to these cruel wars.

What does this mean, concretely, right now, here in Ukraine? And in the meantime, does the fact that many people fighting for Ukraine are indeed fascists mean that all the people who are hiding behind their

backs—including me—are also liable for their politics? Here, we are getting into the harder questions.

But no one is addressing these questions here. The people of Ukraine are all busy taking first aid and gun handling classes—or learning where the city shelters are—or, mostly, just struggling to get by. There's no all-out panic here, just dull weariness. The threat of the big war remains very real; if it occurs, it is unlikely that it will result in anything other than an even weaker, worse, and smaller Ukraine than the one we already have. And I really can't recommend even the current version.

All that being said, it's also worth admitting that I will not risk my life fighting for this country against the Russian army. I will probably do my best to evacuate if Kiev becomes even more unlivable than it already is. This is admittedly the intention of a person with some privileges. Most of the people here have absolutely nowhere to go.

WAR AND ANARCHISTS: ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN PERSPECTIVES IN UKRAINE

This article was composed by anarchists in Ukraine in early February 2022.

This text was composed together by several active anti-authoritarian activists from Ukraine. We do not represent one organization, but we came together to write this text and prepare for a possible war.

Besides us, the text was edited by more than ten people, including participants in the events described in the text, journalists who checked the accuracy of our claims, and anarchists from Russia, Belarus, and Europe. We received many corrections and clarifications in order to write the most objective text possible.

If war breaks out, we do not know if the anti-authoritarian movement will survive, but we will try to do so. In the meantime, this text is an attempt to leave the experience that we have accumulated online.

At the moment, the world is actively discussing a possible war between

Russia and Ukraine. We need to clarify that the war between Russia and Ukraine has been going on since 2014.

But first things first.

THE MAIDAN PROTESTS IN KYIV

In 2013, mass protests began in Ukraine, triggered by Berkut (police special forces) beating up student protesters who were dissatisfied with the refusal of then-President Viktor Yanukovych to sign the association agreement with the European Union. This beating functioned as a call to action for many segments of society. It became clear to everyone that Yanukovych had crossed the line. The protests ultimately led to the president fleeing.

In Ukraine, these events are called “The Revolution of Dignity.” The Russian government presents it as a Nazi coup, a US State Department project, and so on. The protesters themselves were a motley crowd: far-right activists with their symbols, liberal leaders talking about European values and European integration, ordinary Ukrainians who went out against the government, a few leftists. Anti-oligarchic sentiments dominated among the protesters, while oligarchs who did not like Yanukovych financed the protest because he, along with his inner circle, tried to monopolize big business during his term. That is to say—for other oligarchs, the protest represented a chance to save their businesses. Also, many representatives of mid-size and small businesses participated in the protest because Yanukovych’s people did not allow them to work freely, demanding money from them. Ordinary people were dissatisfied with the high level of corruption and arbitrary conduct of the police. The nationalists who opposed Yanukovych on the grounds that he was a pro-Russian politician reasserted themselves significantly. Belarusian and Russian expatriates joined protests, perceiving Yanukovych as a friend of Belarusian and Russian dictators Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin.

If you have seen videos from the Maidan rally, you might have noticed that the degree of violence was high; the protesters had no place to pull back to, so they had to fight to the bitter end. The Berkut wrapped stun grenades with screw nuts that left splinter wounds after the explosion, hitting people in their eyes; that is why there were many injured people. In the final stages of the conflict, the security forces used military weapons—killing 106 protesters.