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SKINHEAD ATTACKS ON THE RISE IN UKRAINE

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Since the Orange Revolution in November-December 2004, there have been a growing number of attacks by extreme right groups against Westerners in Ukraine. These attacks are commonly blamed on "skinheads," but real skinheads have denied involvement, saying that their only targets are individuals with darker-colored skin, not Westerners per se. There are reportedly 10,000 skinheads in Kyiv alone, but under former president Leonid Kuchma they were ignored and their violent attacks were reported as simple "hooliganism."

One of the first recorded attacks was in April 2002 on a Kyiv synagogue. The skinheads badly beat up the deputy chief rabbi, broke all of the windows, shouted anti-Semitic slogans, and ran away. The Interior Ministry blamed the incident on "football hooligans."

The attackers in this and subsequent incidents were skinheads with badges on their jackets that read "White Power" with the depiction of a cross in a circle. The symbol is suspiciously similar to that used by the Ukrainian extremist group Bratstvo on its flags and banners.

The Security Service (SBU) has confirmed that it is monitoring these attacks to see if there is any political motivation and, if so, if there are external links. Andrei Shkil, a parliamentary deputy in the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc, believes the recent attacks are meant to discredit the new authorities.

Television Channel 5's investigative program "Closed Zone" speculated that these attacks were being committed by extreme-right political groups, such as Bratstvo (Brotherhood), who are hostile to President Viktor Yushchenko and may receive covert support from Russia (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 26). The possibility of a link to Russia is most worrying to the authorities as, if proven, it shows how Russia is willing to support different structures in Ukraine in order to discredit the Yushchenko camp by inciting violence.

The attacks have been very well planned against Americans and others, raising suspicions that "organized structures" are involved. An attack on an African-American diplomat in

Kyiv earlier this year was perpetrated by a "well-organized group of skinhead thugs in army boots," the victim revealed (*Fakty I Komentarii*, March 17).

Bratstvo leader Dmytro Korchynsky visited Russia in February and was received in the presidential administration. During the 2004 elections Bratstvo backed pro-Russia candidate Viktor Yanukovich and supported the anti-American campaign that was orchestrated against Yushchenko.

At one point during the Orange Revolution, 3,000 skinheads were readied to create disorder on Maidan Square, the center of protest activities. "But, then an order came from somewhere to not participate in it" *Fakty I Komentarii* (March 17) revealed.

When asked about the attacks, Korchynsky blamed the epidemic on the foreigners themselves. "I am confident that the foreigners are to blame here," he retorted. "Their behavior in relation to Ukraine is very impudent in general, and also when they come over here" (Channel 5, April 24).

Korchynsky blithely ignored the massive intrusion by Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine's 2004 election, blaming only the West for interference. Such views are commonly heard in Russia and in the Yanukovich camp. "This is their custom to issue instructions to our government, to manipulate our president, to arrange their dealings here and to dictate our foreign policy. They think they can do the same in day-to-day life," Korchynsky added (Channel 5, April 24). He warned, "Sometimes they get beaten up for this."

Bratstvo grew out of the extreme right Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA) that emerged in 1992 and possessed a scandalous paramilitary arm, the People's Self Defense Forces (UNSO). Korchynsky headed UNA-UNSO until 1997 when he left to set up Bratstvo.

During the 2004 elections Bratstvo allied with three other extreme-right parties, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in Ukraine, Rukh for Unity, and UNA. All but the UNA nominated their leaders as presidential candidates.

The alignment of four extreme right parties with the authorities showed the depth of the political stagnation in Ukraine during Kuchma's second term in office. The collusion resembled that found in Russia with loyal nationalist parties, such as Rodina and the Liberal Democratic Party, and in Serbia with the Radical Party. Bratstvo's office in Kyiv was next door to the Social Democratic Party-United (SDPUo).

Bratstvo draws on a culture of violence encouraged by the authorities prior to and during the 2004 elections. Skinheads disrupted Yushchenko's Our Ukraine congress in Donetsk in October 2003, when the city was lined by billboards depicting him giving a Nazi salute and sporting a Hitleresque moustache. During a visit to Donetsk after he was elected president, Yushchenko demanded an apology from local elites.

During the April 2004 mayoral elections in Mukachevo, skinheads linked to organized crime disrupted voting and destroyed ballots that showed the Our Ukraine candidate to have won. After round two of the presidential elections, spetsnaz police units foiled an attempt in Trans-Carpathia, organized by the SDPUo governor and local Interior Ministry chief, to use skinheads to shoot at bystanders and then blame the incident on "Yushchenko extremists." The aim was to create an excuse for declaring a state of emergency.

During the presidential campaign, almost every attack on Yanukovych supporters was blamed on Yushchenko supporters. But, as it has become increasingly clear, most of these attacks were actually orchestrated by the Yanukovych camp to discredit Yushchenko (*Ukrayinska pravda*, May 2). Bratstvo could well be these "hired guns."