

SBU Stops Separatism in Its Tracks

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By: [Taras Kuzio](#)

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) has patted itself on the back for stopping separatism in three different regions: Donetsk, Crimea, and Transcarpathia (www.ssu.gov.ua, December 9). All three cases involved pro-Russian organizations financed from Russian sources. The SBU's statements do not provide details about the popularity of these separatist movements or say whether they really constitute a threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Separatism only became a serious threat in the Crimea where it had the potential of turning into a frozen conflict, as in Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Unlike these three frozen conflicts, the Crimean separatist movement was derailed in a non-violent manner by the SBU and from internal splits within the separatist movement.

The SBU focused on the Sevastopol branch of the Institute for CIS Countries, which was closed by a court order. The Moscow headquarters of the institute is headed by Konstantin Zatulin who, along with Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, has been banned from entering Ukraine. All three Russian officials have long espoused support for Russian territorial claims toward the port of Sevastopol and the Crimea.

A second threat neutralized by the SBU in the Crimea was the People's Front "Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia." The SBU asked the prosecutor's office to file a court order banning the organization, because its actions infringed upon article 110 of the criminal code. The organization has since been banned, and two of its leaders have been charged with threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity. The SBU is seeking the maximum legal sentence of five years imprisonment.

Supporters of what the SBU called the "so-called Donetsk Republic" have been warned that their actions could lead to charges. The SBU searched the homes and workplaces of four of its leaders where they confiscated a large volume of materials that could be used in trials, if charges are filed.

There is little information about the "Donetsk Republic" movement, but it probably includes those who support the ideals of the short-lived Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic formed by the Bolsheviks on February 12, 1918. The Republic claimed territories in the Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts), Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts, and part of the neighboring Don region.

The Republic was never recognized by anyone, including by the Russian SFSR. Today, neither the currently dominant Party of Regions in these four oblasts or the formerly dominant Communist Party is a separatist political force. Party of Regions oligarchs do not look favorably on Vladimir Putin's Russia, as they see the Russian oligarchs facing imprisonment, exile, or submission.

The SBU has only taken action against the aggressively pro-Russian minority wing of the

Rusyn movement in Transcarpathia. Earlier this year the majority mainstream World Congress of Rusyns headed by Professor Paul Robert Magocsi who is Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Toronto, condemned the activities of Dmitry Sydor and his organization, the Transcarpathian Rusyn Parliament.

Ukrayina Moloda (November 10), which supports President Viktor Yushchenko, published details of the funding given to Sydor from a Russian government-funded NGO in Moscow. Political technologist Vyacheslav Nikonov headed the Politika Fund in Moscow with which Sydor has been cooperating since 2005. In 2007 President Putin appointed Nikonov head of the newly established Russkiy Mir (Russian World) organization, which Ukrayina Moloda describes as “a sub-structure of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation.”

Rusyn activists claim to be a fourth eastern Slavic nation living in four countries: Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and Serbia. In March 2007 Ukraine became the last of these countries to recognize them as a separate ethnic group, when the Transcarpathian Oblast council voted in favor of this question. The vote was held on the instructions of presidential chief of staff Viktor Baloga, who hails from the center of the Rusyn area, the Transcarpathian town of Mukachevo. Baloga is widely believed to be seeking an alternative base of support in the Rusyn movement in the likely event that he is replaced by Yushchenko.

Sydor is a priest in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. The UOC is the largest Church in Transcarpathia, which, like the three oblasts of Galicia, has traditionally been a stronghold of the Uniate Catholic Church.

The UOC has a checkered relationship with Ukraine. A majority of its parishes are in western and central “Orange Ukraine”; and during the 2004 presidential elections more orthodox believers voted for Yushchenko than for the “pro-Russian” candidate Viktor Yanukovich. At the same time, the UOC officially supported Yanukovich, the candidate of eastern Ukraine and backed by Russia. This was an infringement of the legislation that separates church and state.

The UOC supported the 75th commemoration of the Ukrainian famine in the last week of November with UOC head Metropolitan Vladimir Sabodan issuing a condemnation of the “genocide.” Among Ukraine’s major political leaders, only Party of Regions leader Yanukovich was conspicuously absent, following Russia’s opposition to Ukraine’s commemoration of the famine.

The SBU’s self-congratulation for its success in combating separatism was used to lobby for a higher budgetary allocation next year (www.pravda.com.ua, December 9). The SBU claimed that the intelligence services received an average 1 percent of the GDP in Western democracies; the SBU is lobbying for an allocation of 0.5 percent of the GDP. The anti-crisis measures introduced by the government as a requirement for the IMF stand-by loan in October include plans to cut the SBU by 15 to 20 percent. Yushchenko, however, has called for greater budgetary allocations to the military and SBU following the Russian invasion of Georgia.

Separatism in the Crimea collapsed in the mid-1990s after the Crimean presidency was abolished by President Leonid Kuchma. Crimean separatism is still a potential threat, however, because it is continually being fueled by Moscow, which, for example, issues Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens. Russia justified its invasion of Georgia by claiming it

was defending “Russian citizens” after it had distributed passports to South Ossetians over the last two decades. On a visit to Lithuania, Yushchenko called Moscow’s new plans for issuing “Russian cards” disturbing. Meanwhile, the issuing of passports is an “infringement of international law and demonstrates disrespect to other sovereign states whose territories do not permit dual citizenship” (www.pravda.com.ua, December 10).

Separatism in Transcarpathia and Donetsk are on a different scale as they do not constitute serious threats. Eastern and Western Ukrainians remain strong supporters of Ukrainian territorial integrity.